

THE REAL JESUS

Disciple-making Series | Book 2

Adam Grill

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second book in *The Real Jesus* series! If you have not read the first book, I suggest you pick up a copy and start there. This series is a chronological walk-through of the life of Jesus. This book begins with chapter 28 to remind you that it is a continuation of the story of Jesus' life. In book one, you can read about the birth announcement of Jesus, the stories of young Jesus, when and how he called His first followers, what He taught them, what it meant to make disciples of other people, and so much more.

These books will help you answer the question, "Who was the real Jesus? Was there a real Jesus, or was He just a fictional religious character? If there was a real Jesus, what do we know about His life?" The key questions people ask are: "How can we know with certainty who Jesus was, what He did, how He lived, how He died, and what mysteriously happened after His death."

This book will challenge you as you read about Jesus's approach to life issues such as; what to do when God's timing does not align with our preferences, how to lead while grieving, what it looks like to step out in faith and trust God to provide, why we need to be careful who we learn from, does our sin cause us to suffer, and more about how Jesus taught His disciples how to be disciples who can make more disciples of Him.

Read with an open mind and heart. Jesus has so much for you to learn about His life and how to apply it to your life in today's ever-changing environment. I hope that as you read these books, you will be transformed by learning more about God's love for us. A love so great that He sent His one and only son to earth to teach us how life was designed to be lived and to become our pathway to eternal life with God.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



READ & DISCUSS

I encourage you to read and discuss this book with another person or with a small group of people. This book was designed to be studied with one or more people because that was what Jesus modeled for us throughout His life here. This book is a simple tool to help anyone walk through Jesus' life chronologically and learn who the real Jesus was, is, and always will be.



KEY PASSAGES

Each chapter has specific Bible passages to read. Let me encourage you to buy or download a copy of the Bible to read as we go on this journey together. All the passages quoted in this book are from the New International Version. I would also suggest buying a copy of Thomas & Gundry's *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels*, which pulls out all the Bible passages about Jesus' life and puts them in chronological order for you.



READ

Read those passages in your Bible or *Harmony of the Gospels* before continuing with the book. You will also find parts of the Bible sprinkled throughout the book. Every time I directly quote the Bible, those words will be in *red italics*. This is done to help you distinguish God's Word from mine. You will also see that whenever God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are referenced (He, Him, They, Me, My, etc.), it will always begin with a capital letter because it helps remind us that we are referring to God, Jesus, or The Holy Spirit.



WEEKLY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When you gather, I encourage you to begin EACH SESSION with

the same three questions. We do this to help you get to know your disciples personally and to become aware of what is happening in their lives. Start with these questions every time:

- What is one thing you are most thankful for since we last met?
- What is one thing that stressed you out most since we last met?
- What did you do to follow through on your last “I will” statements?



LIFE APPLICATION

At the end of every chapter, there will be a Life Application section. There, you will find one question that is unique to each chapter and two questions that are the same. Honest answers are always best. The questions help generate conversation and help you consider how to apply Jesus’ life to your daily life.

Discuss your answers to all three questions when you get together. I encourage you to write your disciple’s “I will” statements in your book next to their names. That way, when you meet, you can ask them how they did at following up on their “I will” statement.



LEADING OTHERS

There are several ways to walk through this book with others, depending on how much your disciples want to read each week. The two methods we have seen work the best are:

- Read one chapter a week and meet weekly. When you gather, start with prayer and the opening questions. Then, talk through the highlights you and your disciples recall from the chapter. Next, have everyone share how they answered the Life Application questions. Pray together and schedule a time to meet next week.

- Read one chapter daily and gather weekly or bi-weekly to discuss. When you gather, start with prayer and the opening questions. Then, talk through everyone's single big takeaway from each chapter read. Next, share how everyone answered the Life Application questions chapter by chapter. Pray together and schedule your next time to meet.

CHAPTER 28

SIN & RIGHTEOUSNESS



Luke 7:36–50

One day when I was about 12, I became intensely angry with my mom. I said something a step too far and was sent to my room. Back then, my anger was out of control, and I had a habit of listening to “The Last of the Mohicans” as loudly as possible. During this same time frame, I was so obsessed with throwing stars that I finally managed to buy one. On this day, there before my eyes was that Chinese star. I picked it up and then proceeded to hurl it, over and over, at the inside of my bedroom door. Honestly, it felt surprisingly good! Then I realized that my mom would no doubt see what I had done when she cleaned my room, so I brilliantly decided she wouldn’t notice if I hung a poster over it. I wish that was the end of the story, but it was not. Flinging that Chinese star at the back of my door every time I got angry became a habit, and before long, I needed a bigger poster to hide the results of my sinful temper.



Luke 7:36–50

Jesus continually did things that we would never expect God to do. Just think about what we have already learned about Jesus in previous chapters. His first miracles were turning water into wine, driving a demon out of a person, and calling a sinful tax collector to be one of His followers. He also redefined who would be in heaven one day and even told us we should not only love our enemies but also bless them! The Kingdom that Jesus was building seemed to be upside down from the cultural norm.

In Luke 7, Jesus was having dinner at a religious leader’s home. We do not know who this Pharisee was, but it is possible

he was one of the Pharisees who saw Jesus heal the centurion's servant. He could have been one who saw Jesus heal the paralyzed man or who saw Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. However, it is clear, based on his questions, that he would have been one who was present during all that occurred in Luke 5. These Pharisees were furious that Jesus had not only gone to Levi's home and dined with sinners, but that He had also had the audacity to answer their question with the following response, ³¹*"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick, ³²I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* This would have been confrontational to the Pharisees because they would never have reached out to some sinful Jew and His pagan friends who were considered worthless to the religious leaders.

In Jesus' time, it was considered virtuous to invite a traveling teacher to dine at your home. This phrase, "Jesus was reclined at his table", indicated that the dinner was being held in Jesus' honor. However, we know this religious leader was planning to dishonor Jesus at the dinner because of what happened next. ³⁷*A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house.* The first issue with the story begins here. There is no way this sinful woman would have known where Jesus was going to be. Scripture shows very clearly that the Pharisee was planning a setup at dinner to trap Jesus. At this point, the religious leaders and Jesus had continually butted heads over the question of Jesus' power and authority. Jesus had repeatedly said He had the power to forgive the sins of His followers. The Pharisees did not like or agree with Him. They knew that only God could forgive sins and felt that since Jesus was a man, He could not be God. This sinful lady "somehow" found out Jesus was having dinner at a Pharisees' home and so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

Alabaster jars were not noticeably big because they were expensive. Alabaster rock looks like marble. It is exceptionally

soft and was often carved into shapes. People loved alabaster for storing oils or other expensive liquids because it prevented the liquid from evaporating. Furthermore, when a woman was married, her father would give her future husband a dowry consisting of money, animals, or valuable items. Was it possible this woman was taking her entire dowry to this dinner where Jesus was? However, remember, this was a “sinful-living woman” or prostitute. Very few women were wealthy, and prostitutes were far from wealthy. Perhaps the religious leaders gave her the jar to humiliate Jesus because she would not have had the money to buy this alabaster jar of perfume on her own.

Let’s keep reading. *³⁸As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.* Think about it this way: somehow a random town prostitute found out where Jesus was going for dinner. Then she got her hands on a jar of expensive perfume. Next, she snuck into a Jewish leader’s home without anyone noticing, found her way to the dinner table without intervention, and somehow knew which person was Jesus. Lastly, she was able to get to Jesus without a protest from anyone, pour perfume on Him, cry, kiss His feet, and wipe His feet with her hair. It seems highly unlikely for all of that to happen unless it was part of a plan.

What came next makes it truly clear that this Pharisee knew exactly what was going on. *³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”* It is interesting that while he was busy wondering what Jesus would do, he had no reaction to this random woman breaking into his house... unless, of course, this Pharisee had hired her to come. His thoughts revealed his motive. It was all a setup to see if Jesus was authentic and it was a way to discredit Him, no matter how He would respond.

However, Jesus' response was upside down from "rational Pharisaical" teaching. Jesus was not bothered that a sinful woman was in His presence. He did not mind her tears being used to wash His feet, nor did He pull away as she kissed His feet. (I think that would have been a "no go" for me!). Also, He did not stop her from pouring expensive perfume on His feet. Jesus constantly had sinful people around Him because He knew they needed Him. Jesus' response, from a religious perspective, was totally upside down because religious people avoided sinful people. However, Jesus was not religious. He knew this woman was sinful, and He knew that through His forgiveness, she could be made righteous and new!

In Jesus' culture, three things were done for all guests but especially for honored guests.

- A foot washing: Because they wore sandals, their feet were always filthy. So, foot washing took place when you entered anyone's home. That did not happen for Jesus in this story.
- A kiss: I know that sounds odd but, yes, a kiss for all guests. That did not happen for Jesus.
- An anointing or putting aromatic oil on their guest: That did not happen for Jesus.

All of those things would have taken place for a distinguished guest, but none of them happened when Jesus entered this house. Jesus did not get angry because He was not treated how He should have been. He did not walk out because He was culturally dismissed by this Pharisee. Jesus was not offended and did not lash out at His host for his poor manners. Often, we are not like that. We lash out or badmouth people who do not respect us. We do not let it roll off our shoulders. This Pharisee tried his best to throw Jesus off, and Jesus just rolled with it. It is amazing how Jesus can take something meant to insult Him and turn it around and make it into a beautiful gift.

This woman was a gift wrapped up in a sinful package, but a

gift, nonetheless. Jesus received the gift from this woman as she humbly lavished Him with a foot washing of her tears, a drying with her own hair, and an anointing with expensive oil. This woman knew she should not be there and knew this Pharisee had her there just to humiliate Jesus. This woman could see the scorn of those around the table who were looking at her in disgust.

Now, read again just how upside-down Jesus's response was. ⁴⁰*Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. ⁴¹"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.*

Jesus recited this short story with a deep principle hidden within it. Two people had a debt they could not repay, just like we have a debt called sin that we cannot repay. There is nothing we can do for all the sinful things we have done, which was the same problem this Pharisee had. Pharisees tried to follow 516 laws to be good enough to earn their way into heaven. This Pharisee thought he was better than the sinful woman. Jesus said that both were sinners. Yes, the woman had many sins in the eyes of a righteous man, but both were still sinners. That Jesus came to cancel their debt was made abundantly clear as He continued talking.

⁴⁴*Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Obviously, he saw the woman, but he clearly did not see where Jesus was going with this. So, Jesus continued; I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But*

whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

One sinner was just made righteous through Jesus alone. This woman knew she was a sinner. Simon, on the other hand, clearly didn’t consider himself a sinner. Simon thought he was much better than this woman. Yet, the truth remains. Sin is sin, and he was no better than this woman in the eyes of God. He was self-deceived. He thought his religious actions made him good. He thought that through his temple attendance, he was even better. He thought his good prayer life added another level of righteousness. He thought that because he had memorized Bible passages, he was really “something.” He thought that because he knew how to cover up his sins and act holy, he was okay. This sounds like many “Christians” who make the same argument in churches today.

Simon was a hypocrite, and Jesus was telling him (and us): **Don’t fall into the trap of hiding your sins. Be real with who you are! Admit that you all fall short and need help!** Once we understand the extent of Jesus’ forgiveness, we will never be the same. If you do not feel you have been forgiven much, your love for Jesus will never be much.

This story reminds me of my days of chucking that Chinese star at my door. The poster hid my rage for years! Then I went away to college. One day, my mom decided to redo my room as a surprise for me. She lovingly packed away my childhood, including the poster. She found a rubber band for re-rolling it and carefully took the gummy stuff off the bottom corners. Then she got a step stool (because she is so short) and pulled the top corner off. My sin was revealed! We can try to cover up our sins (our issues), and sometimes we can be successful for years, but eventually, the truth comes out.

I have never asked my mom how she initially reacted. However, knowing my mom, it was probably a roller coaster of crying, anger, and laughing while shaking her head and saying, “Adam, Adam, Adam.” What is even more amazing is what my parents did do. My dad and mom patched the door, filled the holes, sanded it down, and then re-painted it. They never said a word until years later, after time had healed the feelings, and it had become fun to reminisce. What an upside-down response! Maybe they learned that from Jesus.

See, years before when my brother was born, Jesus got ahold of my mom and many years before that, my dad. Because they had forgiveness ingrained in them by the righteousness of Jesus, they could offer it to others, even without them asking for it. That is what Jesus does. He beckons us to come and be washed white as snow. It is the best feeling we will ever experience on earth! He alone can make us sinfully righteous.



LIFE APPLICATION

- Have you ever held an offense against someone who spoke a truth you did not want to hear? How could you lay that offense down and walk in freedom like Jesus?
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 29

SOIL TO SEED TO SOWER



Luke 8:1–18, Matthew 13:1–23, Mark 4:3–25

Jesus was going from place to place, teaching and freeing people from many things that bound them to sin. As people were finding freedom, they began following Jesus. If you want to dig deeper into this, read Matthew 12:22–50 and Mark 3:20–35. Many scholars believe that those passages are examples of what was going on during this season in the life and ministry of Jesus.



Luke 8:1–15

Luke chapter 8 begins: *¹After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ²and also some women.* It was not unusual in the 1st century for women to contribute large sums of money to rabbis in whom they believed, which is what you read in the first few verses. However, in this case it did not take long for Jesus to turn things upside down again because He included women, not only as financial contributors but also as close followers, disciples, and friends. The movement of Jesus on earth was not an exclusive men's club, which has been assumed by many. While it is true that Jesus chose 12 male apostles, He had many disciples who were women. Women were, and are, important to Jesus and not second-class ministry partners. Later, Jesus showed us this by appearing first to Mary after He was raised from the dead.

Upon graduating from high school, I left Michigan to attend a college in Indiana. My post-college career moved my wife and I, and then our growing family, all over the United States. When we returned to Michigan, we lived in a parsonage (a house owned by a church for their pastor). The prior pastor had a big garden, so

Jenny and I decided that we would try to be gardeners. Always a farm kid at heart, I worked on my grandpa and uncle's farm while growing up. Consequently, I thought gardening would be a piece of cake. I thought we would never have to buy produce again. I was too cheap to buy a cultivator, so I tried to do it by hand. We planted seeds after doing zero research on how far apart to plant them, how deep to plant, or which plants did well next to each other. I thought, how hard can it be? I watered and only occasionally weeded because weeding is not fun. At the end of the season, we harvested enough lettuce for one salad, a few handfuls of green beans, about a dozen peas, and nothing else! Needless to say, I was not impressed by my garden, so I vowed that the next year was going to be better.

The second year started out rough. I had done nothing at the end of the first year to keep the grass and weeds out of the garden, so by planting time the next Spring, the grass and weeds had taken over. I borrowed a friend's cultivator and tilled it up, but I did not take out all the weeds. (I thought tilling them under would be enough.) I did a little reading this time, and then I planted. However, the weeds came back with a vengeance, so I spent most of my time trying to pull up weeds. After a while, I could not tell the difference between weeds and crops. I weeded and weeded until I finally gave up. It was impossible, and I have never attempted a garden since.

The same thing can happen with our relationship with Jesus. We can give our lives to Him and be very motivated at the start. We can try to tell people about Jesus but become discouraged when they blow us off or think we are weird. Then we return to the church, learn more, get motivated again, and set out to lead someone to Jesus. When it still does not happen or when life gets busy, we give up, just like I did with my garden.

Beginning with verse four, and from this point forward, you will read about Jesus frequently using parables. *⁴While a large*

crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: Parables were Jesus' way of painting word pictures with deep hidden meanings. This parable clearly made an impact on His followers because this is one of the stories we find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In each gospel, it follows the same pattern. Clearly, this teaching hit home with His disciples once they understood what it meant.

⁹His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.' ¹¹"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

At this point in time, Jesus was near the Sea of Galilee, which was ringed with fields that were filled with crops. Jesus was speaking to them in a common language that they understood because farming was their way of life. He began with something they saw and then moved to something they could not see. He started with something natural and moved to something supernatural. He started with what was commonplace and moved to what was uncommon. He started with what was simple and moved to what was profound. They understood sowing seed; they did it all the time. This was a very familiar part of life, and everyone understood the principles of sowing and reaping. What

they didn't understand was the spiritual truth that functioned the same way. Jesus wisely began with what they understood to take them to an understanding far beyond that.

This idea was clearly upside down for the people in His time because religious life was all about what you did and looked like on the outside. However, Jesus was only concerned with who they were on the inside and what they were doing to build God's Kingdom. Beginning with verse five, we learn more about four types of soil, but remember, it is not about soil types.

⁵ *"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up.* At this point in history, around every field there was a well-traveled path for walking. Naturally, as the farmer scattered seed, some would fall on this path. Since seeds falling on hard trampled ground could not take root, that seed was worthless to the farmer and would quickly have been eaten by birds.

The second kind of soil was rocky. ⁶ *Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.* In Palestine, large plates of limestone rock were under the soil and beneath where a hand plow could reach. So, a farmer doing his best to plow the field never knew it was there. When he planted the seed in those places, it would take root and begin to grow. Yet not being able to grow deep roots that reached the water, it would wither and die. Farmers in Palestine knew that kind of soil as well as they knew about the hard path.

There was a third kind of soil. ⁷ *Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.*" Every farmer does their best to plow their field and get all the weeds out. If they just pull the top off a weed and do not get full root, it comes back stronger than ever. (I learned that the hard way.) Sadly, weeds grow better than anything, or at least mine did. Weeds grow fast. They suck out all the moisture and nourishment that is in the soil and leave nothing for the fragile young plants, which soon will

die. Every real farmer knows this.

Thankfully, that was not the end of the story because there was also good soil. ⁸ *Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.* This was deep, soft, rich, and clean soil. And this good soil produced a good crop. This good soil reproduced multiple times more than what was planted in it. If you were a farmer in Palestine, a tenfold crop would have been exceptionally good. History tells us that “normal” was about 7.5 times in return. But thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundredfold return would have been unheard of! There is always the possibility that when seed finds good soil, it can produce an unimaginable crop.

Jesus was speaking to people who lived in a farming culture. The people listening would have heard about all the miracles He had been doing. Jesus had helped some fishermen on this very lake catch so many fish that their boats almost sank! Jesus had healed people here, and He had cured diseases! How exciting it would have been to hear this miracle worker now talking about your line of work, about your farm, and about how you could get your crop to produce ten times anything you ever experienced in your life! They had to have been dreaming that it was finally their turn to get a miracle from Jesus! He was going to give them the crop of their lifetime! It is likely that was exactly what they were thinking because at this point most everyone was following Jesus for what He could do for them.

Now that we have learned a bit about the soil, let’s turn our attention to the sower. This is the meat of this chapter. Honestly, it could be a separate chapter, but I wanted to be certain we didn’t disconnect the soil from the sower.

The story began, ⁵ *“A farmer went out to sow his seed.”* This is a simple statement fraught with work. This farmer had to learn all the things I did not take the time to learn. He had to learn what kind of soil he had, the proper way to prepare that soil, the proper

way to plant the seed, and the proper time to plant it. This farmer had to spend time before he ever got to the planting by preparing both the soil and his equipment. He had to learn what kind of soil he had.

We, on the other hand, must take the time to get to know the people around us. This farmer had to learn the proper way to prepare that soil. We must take the time to study our Bible to know how to guide someone spiritually. This farmer had to learn the proper time to prepare the soil. We must learn how to follow God's leading as we invest in other people. This farmer had to spend a great amount of time before he ever reaped a crop. And we, too, must invest the time and devotion to prepare ourselves to reach people with the good news of Jesus.

Here is the point: **You cannot go out and sow seed if you have not prepared the land. You cannot lead people to Jesus if you have not prepared your life.** If a farmer walked out onto your grassy lawn and started sowing wheat, it would not yield a great harvest. In the same way, if you walked up to a neighbor, co-worker, or family member with whom you had no relationship and start throwing all this "Jesus stuff" at them, you should not expect to get a great result either.

There are only three components in this parable: the sower, the seed, and the soil. Who is the sower? In Matthew 13:37, Jesus says the "Son of Man" is the one who sows good seed. The Son of Man was Jesus' favorite term for himself. What Jesus was saying was that we are not the ones sowing seed but that He is. Jesus was the first to preach this message, but that is not where His message stopped. Jesus was the first to preach salvation through His name but not the last to do so. Acts 9:15 said that the Apostle Paul was God's chosen person to preach His word. The Apostle Paul was a sower, Billy Graham was a sower, and you are a sower. **The ultimate Sower is Jesus, and Jesus sows through us.**

What is the seed? ¹¹ *"This is the meaning of the parable: The*

seed is the word of God. **The seed is the Word of God.** Jesus wants us to join Him in ministry doing what He did. Jesus wants us to sow His seed, His message. The sower is anyone who spreads the message of Jesus. First, it was Jesus Himself. Then it was the Apostles. Then it was the church in the book of Acts, followed by countless people throughout history. Now, it is us.

At this point, Jesus became even more practical! ¹² *Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.* This describes many people. They hear about Jesus. They know some stories about Jesus. But the world is more attractive, and, in their heart, they decide to live for something other than Jesus. Think about the people in Jesus' day and age. Jesus threw His seed (message) all over Israel. He invited them to come into His Kingdom, but they chose to say, "Nah, I'm good. I'm not sure about who You really are, anyway." Unfortunately, our own heart can be that hard, dry road at the end of the field.

Jesus continued: ¹³ *Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.* Maybe this was you or it is you now. You were super excited about Jesus, but then life happened, and now you just go through the motions. You do not really want to go to church, read your Bible, pray, or think about how God could use you to reach lost people. Over time, you simply slipped away. This does not mean you left the church. It means your passion fell away, your joy left, and you lost your first love. This would be like the Pharisees in the Bible, people more committed to religion than God, people more committed to their traditions than God. There are loads of people in this boat today. This picture is so clear. This is the person of shallow faith.

This was me for seasons of life. I had no depth, so I fell away. I have seen this with people I have led to Christ, as well. Far

too many people come to Jesus, but then the world seems more attractive. People are unwilling to give up their pet issues to follow Jesus. To be a Christian could cost you a relationship, perhaps even causing your own family or good friends to turn against you. There may be an actual price to pay. Unless we truly trust in Jesus and understand that all things happen for His purpose, we will fall away when life gets hard.

This next soil saddens me greatly. ¹⁴ *The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.* This is an all-too-familiar story I hear from people. “I left home and went to college, and I was so busy. I was always exhausted, so I needed extra sleep on Sundays. I graduated, got a job, and was working all the time and did not have time for church. Eventually, we had kids, and it was so hard to get kids ready for church. We were exhausted, so we slept in. Life got in the way. Riches, job, career, and keeping up with the Jones got in the way. Pleasures, Saturday night parties, hot dates and hookups got in the way.” Honestly, those paths are easy to see played out in our culture! We seem to miss this point: **The soil is your heart.**

The soil is not your husband who really needs to change or your teen's heart that really needs to change. The soil is not your annoying co-worker's heart, sibling's heart, boyfriend or girlfriend's heart. **The soil is, first and foremost, your heart.** Are you preparing that soil so that God can work? Are you adding to that soil things that help God work in you? As with everything, your heart can only hold so much. The ground is limited, and the weeds will come and drain your heart if you let them. How are you keeping your soil nourished for God?

The good seed is not native to the soil of your heart; the weeds are. They are accustomed to being in there. They have lived with you for a long time. The good seed is alien to your heart and must be protected, cared for, and cherished. But the weeds—they are at

home. And as long as weeds live, they are telling you to do this or that, buy this (you need it), do that (it will make you feel good), drink that to make the pain go away. If you feed weeds, they will continue to grow. If you only pull the top off the weeds of your life, they will grow stronger roots. Eventually, those weeds will kill the ability of good seed to grow in your heart.

So, what we need to do is keep our heart like this last kind of soil: *¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering, produce a crop.* This is the person who hears the Word of God and understands it. But it does not stop there; they produce a crop! What is the crop Jesus is talking about? We all bear a crop. Perhaps your crop is a successful career, a nice house, a boat, children, lots of friends, and so forth. But understand that Jesus' crop is producing more believers in Jesus! Bearing a crop of thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold: That is the distinguishing mark of a true believer in Jesus.

The issue is not the skill of the sower; it is the state of the soil. The more seeds you throw, the more likely you are to hit some good soil. Do not go through your life with one seed and say, "I'm waiting to see where this baby grows. I am going to wait for the perfect time to talk to someone about Jesus." Instead, start throwing Jesus seeds in every direction, and you are more likely to hit good soil. There is only one reason for God to have left us here on earth after salvation, and that is to reach lost people. Sow seeds!



LIFE APPLICATION

- This week, work on your soil (heart). Read Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8. Prepare your soil with the Word of God. Prepare your life for sowing the seed God has for you to sow. Pray over these verses and ask God to use you as a sower.

CHAPTER 30

WHEN TROUBLE COMES



Luke 8:22–25, Matthew 8:18, 23–27, Mark 4:35–41

On October 8, 1871, the Great Chicago Fire swept through the city. Horatio Spafford was a prominent lawyer in Chicago and had invested heavily in the city's real estate; sadly, the fire destroyed nearly everything he owned. Two years later, Spafford decided his family should take a vacation, and he chose England, knowing that his friend D. L. Moody would be preaching there. His departure was delayed because of business, but he sent ahead his family: his wife and four daughters, who were eleven, nine, five, and two. On November 22, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic, their ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel, and 226 people lost their lives, including all of Spafford's daughters. His wife, Anna Spafford, survived the tragedy. Upon arriving in England, she sent a telegram to Spafford that began, "Saved alone." Spafford then sailed to England. While sailing over the location of his daughters' deaths, he wrote the famous words of the hymn, "It is Well with My Soul." Read these words carefully,

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

In the middle of an unspeakably heart-wrenching time, Mr. Spafford received peace like a river from God. During the most challenging times in our lives, we, too, can have peace. Regardless of what you are facing right this moment (death, divorce, difficulties with your children, difficulties with your career, a health crisis, or fear of what is going on in our world), even if you feel scared and helpless, God is with you. In this story, we find Jesus' disciples feeling many of these same emotions. They had to

learn the importance of believing in and responding to the Word of God.



Luke 8:22–25

In verses 22–25, we find Jesus and His disciples out at sea and caught in a terrible storm. Do not forget that many of His disciples were professional fishermen. This would not have been the first time they had been out at sea when a storm had blown in. However, this must have been a seriously frightening storm because Luke tells us that their boat was being swamped and that they were in great danger. So, when the disciples went to tell Jesus that they were about to die, there He was, fast asleep in the middle of this terrifying chaos!

Most of us go through life situations that feel like everything is out of control and that God is nowhere to be seen. Let me point out something that might help some of you. Jesus was the one who told the disciples to take this trip. The disciples obeyed Jesus, and now because they listened to him, they were facing adversity. That seems a bit upside down because most of us think that if we are following what Jesus tells us to do, then everything should go as planned. It should be smooth sailing. Most of us who follow God, if we are honest, expect an easy life. Yet, that is not what we see right here. We must understand that **God doesn't promise a trouble-free life, but He does promise to be with us.**

In their moment of fear when they had no options, the disciples turned to Jesus for help. When we face difficult times in our lives and are tempted to take control of the situation ourselves, we must turn to Jesus. A few years ago, there was a popular bumper sticker that said, “God is My Co-Pilot.” I am sure that the person who thought it up and the people who put it on their bumper thought it was a great idea, but they would be very wrong! Here is why: **If God is your co-pilot, you are in the wrong seat!**

Jesus didn't expect His disciples to calm the storm. However, Jesus did expect that, by this point in their relationship, they would know He was never too busy or too tired to help them. No matter how much you call on God, He never grows weary of helping you.

Look at verse 24. The disciples woke up Jesus, He rebuked the wind and raging waters, and immediately the storm subsided. The wind stopped, the rain ceased, and calm was restored by a word from Jesus. It was one thing for Jesus to have the power to heal someone. We could attribute that to a medical anomaly or luck, but they just watched Jesus exert power over nature. Jesus spoke to the wind, rain, and crashing waves; and the elements of nature immediately obeyed Him like a well-trained dog. Had I been one of the guys, I would have thought, *Wow! This is getting crazy! I would have wondered who Jesus really was. How could Jesus do this and how could I logically explain this?* And that was exactly what the disciples asked themselves in verse 25, *"Who is this?"* There was no other answer than the fact that Jesus was powerful beyond measure and that, possibly, He was God. Like Jesus' followers, we all need to answer this question:

Who is Jesus to you?

We began with the story of the worst imaginable tragedy. It is in those tragic moments that the enemy tries his best to take possession of your mind and heart. The enemy knows your weaknesses and uses them against you. There is always a choice: either to fall headlong into the arms of the One who created you and find peace, like Horatio Spafford, or to lose your heart to the enemy.



CHAPTER 31

EVEN DEMONS BELIEVE, DO YOU?



Luke 8:26–39, Matthew 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20

Demonic—When I was a kid, even the word could make the hair on the back of my neck stand up! Yet I loved to drive through the cemetery with my friends as we’d scare each other half to death, with visions of terror about to be unleashed. Once when I was with three of my best friends, we convinced our friend Nate that it would be fine for him to jump out of the car to relieve himself in the outhouse there. A moment later, another friend got out, snuck up to the outhouse, and let out an ear-piercing scream. Nate flew out of that door like the hounds of hell were on his heels and ready to devour him! He was certain that demons were coming for him. He realized it was a joke, but in today’s story, it isn’t!



Luke 8:26–39

After calming the storm, Jesus and His disciples sailed to the other side of the sea. There, they encountered a demon-possessed man who had been that way for a long time. On several occasions, he had been chained up, but he kept breaking the chains! Everyone in the town knew him and feared him. He was so possessed that he walked around naked. He had no home and chose to live in the graveyard. Talk about the makings of a horror film.

Into that scene sailed Jesus and His friends. Jesus had been sleeping in the middle of the raging storm. Without doubt, He was wiped out from long days of ministry. If you read the passage in Luke 8:19-20, you will learn that Jesus was so busy that His own family could not even get to Him. Jesus was drained, but His attempt to sleep had barely begun when His disciples awakened Him. Soon, they landed the boat on the other side of the lake. Jesus still had no time to rest because as He got out of the boat, a

crazy, naked, demon-possessed man came running right at Him. If that happened to me, I would tell the boys to jump back in the boat and sail away!

However, Jesus did something completely upside down from what most of us would do. ²⁷ *When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time, this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house but had lived in the tombs.* ²⁸ *When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”*

Did you notice what he just called Jesus? Obviously, no one had told this demon-possessed man who Jesus was. However, the man was controlled by the demons inside of him, and these evil spirits made clear that they knew exactly who Jesus was: “the Son of the Most High God.”

Whether you believe that Jesus is the Son of God or not, whether you have given Jesus control of your life or not, the Bible says in Philippians 2:10–11 that one day *“every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”* Even though humans did not recognize who Jesus was, the demons surely did, and they were scared to death of Him because they knew who was in charge. This was not the first or last time that this happened in Jesus’ life.

If you live in the United States or another first-world country, you might not experience demon possession like this, but do not be fooled into thinking that demons are no longer present. The demons of today might look different, but they still destroy lives. We might not be held by physical chains, but we can be bound by financial or relational chains or even our jobs from which we cannot break free. Bottom Line: **We must recognize that we desperately need to depend on the power of Jesus to overcome the demons we face.**

These demons begged Jesus not to destroy them but rather

to allow them to go into a large herd of pigs, and Jesus caused that to happen. Jesus did not do this to grant their request but to give us a visible picture of what our lives would look like if we chose to follow the enemy and not God. In his book, Mark told the same story, and he said that it was a herd of 2,000 pigs! Can you imagine when the locals came out and saw the carcasses of 2,000 pigs floating in the sea and then saw the formerly demon-possessed man acting normal and sitting obediently at Jesus' feet? You would have been scared just like they were!

Fear of God is not a dreadful thing, yet we tend to lack the type of fear that we should have for Him. It is like the type of fear you may have had of your parents or your schoolteachers or a coach. Not a fear that they would kill you, but a fear that you had better be careful of your actions and attitudes. Not a fear of pain, but a fear that comes from respect. God is to be respected above all things. In our modern culture, we fear nature (earthquakes, tsunamis, or hurricanes) more than we fear the Creator of nature.

The locals witnessed the amazing power of Jesus and wanted nothing to do with it, so they asked Him to leave, and He did. What a sad reality to understand about Jesus. In addition to asking ourselves who Jesus is to us, we must also ask ourselves if we will invite Jesus into our lives, or if we will ask Him to leave us. The locals asked Jesus to leave, and Jesus did. But also notice the response of the man who was freed from his demons. ³⁸ *The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,* ³⁹ *“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So, the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*

He begged to go with Jesus, but He needed him to stay and share his story of transformation through the power of Jesus. Understand that not everyone who believes is called to travel around the world to share Jesus. But we are all called to share Jesus where we are today. In fact, those whose lives are most

radically changed are often the strongest witnesses in their own community. You may not be able to imagine right now how God could use you, but that is His strong suit! Jesus is in the life-restoring business. Through today's stories, we saw four responses to the power of Jesus:

- The disciples saw Jesus' power and believed.
- The demons saw Jesus' power and raised havoc.
- The locals saw Jesus' power and wanted nothing to do with it.
- The man who was freed from demons, saw Jesus' power, and begged to go with Him.

Which response best represents the desire of your heart?

The enemy knows he loses everything in the end. Only God's Kingdom is eternal. Satan and his kingdom end in a lake of fire. Even the demons know that, so they are taking as many people as possible with them in attempt to hurt God. They could care less about you. God is their enemy, and you are their pawn. The demons know that Jesus wins. Make sure you do, too.



LIFE APPLICATION

- Is there something in your life that is holding you in bondage? (Finances, relationship, career, house, car, etc.) What do you need to do to break free from the hold the enemy has on you and step closer to Jesus?
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 32

DIVINE DELAY?



Luke 8:40–56, Matthew 9:18–26, Mark 5:21–43

My mom was a teacher and was going to be delayed one afternoon for a couple of hours, so she asked Justin, my oldest brother, to drive my little brother Lucas home. She told Justin to be extra careful because she had heard the roads were getting icy. After an additional warning and a further delay to give them another hug and last warning, off they went. The roads were more than a little icy, but Michiganders are accustomed to driving on bad roads, and my brother was a cautious driver. The road to and from school had a few significant hills and a few no-passing zones. On this day, they went up one of those hills where just seconds before a young man had been traveling the same path in an awesome sports car. And on that same hill in the same no-passing zone, he had decided to pass another car while going ninety miles per hour. He had crested the hill only to meet another car coming head-on.

My brother crested the hill a moment later and saw a tangle of metal and smoke. When my brother saw what was at the bottom of the hill, his S-10 pick-up couldn't quite handle the downshift on a sheet of ice. They ended up skidding off the road and hitting a tree. My brother totaled the truck but avoided the fatal accident—by about sixty seconds. My mom said that God had encouraged a last hug and warning to give the delay needed to save her boys' lives. Some would agree that it was a divine delay; others might say it was a random chance! I would say that the space between life here and the divine is something we need to ponder. **Sometimes divine delays are exactly what we need.**



Luke 8:40–56

Two miracles are described in this passage, and they are intertwined in an unusual way. The first miracle had to take place for the second to happen. It appeared that Jesus' healing of a woman cost the life of Jairus' daughter. For the woman, the divine delay was an incredible blessing. For Jairus, the delay caused by the woman seemed anything but divine.

Jesus had been doing miraculous things, and the news had likely made it back to town. The crowds were now excited for Jesus' return. Luke depicted Jairus' daughter's condition as critical; she was dying. As precious time lapsed, it is not difficult to imagine that Jairus was struggling with how to save his daughter. So, having heard stories about Jesus, Jairus turned to Him. Any loving parent would do the same. Jesus agreed to go and see the daughter of Jairus, so a crowd of people followed Him to watch what would happen next.

Unseen, a woman made her way to Jesus. She believed in her heart that if she could just touch the garment of Jesus, she would be healed. It turned out she was right. However, the moment it happened, Jesus stopped, turned to the crowd, and asked, "Who touched me?" Can you imagine the woman's shock and fear of having been found out? The woman, whose name was never given, had suffered from a bleeding issue for 12 years. It is not difficult to understand why she approached Jesus unseen from behind because of her health issue. Then imagine the excitement she felt as healing rippled through her body, followed immediately by fear as Jesus stopped. Imagine her thoughts as Jesus started looking for the person who took healing from Him. Imagine her anxiety as Jesus called out to find out who had touched Him without knowing why He was asking.

Imagine being Jairus. His thoughts raced toward why Jesus stopped at a critical moment of his daughter's imminent death. Why would Jesus delay? What could be more important than

his daughter's life? Likewise, can't we all get that way in life, anxious for our own needs to be met, perhaps overwrought by the smallest delay?

This was a delay that was orchestrated by His Father but that, at the time, seemed to surprise even Jesus. It was a delay that was not appreciated by Jairus and a delay that appeared to confuse Peter too. Look at the second part of verse 45: *When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."* ⁴⁶ *But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."* I love Peter, perhaps because he reminds me of myself. This was not the first time Peter had thought he knew better than Jesus. Peter was like so many of us, caught up in the moment, caught up in the urgency of the task at hand, thinking he always knew the best next step.

So many people today are caught up in the "tyranny of the urgent". What must be done? The next appointment, the next sporting event, the next promotion? We can get so caught up that we miss the space between what God is doing in the present moment and our own thoughts. I can see Peter's eyes roll at Jesus' words. Don't forget, Jesus' identity was not yet fully known, as we saw from the disciples' question after the stilling of the storm (Luke 8:25). At this point, Peter and the disciples frequently listened to some of Jesus' words with a kind of condescending tolerance rather than with faith and understanding. Soon, we will even see Peter rebuke Jesus for talking about His death. Peter felt it was his responsibility to rebuke Jesus and at times straighten Him out. That was the same basic attitude that I sense here. It was as though the disciples' eyes have met, as though to say, "Somebody must take Jesus aside and have a little talk with Him. He expects to know the impossible. He wants to know who touched Him when hundreds have done so."

But Jesus said, "No, Peter. Right now, we need to pause." Someone was healed, and Jesus wanted to see who. Jesus saw

an opportunity to teach an even greater truth to the crowd, something that would seem upside down and backward to all the Jews surrounding Jesus. ⁴⁷ *Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.* She was afraid, so much so that she was trembling because she knew her condition was one that made her unclean. Therefore, she should have been restricted to her own home. To further complicate it, whomever she touched would have become unclean, as well. (Leviticus 15:19, 25–27). What she did was a serious offense in the eyes of Jewish law. This meant that as she pushed through the crowd, every person she touched was now unclean. It meant that she made Jesus unclean, and now she had to admit it to everyone. Or did Jesus flip the script? ⁴⁸ *Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”* What Jesus did likely caused Jairus to recoil a little. It would have astounded the Jews packed around Jesus. It would have caught the disciples off guard. But this still does not explain why Jesus insisted on speaking to this woman. He obviously had a good reason for pressing this matter.

Jesus delayed that urgent journey to the house of Jairus to learn who had touched Him and to say so...few...words, ⁴⁸ *“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”* Jesus delayed a trip to save a person’s life by speaking nine words.

LET ME SUGGEST SEVERAL REASONS.

1. Jesus would not allow the woman to have a second-class healing. Note the position of the woman. Earlier, she had been hiding behind Jesus. Now she was at Jesus’ feet, just as Jairus had been. I may be in error here, but it seems that the woman came to Jesus secretly. He would not be content until she, like Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, was before Him, face to face. She was not worth any less because she was a woman or because she had an issue. Jesus was showing her compassion

and increasing her standing.

2. Jesus saw an opportunity to teach. Jesus identified faith as the real cause of the miracle. She believed that if she were to touch Jesus, she would be healed. She not only believed this intellectually, but she also acted on it. You may be thinking it was the power of Jesus that healed her, but we also learn that Jesus never overlooks anyone. She had the faith to be healed, and her faith moved her to act. The woman's faith and action brought her to the place to be healed. Had she done nothing, we would not be talking about her.
3. There may be one more reason Jesus stopped: Jesus did not want the woman's faith to be anonymous. While Jesus would soon insist that the raising of Jairus' daughter be kept silent, here Jesus forced the woman to make her healing public. Why? Could it be that the faith of Jairus was evident, and he was not afraid to publicly declare his faith in Jesus? However, because this woman reached out to Jesus in secret faith, Jesus did not allow her faith to remain anonymous. **Faith in Christ must be publicly professed.**

Romans 10:9–11 tells us this: *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."*

Faith was never intended to be a "private" matter, as so many seem to think. How often have I heard people decline to discuss their own spiritual condition, justifying themselves with the statement, "Well, my faith is a very personal thing." **Faith in Christ is not a personal thing.**

Jesus acknowledged that it was the woman's faith that healed her, but she also needed to confess her faith before others. This was so important that our Lord refused to go on without her confession

of faith. I know that sounds upside down from what many of you think, but Jesus led what seems to be an upside-down Kingdom.

This delay appears to have been very costly for Jairus. ⁴⁹ *While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” he said. “Don’t bother the teacher anymore.”* As the woman went her way, a messenger came from the house of Jairus. The girl had died. All hope was lost. There was no longer any need to trouble Jesus. From these words, we can see the prevailing opinion among this delegation: Where there is life, there is hope. Where there is death, there is no hope. Jesus might have been able to heal a sick child, but they did not view Him as having power over death. Thus, the death of the child was the death of hope for her healing.

However, Jesus quickly countered it with these words to Jairus: ⁵⁰ *Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”* As Jesus drew near to the house of Jairus, He left behind all but three of His closest disciples. Then ⁵⁴ *he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!”* ⁵⁵ *Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat* ⁵⁶ *Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.*

Jesus gave two perplexing commands: Give the girl something to eat and do not tell. One would think that if Jesus could raise this girl from the dead, He could also give her a full stomach. It seemed like a strange detail, but understand that **God does not do for people what they can do for themselves.**

The common saying that “God helps those who help themselves” is a lie. Jesus came to help those who cannot help themselves. Jairus could not heal his sick daughter, nor could he raise her when she died. Jesus could and He did. However, Jairus and his wife could feed the child. **Miracles are not performed when normal human effort is sufficient.**

The second order Jesus gave to the parents was to not tell

anyone. Jesus did not want this miracle spoken of. The girl would appear alive soon enough. In fact, everyone did learn that she had been raised. We can see that in Matthew 9:26: *“News of this spread through all that region.”* Jesus was not trying to prevent the impossible. Instead, he sternly insisted that those who had scoffed would be deprived not only from witnessing this miracle but also from hearing a first-hand testimony of what had happened. Think of the frustration and irritation of those who had laughed at Jesus, who upon seeing the girl alive could not hear from the parents what had happened inside. “Tell us what happened,” they must have inquired only to be told, “I’m sorry, but Jesus told us not to tell you.” What we learn is that **those who do not believe fail to see the miracles and blessings of God.**

There are two clear principles in the events of this story that shed light on the “delays” we perceive in our own lives.

1. God does not bless one person at the expense of another.

There is somehow a misconception that God has limited resources. If God blesses one person, He must have utilized the blessings He would have given to another. It is as though we sometimes think God has \$1,000 dollars in the bank, and if He gives His \$1,000 dollars to one person, He has nothing left to give others. For the Christian, we do not need to fear that God’s blessings for others will in any way limit our own blessings. We should delight in God’s goodness to others. We are not to covet that which belongs to our brother or sister. We need to learn to be content with what we have. **Be content with the delay.**

2. Divine delays are a blessing because God wishes to bless us in an even greater way than asked. This divine delay resulted in two increased blessings. It was God’s actions, not the woman’s, that slowed Jesus down. She did not create the delay; Jesus did. It was, indeed, a divine delay. The delay was a blessing for the woman. It focused attention on her faith

and on her healing. It showed that she had equal access to the Savior and that Jesus delighted in her healing. The delay was also a blessing to Jairus. This “greater healing” required greater faith from Jairus, and it brought greater glory to God the Father and Jesus. It also revealed the lack of faith on the part of those who came to report the girl’s death as well as the mourners who had begun to weep and wail over her death. Jesus could have easily prevented the girl from dying, whether present or absent, but He chose to overcome death in this instance. The divine delay was for the good of all involved.

You and I have experienced, or will experience, God’s “delays”, too. Whenever it happens, we need to ask God to help us trust His timing. We need to be content in the space between. If God has promised to do it, it will be done. The greater the delay, the greater our delight when God proves Himself faithful. Faith is essential for all of us.



LIFE APPLICATION

- Look back over your life to see where you may have experienced a divine delay. Thank God for the delays in your life. Thank God for the things you are currently waiting on Him for.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 33

JESUS SENDS OUT THE 12



Luke 9:1–6, Matthew 9:35–38, 10:1–42, Mark 6:7–13

New phases of life are always an adventure. One of those adventures happened for me when my wife and I chose to go “all in” for Jesus. And it was a choice. I will never forget the moment when we were sitting at dinner and my phone rang; it was Pastor Jim Wall. He called to say that God had told him to ask me to leave my career and come to work for him as a missions pastor. I could ignore what he felt God was telling him or I could listen and pray...Choices. Long story short, that phone call led to the most challenging and life-altering season of our lives. For me, it meant uprooting my family from our beautiful five-bedroom house in a gated community in Boca Raton, Florida, and a job that provided far more income than we would receive in ministry. It meant giving up my career and substantial salary and moving to a tired and worn two-bedroom, cockroach-infested rental house off a busy road in Chesapeake, Virginia. We went from shopping at Whole Foods to living off food stamps. It meant no more Gucci; it was now Goodwill. Our lives went from self-reliance on always having extra money to praying for God to multiply the little we had so that it would last until the end of the month. It also meant rejoicing over a great coupon!...Choices. There is no question that following God to a different part of the country was a challenge. It was both the best decision we ever made and the hardest decision we ever made.

We are each called by God for different purposes. When you decide to go “all in” with Jesus, it changes everything. If you do, the day will come when He sends you out on a mission for Him. That does not mean you will have to travel across the country or globe; it may mean you will never leave your hometown. All followers of Jesus are called to live on a mission with Jesus

wherever they are.



Matthew 9:35–38

Jesus was with His disciples doing remarkable things, and right in the middle of that, He paused and took note of what was going on around Him. He said, “There are so many people around us who need help.” Then He said, “Stop looking at what is right in front of you. Look at the bigger picture; a harvest of people is waiting for us.” Jesus identified a problem: there were not enough people willing to jump in and serve. We have the same problem today. A great harvest surrounds us, but we do not have enough workers willing to sacrificially serve. The Bible is clear that people said to Jesus, “We want to do ministry with you” until Jesus said, “Great! Let’s go minister to the Samaritans.” Or “Leave your father, mother, and everything you know and follow Me.” Or “Go sell everything you own and give it to the poor and then come and follow Me.” When there was a cost to following Jesus, people no longer wanted to jump in. Jesus was, is, and always will be looking for people who are willing to follow His lead and head out into the world to reach people with the good news! The point Jesus made is still applicable today: **The harvest is plentiful—but the workers are few.**



Matthew 10:1–20

Put yourself in the shoes of the apostles. Consider what they were thinking, feeling, and worrying about. Jesus told them that He was giving them the power to do everything He did and that He was going to send them out without Him to do it. Look at what they would be doing again in verse 8: *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.* If Jesus asked that of you and your best friend,

it would be nerve-racking to suddenly hear that He expects YOU to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse people with diseases, and drive out demons. If that was not hard enough, Jesus kicked up the stakes to the point where most of us would break, even if we thought we could do some awesome things through the power of Jesus. Let's read verses 9 and 10 again. ⁹ *“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—¹⁰ no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”* Jesus said to go with nothing, not even an extra shirt. In our context, it would be no toothbrush, make-up kit, shaving kit, hair gel, or your favorite relaxing pajamas.

Imagine Jesus and those twelve young men who had been involved in amazing ministry all day. They were now exhausted and getting ready for bed. They saw Jesus stop, look them in the eyes, and say, “I know we talked about the fact that the harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few. Well, tomorrow something great is going to happen!” Then with a big smile on His face, He said, “Night, guys.” I am sure Jesus fell asleep immediately because we have already seen how Jesus can literally fall asleep anywhere and in any condition. However, it is likely that for the apostles, sleep did not come quickly. I imagine they gave Jesus that same baleful stare that wives give their husbands as they lay fast asleep while she is up feeding the baby. No doubt, they were wide awake and wondering what was coming.

Morning finally came, and ¹ *Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.*⁷ Jesus began by giving the good news. He was giving them some of HIS authority. They would now have Jesus' ability and power to control what was uncontrollable and would now be able to do some of what Jesus had been doing. Imagine the excitement! Peter probably nudged Matthew while telling him how awesome this would be! The Sons of Thunder probably punched each other and grunted. But then

came the twist in verse 5. They received this gift of authority because they were about to be sent out into the fields of harvest... on their own. Jesus was not going on this trip. I am sure some of them were stoked and some were scared to death. I wonder if they asked Jesus, “Why am I partnered with him?”

Verse 5 begs another question. I find the instruction from Jesus a curious one regarding to whom they should talk. Jesus sent the apostles to the people of Israel (the Jews) and no one else. To us, this does not make sense, but it made total sense to the followers of Jesus. Jewish people knew they were God’s chosen people, and if God came to earth as Jesus, it made sense that He would send them out to take the good news to God’s chosen people. Because of that status, the Jewish people were also prejudiced against other races like the Samaritans and Gentiles. Therefore, the apostles of Jesus would have been fine not going into pagan, foreign places or towns with other religious beliefs.

Jesus knew this was a first step for His disciples. Leaders commonly know that when you are sending people to take their first step in leadership, it needs to be a reasonable step. This would be the same reason churches plan local outreach opportunities. It helps the community, and it helps everyone to get involved within their comfort zone. Wise pastors and mission leaders have learned from Jesus to make the first step easy and then to encourage another step, then another, and so on. That was what Jesus was doing in this passage. Verses 9–14 were advice from Jesus on what houses to enter, what to say, how long to stay, when to move on, and how to respond if things did not go well. Jesus was giving practical training to be used in their daily ministry for Kingdom purposes. **This trip was designed to teach these young leaders a complete dependence on God the Father and His way of doing ministry.**

While they were eating breakfast, Jesus gave specific instructions. As breakfast was wrapping up, they began to pack

their travel bags. They were loading up their bags because no one knew what they would need. Then came verse 9... “Hey guys, come over here with your supplies. Drop everything in front of me because you will not be needing any of it. Peter, you do not need a sword; that is for sure. James and John, I see that bread in your pocket; hand it over. Matthew and Judas, give me your money bags. Andrew, I will take that extra tunic off your back.”

What? They had to trust that **everything** they needed would be provided along the way. No doubt, there were twelve shocked faces. But it got even worse when Jesus said, ¹⁶ *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”* If this were a cartoon, imagine the thought bubbles. “Well now, that sounds just great!” ¹⁷ *Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues.* (Thought bubble: “Wow, Jesus this is not sounding quite the way we imagined it.”) ¹⁸ *On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.* ¹⁹ *But when they arrest you,* (Thought bubble: “Seriously, Jesus, this is kind of scaring me!”) *do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say,* ²⁰ *for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”* (Thought bubble: “So, when I open my mouth, Your words will come out?”) Their excitement had to have been mixed with a bit of trepidation as reality set in.

Jesus sent His apostles out in pairs without Him because this trip was designed to teach these young leaders to have complete dependence on God the Father. Jesus was sending them out into the world just like God sent Jesus out into our broken world. They would need to discover answers to their many questions. Would they live in dependence on God the Father as Jesus did? Would they live in dependence on God to provide for their physical needs? Would they live in dependence on Jesus to speak through them? **This trip was designed to teach TOTAL dependence**

on God.

I imagine Jesus drawing them together in pairs, huddling with each pair, giving them specific instructions on where to go, and then praying with them. As each group departed, maybe the last pair lingered a little longer, so Jesus walked with them for a bit. I see Him stopping by a tree and, with tears in His eyes, looking out toward the horizon as these twelve young men left for the adventure of a lifetime. Then I imagine Jesus dropping to His knees and praying for them. Here is the most crucial point for you to remember: **If you say, I am here, Lord. Send me, HE will. Who God sends out, HE also equips.**



LIFE APPLICATION

- Pray about what or who could be a local mission for you. Trust God to provide what you need. Trust the Holy Spirit to give you the words. Take nothing. Go share your faith with someone! Set a date, take a risk, trust God, GO!
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 34

LEADING WHILE GRIEVING



Matthew 14:1–14, Mark 6:14–34, Luke 9:7–11,
John 6:1–3

Originally, I planned to skip this part of Jesus' life. I planned to jump right into the next grandiose thing that Jesus had done. I am not fond of crying or watching others cry. I do not like grief; it is uncomfortable and unpredictable. Recently, my wife asked our oldest daughter why she didn't cry more. She said that when she was growing up and she cried, I would tell her to go put her face in a pillow because I did not want to hear it. Ouch! Not a good parenting moment. When my son Wyatt was diagnosed with B-cell Leukemia at ten years old, I learned far more than I wanted to know about grieving. Frankly, it was sad, awful, and terrifying. It was hard to write a sermon at first, let alone preach one in the middle of my season of grief. It could have derailed me, but I chose to lean into God, and He led me through the valley. That did not mean it was easy, but it meant I found a stable place in God my Father to stay focused on as life crashed in around me. And so, I was convicted by the Lord to circle back, change my plans, and include this chapter about the life of Jesus. This topic is for everyone because grief eventually comes to all of us.



Mark 6:14–34

The last time we encountered John the Baptist, he was sitting on a cold prison floor waiting to hear back from Jesus. In these passages, we discover the rest of John the Baptist's story. News of what had happened to John, that he had been murdered at the request of Herod's wife, was spreading. Imagine Jesus' inner circle of 12 returning from their first mission trip. They were filled with stories about God showing up at just the right time.

They likely gathered around the campfire and shared funny stories about things that had happened as well as supernatural God stories. They were likely laughing, crying, eating, and being overcome with emotion and awe in how God had worked through them. And then as nightfall descended and they were thinking about heading to bed, in Matthew 14 we read: *¹² John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.*

What emotions do you think Jesus was experiencing?

Have you ever experienced something like this? You are on the mountaintop of life and then boom! Something terrible happens, and you feel totally caught off guard. This is one of the stories where we learn who to lean into as Jesus did. He has been through everything we have: great mountaintop experiences and deep dark scary valleys. Jesus can truly sympathize with us in our times of trouble. When you get the call that it is cancer, Jesus is with you. When you get the call that a loved one has suddenly passed, Jesus can sympathize with you. When you hear the words, "You are fired," Jesus can comfort you. **Jesus understands your pain and can bring you comfort.**

When the news of his cousin John's murder reached Jesus, He would have been grief-stricken. Jesus teaches us how to take the next step while grieving, how to breathe when the love of our life is taken away, how to wake up when we have no job to go to, how to stay motivated when our life seems worthless, how to walk into school when our friends are gone. Grief will find all of us one day. But the good news is that we can learn from Jesus how to not only make it through those times while grieving, but still be able to lead. Let's see how Jesus handled it.

Jesus' disciples would have been right there when John's disciples arrived and gave Him the news of John's death. I am

sure they were upset and wondering what He would do. Jesus had been teaching them about forgiveness and loving your enemy, but this just got real. It hit home, so now what? Would Jesus go after Herod? Was this the moment Jesus would say it was time to overthrow Rome? What would Jesus do?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell us that Jesus jumped into the boat with the guys and detached from the larger group of people. In Mark chapter 6 we read, ³¹ *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”* ³² *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.* Jesus just taught us that it is okay to get away from everything when you are in pain. Jesus was surrounded by people who were likely trying to make things better for Him, but He needed to leave. Matthew told us that Jesus went to a private, solitary place. He needed time alone with His Father.

When our son Wyatt was diagnosed with cancer, my wife and I did not leave the hospital for over a week. But we, especially my wife, needed time to process, pray, and seek God in the worst situation we had ever faced. So, we took turns going alone for walks around the hospital to pray. When the child-life workers (the most amazing people in the world!) came to play with Wyatt, we would go outside to walk, pray, and seek God. Here is the point: **In our grief, it is good to get alone with God first.**

Here is what I learned from Jesus by leaning into Him: The only person who is going to give us the perfect advice at that moment is God. As a pastor, I have been with people in their hardest moments and, honestly, I do not always know what to say. However, God does. Truthfully, in that moment, the hurting person does not know what to say or even do. Jesus gave us this model of breaking away and getting alone with God. Jesus must have felt like a knife had pierced His heart when His cousin, who was more like a brother and had been a rock through Jesus’

whole life, was ripped away from Him. John was the one who ushered in Jesus' ministry, baptized Him, and sent Jesus His first disciples. God could have stopped or prevented it, or He could have brought John back to life. But God allowed John to die. We do not know why God did not save John or why Jesus did not raise John from the dead like He had done for others. There are so many things we do not know, just like there are so many unanswered questions in our own lives. It makes me wonder: What did Jesus and God talk about when they were alone? We do not know, but here is what we do know: ³³ *But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.* ³⁴ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things.*

This passage taught me an amazing truth. Jesus was stung with pain. He got away for a few moments as they sailed across the lake. But when they arrived on the other side of the lake, Jesus saw the masses, and He suddenly had compassion. Think about that. Jesus was in pain, but He made a choice in His full humanity that I imagine was incredibly hard for Him. He looked beyond Himself and beyond His grief, and He remembered that God the Father was in control. This was, and is for us, a part of God's plan even if it makes no sense in the moment. Jesus chose to trust God the Father. We can do that as well, but it is never easy. I can tell you from personal experience that leaning into Jesus is always the best way to deal with grief, especially as a leader when others are watching you.

Jesus had compassion for the crowds of people, but what about the people? Did they show compassion for Jesus? Nope. We know this because we see why these crowds were following Jesus. The sad truth for many of them was that they knew Jesus was doing amazing things, and they wanted Him to do an "amazing thing" for them also. They wanted a new king and they wanted it

to be Jesus; we saw that in John's gospel. They were mad about what had happened to John the Baptist and they were ready to overthrow Herod. They believed Jesus could do miraculous things for them, so they cared less for Jesus' grieving than for their own needs. Jesus knew this, and He also knew that most of those people were going to turn on Him. Soon, most of those people who said they loved Him were going to call for His death. Jesus, knowing their hearts, could have compounded His overwhelming grief and yet—**compassion was what came from within Jesus.**

I picture Jesus in the boat. He was bent over in pain, weeping and pleading with God; and I hear God saying to Jesus, "Son, lift up Your eyes." And as it says in John 6:5, Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming. Through His tear-filled eyes, Jesus saw His Father sending Him the hopeful, the hurting, the sick, and the lost. Jesus alone realized how lost they were, like sheep without a shepherd. So, Jesus called to mind what He knew about His Father, and He rose above His grief and focused on the greater picture of His life. Here is one last point: **In our grief, we must still follow God's direction.**

I am not saying that this is easy or comes naturally. I am not saying that it will make you feel better in the moment, but I am saying that this is very clearly what we see our Leader, Jesus Christ, doing. I had to do that in leading Family Church. Unbelievably, we were exploding with growth during the pandemic when our son was diagnosed with cancer. I had to choose to lean into God to help get things done because it was impossible for me to keep up while in the hospital. Yet now, years later, I can look back and see how Jesus stepped into the gap and did what God alone can do. Our church never missed a beat and kept growing because Jesus, not me, was at the helm. Praise God!



CHAPTER 35

NEW MATH



Mark 6:31–46, Matthew 14:13–23, Luke 9:10–17,
John 6:1–15

The more you study the Bible, the more you will realize that God places His people in situations where it feels like there is “not enough.” And I am not talking about when you were a child and were convinced there were not enough cookies, cake, pie or ice cream to go around. I am talking about the times in your life when you did not have enough money to pay the bills or other times when you did not have enough hours in the day to get everything done.

Years ago in Bristol, England, there was a pastor named George Müller, who not only pastored one church for 66 years but also founded an orphanage. He cared for more than 10,000 orphans and, adjusting for inflation, raised around \$150 million dollars for causes for God’s Kingdom. And he did it all without asking for a penny! George decided he would ask God for only the things he truly needed. It is estimated that Müller experienced, as recorded in his journal, some 30,000 specific answers to prayer! That is one of the reasons I encourage people to journal and write down what you are talking to God about. Then when God shows up, you can look back at what you were praying for, and it will build your faith.

When Pastor George prayed, God provided. Food was repeatedly dropped off on the orphanage doorstep right when they ran out. A donation was made just before a bill came due. A plumber offered his services right when a problem needed to be fixed. Now, I am not suggesting that we never let people know when we have a need. However, George’s life story should cause us to remember that we should pray first, rather than saying, “Well, we have done everything we can, so I guess we can try

praying.” Many people, perhaps most, put the whole load on their own back and then wonder why they are so anxious and worried all the time. In John 6, we find a different way. When we commit our needs into God’s hands, the impossible becomes possible. Here is the main point: **God is able.**

God is not just able or more than able, but He is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask for or imagine. In John 6, we are going to see a famous mathematical problem. There were 5,000 men plus women and children gathered to listen to Jesus. They needed to be fed. That was an unsolvable problem because there was not enough food (no restaurants or fast-food joints in the time of Jesus). By using their reasoning and simple math, there was no way it was going to work out. However, with God’s math, something interesting happened. They saw how five plus two equaled 20,000 with a remainder of 12. When you add God to the equation, He can take five loaves and two fish to feed thousands and then have more left over than He started with.



John 6:1–15

That is what I call a “new” math. There is no way to explain how that was possible unless we admit some outside force was present. We cannot explain how that was possible outside of a miracle. A miracle is defined as a time when God shows up and does the impossible! Let’s go back and walk through this real-life story by diving a little deeper. ¹ *Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),* ² *and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.* These people were not following Jesus because they believed He was the Son of God or because they wanted to be forgiven of their sins. They were not following Jesus for spiritual reasons. They were following Jesus because of the unexplainable work He was doing. It is likely that many

were following Jesus because He might do miracles for them and we are no different. If getting something from Jesus is your sole reason for believing, it will not last when times get tough.

What Andrew said clearly shows us that he had some level of faith that Jesus could do the impossible or he would not have brought this boy forward. But at the same time, we can hear the doubt because he ends with, ⁹ *“How far will they go among so many?”* It is one thing to have some faith, but it would have seemed crazy to think that five small loaves and two fish were going to help. Do you ever say that to God? “God, I trust you... but with this one thing in my life, I don’t think even you can fix it.” **Is there something in your life you think is too big for God to fix?**

Stop and take time to think about the impossible things in your life and remind yourself that nothing is impossible for God! Now let’s make sure we have this story in perspective: 5,000 men + their wives = around 10,000 + their kids = at least 20,000 (if not far more), so 20,000 would be a conservative estimate. We have a massive math problem here; $5+2=7$ but $5+2$ could never = 20,000 with a remainder of 12! What did Jesus do when faced with the impossible? ¹¹ *Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.* Jesus faced an impossible situation and said, “I am going to transform this into the possible with this young boy’s offering.”

For teenagers reading this, notice that it was a boy, not an adult, who came to Jesus with the materials He needed for a miracle. If you think you do not understand a lot of this yet, that is not all bad. It is harder for adults to have faith at times because we are jaded by life. However, you can show older people that miracles still happen. Do not be afraid to step out in faith and trust God. If this boy had not come forward, who knows if we would have had this real-life story in the Bible! This boy’s faith, his offering, was

the catalyst that started this miracle. After Jesus gave thanks for the food it was ¹¹ *“distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.”* Here is the point: **Jesus takes our “not enough” and makes it into enough.**

What is your “not enough”? Are you staring in the face of something and wondering how you will make it through? Perhaps you are wondering if you will be able to pay for the gas to make it to work on Monday, or if you’ll ever get married or be reconciled with that person or ever become a parent or ever get out of debt. Just go to Jesus with your “not enough”, offer it up to Him, and say, “Jesus, I can’t do this.” That is when Jesus will smile down and say, “Watch me work with your ‘not enough’ and show you how I will make it enough!” Stand on the promises of God and watch how God will show up in your life... repeatedly.

Let’s circle back and focus on one more thing from verse 11. Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks. Jesus’ gratitude preceded the miracle. Jesus thanked God the Father before anything happened. Jesus praised God and put it all into His hands. Jesus did not bless the food. Jesus blessed God for providing what He needed in the moment. That is faith! And it resulted in everyone having ¹² *enough to eat!* Talk about an incredible miracle! I wish I could have seen people’s faces as these baskets were being passed and passed and passed, without ever running out!

There is still another lesson we can learn from this passage. ¹² *He said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”* ¹³ *So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.*

Jesus told them to gather up the extra pieces. This is the point: **Jesus takes our “not enough” and makes it into more than enough.**

Jesus didn’t come to earth to fulfill the vision mankind had for a messiah. The people wanted their vision! Read their takeaway

from this miracle: ¹⁴*After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”* ¹⁵*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

Jesus came as a new kind of King. He did not come to conquer us. He did not come to force us to submit to His will. Jesus came to set us free, to become the bridge from our sins to eternal life. It is my prayer that today you will put your “not enough” into God’s hands and watch what He does with it.

Remember that when the little boy offered to share his lunch, Andrew, one of Jesus’ close friends, responded by saying, “Thanks, but what can we do with so little? After all, how far will the loaves and the fish go among so many?” Sometimes we over analyze what is happening in front of us, and when we do that, we miss the miracle God wants to do. For instance, you believe God wants you to take a job that pays less, meaning you wouldn’t be able to pay off your school loans as fast, so you pass. You know God wants you to go on the mission trip, but you can’t afford the days off, so you don’t go.

What do you do when the will of God doesn’t add up with normal math?

The will of God rarely adds up by our math. The will of God doesn’t always make sense to us. By definition, a God-ordained dream will always be beyond your resources and beyond your ability. Yet, God can do more in one day than you can accomplish in one hundred lifetimes. Let me assure you that when you add God to the equation, His output always exceeds your input. Your two fish can go so much farther than you imagine if you put them in His hands. I have said this before, but do you realize that **You are one God-sized idea away from changing the world? Take a step of faith and let God do the math.**



CHAPTER 36

WATER WALKING



Matthew 14:22–36, Mark 6:45–56, John 6:14–21

The ability to focus is strange. I have always had the ability to laser focus on things that interest me; yet on something that does not, I find it nearly impossible to even try. There was a time in my life when authoring a book about the life of Jesus would never have happened. I would have had zero interest in such a thing. Years ago, my focus was on money and getting rich. In fact, I was so focused on that goal that I was getting “there” quickly. By age 29, I lived in a gated community in a town whose slogan is “Iconic South Florida luxury living!” Then Jesus got a hold of my heart, mind, soul, and spirit; and my life changed. Now I have the same laser focus, but on eternal things, not temporal things. I am now willing to do what others may think is crazy. Now I understand the importance of getting away with God, decompressing with my family, and remaining focused on the power of Jesus alone. Now I find it thrilling, and I’m no longer fearful to “step out of the boat”.



Matthew 14:22–36

Immediately after the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, Jesus told His disciples to return to the boat. While so much of what he had taught them was still sinking in, Jesus told them to leave without Him, and He would take care of the crowds. They had been involved in some intense situations: the death of John the Baptist, the incredible miracle of feeding thousands of people, and other events from their recent mission trip. Life can be draining and exhausting, and sometimes we run on adrenaline; but when the adrenaline drops, so do we. Jesus knew this and decided that it was in the best interest of the disciples that they get away to decompress. They needed some time to talk with each other and

process what was going on. Jesus needed the same.

Let's look at what Jesus did, ²³ *After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.* Jesus needed to be refreshed and spend some alone time with His Father. He still had not had time to grieve His cousin John's death. So, as we have seen Jesus do quite often, He broke away from everyone and went to a solitary place to seek direction for His next step. We know Jesus prayed for hours. Earlier, He had fed everyone dinner and then sent His disciples away before He went to pray. Then we read in verse 25 that Jesus did not head out to meet the disciples until close to dawn. I would think that some of this conversation with His Father was about the reality of what He was going through. Jesus had been on a spiritual roller coaster. This season of His life was a draining time, just like life can drain us. We can learn a life lesson from Jesus: **When He needed refreshment, Jesus prayed.**

In the next part of this story, we find out a storm was blowing in. Was the storm known to Jesus? If so, why would Jesus send His disciples out on a lake before a storm? Or is there something greater to learn here? *Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.*

This story can be found in Matthew, Mark, and John. John tells us that the boat was over three miles out from the shore by this time (John 6:19). The disciples were having a tough time rowing because a strong wind was blowing against them. Since no other boats would be heading out, Jesus had only two choices: swim or wait out the storm. Jesus chose neither; He walked. Jesus simply walked out to them on the water. The disciples were struggling to row across the lake, but Jesus walked on top of the waves! I wonder what it felt like to walk on water. At least one of the disciples did, too. ²⁶ *When the disciples saw him walking on*

the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

You must admit that if you saw someone walking on water in the middle of a storm, you would freak out too. In Mark, it says Jesus was moving along with such ease that He was about to pass them by. Imagine that you are straining to keep a boat moving when you see some dude just strolling along on top of the water, and he gives you a little head nod as if to say, “What’s up?”

The disciples are freaking out, so Jesus said, ²⁷ *“don’t be afraid.”* They were not sure it was Jesus because it was dark and stormy, so Peter spoke up.

I love Peter because he was so raw, a totally unique man, the boldest of all the disciples who at times had few filters on what came out of his mouth. We all have that friend or family member who has no filter. When they open their mouth, you are always braced for what is going to come out. Well, that was Peter, and that is not an insult.

Jesus loved Peter. Peter was a little crazy, but Jesus loved him. Peter did amazing things through the power of Jesus. He was the type of person who did things that other people did not have the nerve to do. Peter was completely drawn to Jesus and wanted to follow Jesus with his whole heart. He did make mistakes, but he had the belief and courage to do things the others would never have imagined doing. Peter was about to show us how true that was; ²⁸ *“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.*

Jesus probably told Peter to come walk on water because he was the only one who asked. Are we like Peter, ready to step out in faith and see God do miracles in our lives? Bear in mind, Peter did the impossible because he asked. The rest did not because they did not ask. Or perhaps their common sense meter told them

it was impossible, so they stayed in the boat!

If you remember, Jesus told us a few weeks ago that it was totally okay to ask God for opportunities (see Matthew 7:7). Peter had enough faith to step out of the boat in the dark and into the crashing waves and onto something that had been proven, beyond doubt, could never hold him up. He was willing to step out and do the impossible because he trusted Jesus. At first, Peter's eyes were fixed on Jesus because he knew that, without Jesus, he was going to sink. His life as a fisherman had proven to him that anytime he went into water that was over his head, he sank. Without Jesus he was going to sink, and he knew it. So, his eyes were **fixed** on Jesus. Here is the point: **While Peter was focused on Jesus, the impossible became possible!**

He could see the power that Jesus held over all things. He knew how much Jesus loved him and that Jesus would never let him down. Peter knew his faith would be strong when his eyes were on Jesus. As we have learned, Jesus has power over all things. This is true for you, as well. Jesus loves you. He loves you enough that He laid down His life for you. When you know Him, you know He is completely deserving of your trust. When you keep your focus on Jesus, you will see His power. However, Peter was about to do what we all tend to do. Look at what he does next: *³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"*

Here is the reality: Peter was safely walking on water until he decided to pay more attention to his surroundings than to Jesus. Peter suddenly remembered it was storming. He heard the wind, he saw waves, and fear set in! It's just like times when we listen to our friends' doubts or when we remember a time when God didn't do what we wanted Him to do. We doubt, and, like Peter, we begin to sink. And bear in mind, **Jesus did not change; Peter took his**

eyes off HIM. Jesus was always there. Jesus was standing steady on the water. Jesus was there to help, yet Peter chose to look away into the raging sea. Peter chose to be overwhelmed by the things around him. But Peter should have remembered that **nothing is more powerful than Jesus, and He was right there to catch him!** Gently, Jesus told Peter that his faith was small because he doubted Him, yet He was still there to help.

Now before we judge Peter, remember that Peter was the only one willing to step out of the boat and into certain death. I have heard a lot of sermons about how Peter sank but remember this: the other disciples never even left the boat. They did not have the faith or trust that Peter had. They preferred to stay in a safer place, not choosing to venture out into danger. Look back at verse 26. When the disciples first saw Jesus walking on the water, He told them to be brave and not afraid. Peter had a mixture of faith and fear. That describes most of us at times. We may start out with faith. We might begin to do something that we know God wants us to do. Or we might have faith that gives us peace in a challenging time, but then we take our eyes off Jesus. We look at the scary situation around us. We doubt whether God has power over that situation or if He even cares enough to help us. We stop doing what God wants us to do. We may even be overwhelmed with fear. In the pit of our stomach, we doubt. Here is the point: **Many of life's situations are too big and scary for us to handle, but nothing is too big for Jesus!**

Do not focus on the situation you are in. Focus on the One who has power over every situation!

The Creator of the universe has power over all things, and He is waiting to help you. He wants to do what is best for you! He is able to do what is best for you! Focusing on that truth should give you peace. That truth should give you the confidence to step out of your boat and do whatever it is He wants you to do... without fear. No one's faith is perfect. If you do stumble, if you ever have

a doubt like Peter did, talk to Jesus about it. Jesus never changes. Just like He reached out His hand to Peter to keep him safe, Jesus is that close to you and is willing to help you, too.

The story is not over yet; ³²*And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.* ³³*Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”* The disciples finally understood who Jesus was. They had already seen Jesus do miracles. But when Peter and the other disciples saw that having faith in Jesus changed Peter into a man who had just walked on water, their lives were changed. They all knew Peter; some had known him all their lives. He was just a plain, clumsy, outspoken fisherman with no filter. But when he trusted in Jesus, he did something miraculous. He walked on top of the Sea of Galilee! Jesus transformed Peter. Surely Jesus was the Son of God because only God could do that!

This applies to each of us, too. Your family and friends know your faults. They know some of the mistakes you have made. They know who you really are. But when you ask God to use you, then step out in faith and keep your focus on Jesus. He will do amazing things through you. This is what life in the kingdom of God is all about. You will do things you could never do on your own. You will love people who seem unlovable, have peace when it seems impossible, have joy when all joy is gone, be fearless when you should be afraid; and you, yes you, will be a living testimony for Jesus. The people who know you best will know that Jesus is the Lord of lords!

Let me wrap this up with a story that I am hoping will drive home the point. There was an officer in the Navy who had always dreamed of commanding a battleship. He finally achieved his dream and was given a commission over the newest and proudest ship in the fleet. One stormy night as the ship plowed through the seas, the captain was on duty on the bridge. Suddenly off to the port side, he spotted a strange light rapidly closing in on his

own vessel. He immediately ordered the signalman to flash this message to the unidentified craft: “Alter your course ten degrees to the south.” A moment passed before the reply came: “Alter your course ten degrees to the north.” Determined that his ship would not take a backseat to another ship, the captain snapped out the order to be sent: “Alter course ten degrees... I am the CAPTAIN!” The response beamed back, “Alter your course ten degrees... I am Seaman Jones, Third Class.” Now infuriated, the captain grabbed the signal light with his own hands and fired off: “Alter course; I COMMAND a battleship.” The reply came back. “Alter your course; I am a lighthouse.”

No matter how big or important any of us think we are, God’s Word stands forth as an unchanging beacon. All other courses must be altered to His.



LIFE APPLICATION

- Does your life show you are a water-walker or a boat-hugger? The only way you can walk on water is to keep your eyes and life focused on Jesus. Consider where you need to take a step of faith in your life.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 37

BREAD OF LIFE



John 6:22–71

Growing up, we always had freshly baked bread, and I loved it. When I got married, I missed that warm fresh bread and the smell as we walked in from school. So, I bought a bread book and all the bread making ingredients. However, I soon discovered that making bread takes quite a bit of time. First, you need to make sure you proof your yeast. Then you add in the flour and salt. (I learned the hard way to never forget the salt.) Then you knead the dough, let it rise, punch it down, form the loaves, let it rise again, and finally bake it. Growing up, I never knew it took so much time. I just enjoyed the bread my mother made. Today, I enjoy the great bread the person at the bakery makes! Today's story is about a different kind of bread, one Jesus calls the Bread of Life. And the bread-making process has some similarities to this story.



John 6:22–34

What you just read happened the morning after the water-walking miracle. People were looking for Jesus yet again, but they were still looking for what they could get from Him. They were still not seeking anything eternal. Jesus wanted them to understand that there was a cost for every action. Let's see this come to life: ²⁵ *When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"* ²⁶ *Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."*

Jesus said, "I know why you are here; don't try to flatter me. You are here because I filled your bellies with food." There is a difference between faith in Jesus because you genuinely believe

He is God and gave up His life for you and believing in Jesus because He can do good things for you, like fill your belly with bread. Jesus then said, ²⁷ *“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”* The word “endures” in this verse is the same word and has the same meaning as when Jesus talked about the vine and branches and our need to remain connected to Him to bear fruit. In the same way, fruit cannot be produced without a direct connection to a branch, which has a direct connection to a tree (or bush), which has a connection to roots that must be planted in soil. Jesus was saying that we must also be connected to God so we can produce godly fruit. This connection comes through one source, and **Jesus is our only connection to eternal life!**

In a previous chapter we talked about the woman at the well, and we saw a parallel meaning. Everyone who drinks the water Jesus gives will never thirst. So, just as it did with the woman at the well, this too brought up a question: ²⁸ *Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”* They wanted to know how to earn, through works, eternal life. In other words, how could they know for sure they had done enough to receive something from God? Or the simple question: What do I have to do to make God happy? ²⁹ *Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”* This means that you cannot work your way to God. Salvation has nothing to do with your work. It does, however, have everything to do with your faith in God, the Father’s work done through the One He sent!

Their response to this was: ³⁰ *So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?”* ³¹ *Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”* They asked for proof. They were saying to Jesus, you have done some amazing things, but our ancestors were fed by God for 40 years, and well—

you are not quite there, yet. They felt that Jesus was not at the same level as Moses, so Jesus needed to give them more proof, more than He already had. This is strange, really, because Moses told them to expect another Prophet to come, one they could believe in (Deuteronomy 18:15–18). But they did not care about that; they wanted to see a miracle like Moses had done long ago.

³² *Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* In other words, “You think your parents gave this to you? You think the government gave this to you? You think you earned this? The reality is that it all came from God in heaven.” He was saying to these Jews, “You misquoted your Bible. Moses did not bring the manna; it was God, and you should know that.” So, they responded: ³⁴ *“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”* They wanted never-ending bread like their ancestors. Remember again the teaching of Jesus with the woman at the well; she wanted the same thing. They were looking at this from their physical needs, their hunger or thirst for bread and water. However, Jesus was talking about things from a spiritual perspective, and they were not catching on.



John 6:35–42

Because they did not understand, Jesus made clear where He came from, and that caused the grumbling to escalate. They were talking about a free lunch and dinner like God had sent generations ago to their ancestors. Then Jesus said, ³⁵ *“I am the bread of life.”* They may have been wondering if Jesus was promoting cannibalism. Jesus was saying it was all about Him, and He was the key to eternal life. Unfortunately, this did not seem to agree with what the Jewish people had been taught in the synagogue. After all,

who did Jesus think He was?



John 6:43–71

A minute ago, they thought Jesus was hinting at cannibalism, but now He just straight up said it! Everyone was freaking out, and so would you. This made no sense with their understanding of God and how God had always operated. Jesus made it more difficult to understand as He continued talking. ⁵³ *Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.*

Okay, so now it might have sounded like Jesus wanted them to become cannibalistic vampires. This was the moment when Jesus’ ministry made another turning point, but this time it began shrinking. They did not understand or like what Jesus had said, and there was no desire to learn the deeper meaning of His words. Many started to leave Jesus because of this; it was clearly too much. Jesus sensed what was going on.

⁶¹ *Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”*

This is a spiritual truth we need to understand today. When we are followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God,

lives inside us. The Holy Spirit reveals things to us, guides us, and helps us. These followers did not yet have the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not send the Holy Spirit to live inside His disciples until after He returned to heaven. His disciples had no idea that in a few months, Jesus was going to serve them what we today call communion. Jesus would soon teach them that His body was like the bread, not literally the bread they would eat, but figuratively the bread that would sustain them. Jesus would also teach them His blood was like wine, not literally blood they would drink, but figuratively the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus taught them that, going forward, they would eat the bread and drink the wine to remember what He was going to do for them soon, a future event they still had no idea was coming.

When we read these stories, we read into them things we know or think we know. Because we have the New Testament, we forget to put ourselves in the shoes of those listening to Jesus who at those moments had no knowledge of what was coming next. We do not think about how difficult what Jesus was teaching would have been for them to understand. For a seasoned Christian or someone who grew up in church, that knowledge is your lens as you read through these passages. If you know little or nothing about Jesus and you grew up outside the church, you are likely thinking the same thing as these people back then. This teaching sounds crazy!

If this is the case, then let me try to make some sense of it for you. If we look at this passage with fresh eyes, it is hard to understand it without the greater knowledge that comes from referring to other places in the Bible. It is important that we never “cherry pick” when studying our Bibles. Anyone can pull one sentence from the Bible, put it in the context of what they know, and say, “I knew Christians were all weird!” It is easy to read one thing and say, “I have read enough!” But if we take the time to admit something we read was odd and yet keep reading

and learning, we will find out what Jesus was honestly saying. So don't "check out"! Work at understanding who Jesus really is!

Coming to faith in Jesus is a process. I know that for some, it is an immediate change. One day, you live for yourself, and the next day, you meet Jesus and are "all in". But for many, including me, it was a process. I want you to be aware that coming to understand the Bible is also a process. Coming to understand how God works is a process. Coming to a real authentic faith in Jesus is a process.

What we see in the text is that people saw Jesus as a kind of a modern day Santa Claus, a person who could give them what they wanted. Jesus would never support a person's desire to have an "all-about me, myself, and I" attitude. Jesus was not there to hand out miracles for a cushy life. So, *⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* Do not miss that word... **many**. Many of his followers thought things had gotten weird or too hard, and they threw in the towel. Many decided not to bother to try to figure out what Jesus meant. Many were offended and walked away. If we are honest, this is the same problem some of us have today. Offensive things happen all the time. Here are two important points:

- You are the only person who can choose to pick up an offense.
- You are the only person who can lay down that offense.

Only **you** can make the choice. If you become skilled at refusing to pick up offenses, your life will be much more joyful. Start today to learn to be the opposite of the followers who were offended by Jesus and left. Instead, learn to be like the 12 disciples who may not have always understood what Jesus meant but chose to stay, to learn more, and to trust Jesus.

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹ (He meant

Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.) His core disciples chose to stay with Him.

Let's return to the bread-making process mentioned earlier. Jesus had taken them fishing, had shown them what true leadership looked like, and re-aligned their thinking to an upside-down kingdom model. (The ingredients to produce a loaf of bread.) His core followers had been processing His words for quite a while at this point. (Kneading the dough to develop the bread.) They had matured enough to realize that another lesson was likely coming. A lesson that would explain His strange words. (Letting the bread rise and develop further.) That is the thing about going "all in" with Jesus versus staying on the fringe. A lot of what Jesus said seems odd while staying on the fringe, but when you dig deep and go "all in", many (but never all) of your questions are answered. God is the greatest of all mysteries. Most of the followers simply walked away because of the mystery. The minority said, "Jesus, we might not understand all of this, but we are with you." (As with baking the bread, once it's in the oven, there is no turning back.) Choose to trust God to work out the things you do not understand. (The bread is finally ready to be shared and "eaten".)



LIFE APPLICATION:

- Do you have a broken relationship with someone because of something that was said or done to you? If so, make a choice today to lay down your offense and forgive that person.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 38

TRADITIONS



Matthew 15:1–39, Mark 7:1–8:10

Every family, culture, and religion has their own array of traditions. Some traditions are great while others are annoying; some we dread and some we love. As a kid, I always looked forward to Christmas time. My favorite part was when we went up into the attic, got out all the decorations, and started putting them up. I loved it! I loved the clutter of stuff all over the house. Then I grew up and was married. We added new traditions, and I quickly learned that balancing the traditions of two families can be precarious at best. I moved out of Michigan for college and then, after college, moved all over the country. For many years, my wife and I came back to Michigan for Christmas. Before our children were born, it was easy to drive across the country and bounce from one side of the family to the other. However, that all changed once our children came along because we wanted to start our own traditions. And that meant changes to some of our long-time family traditions. We learned quickly that changing traditions is hard—even in families. As you learned when reading the Scripture for this chapter, the Jewish leaders in Jesus' time recoiled strongly against His teachings, which violated certain long-standing religious traditions.



Matthew 15:1–20

The tradition the religious leaders accused Jesus of breaking was one we still break today: washing hands before eating. When I was growing up, I remember my mother always saying, “Go wash your hands before you eat.” Now, I never do because dirty hands expose my body to more germs, which helps to build my immunity so I can fight sickness better... just kidding! The interesting thing

about this challenge from the religious leaders was that hand washing was not actually a tradition or requirement for Jewish people to keep. It was for priests alone due to purity laws, but they were trying to stretch a tradition beyond the religious norm.

Jesus instantly pushed back on their hypocrisy and said, ³ *“And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ⁵ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites!”*

Harsh words, but true words. Far too often we are quick to point out how other people fail to live up to our expectations while failing to see how we do the same thing in other areas of our lives. We must remember that we are not to judge other people. That is also why Jesus said, ¹⁴ *“Leave them; they are blind guides.”* The religious leaders were leading people astray. We, too, must be careful of the kinds of people we allow to influence our thinking, our decisions, and our actions.



Matthew 15:21–39

Jesus continued this journey with two more miracles. The first story had two key takeaways. The Canaanite woman showed, yet again, that Jesus had the power to do anything—anywhere—at any time. It says in verse 22 that the woman came to Jesus. It does not say that she came with her daughter. Yet, Jesus healed her absent daughter. The second takeaway is found in what Jesus said to the woman: ²⁸ *“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”* The mother, not the daughter, was seeking this miracle; yet it was the mother’s faith that led to the daughter’s healing. This should give us assurance that when we have children who

suffer or have wandered away, there is still hope. We should never stop praying for them or asking God to work in their lives. This reminds me of my mother, who prayed for decades for her father to accept Jesus. Her father was very anti-church and anti-Jesus and was not afraid to let anyone know. However, my mother never gave up on Papa; and just a few days before he passed away, she was able to hear him give his life to Jesus! Never give up!

Jesus continued performing other miracles. Once again, we read that Jesus was moved by compassion for the people (verse 32). Jesus fed 4,000+ people with a similar amount of food as when he fed the 5,000. Sadly, compassion was considered a weakness in Roman culture, just as it is not a virtue in most modern cultures today. Yet it seems to me that one of the “traditions” we see in the Kingdom of God is being moved by compassion. God instructs us to never be too busy to see those around us. As we go through our daily routines, we must remain open to what He wants us to do. I would encourage you to consider how you can allow compassion to move you in a way that helps other people. You never know where that might lead!



LIFE APPLICATION:

- Slow down, pay attention to the people around you, and ask God to show you ways you can serve those people. Then act on His leading.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 39

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU LEARN FROM



Matthew 16:1–12, Mark 8:11–26

As children, we grow up learning from many people. I learned from my parents and grandparents. I went to public school and learned from my many teachers as well as from the principals because of my time spent in their office. I attended a youth group and learned from Pastor Bill, our youth pastor. I went to Huntington College and learned from the professors there. I went into the construction industry and learned from our trade partners.

As an adult, I moved all over the country and climbed the corporate ladder. It was there that I learned something interesting: people who live in one state their entire lives often fail to realize how much local and state government affects how they live and think. I saw this after moving from Michigan to Indiana and then from Indiana to Ohio. We then moved from Ohio to Tennessee and experienced even greater cultural differences, but the biggest contrast came when we moved from Tennessee to New Jersey. We experienced people there who grew up with a totally different worldview. This worldview leads to values and a lifestyle different from those in Tennessee. In Tennessee, several neighbors brought us a meal the day we moved in. Everyone's first question was, "Are you a Christian?" Everyone's second question was, "Do you go to church?" The third question was, "Do you want to come to church with us this Sunday?" Coming from the Midwest, I thought it was very odd. Growing up, we may have taken a casserole or cookies, but a "church" conversation was rare. However, in New Jersey, there was a complete absence of neighborly concern.

We learned from these different regions and people some exceptionally good lessons and some exceptionally difficult lessons. We didn't always like what we learned, but in looking

back, we could see God's hand in every move. His protection covered us when the influences we were surrounded by could have easily led us in a very wrong direction. In today's reading, Jesus is going to teach much the same thing.



Matthew 16:1-4

I want to point out one thing Jesus said in verse 4: *“none will be given except the sign of Jonah.”* People were trying to make Jesus prove He was who He said He was, which I find comical if you think about all the miracles Jesus had been doing. The reason was obvious, though. They were choosing to ignore the truth. In the same way today, two people can look at the same situation and one sees the obvious truth while the other sees what they choose to see. As I've said before, there is nothing new under the sun.

Jesus did say He would give them one sign that would be obvious, the sign of Jonah. In the Bible there is a book named for Jonah. Jonah was called by God to go to a town and tell them that a terrible fate awaited them if they did not change their evil ways and follow God. Jonah did not want to do that, so he boarded a boat and ran from God's call. Jonah had to learn the hard way that you cannot run from God. Long story short, Jonah was thrown off that boat and swallowed by a whale. He was in the belly of that whale for three days and three nights and then spit up onto the same beach where God had asked him to go in the beginning. So, Jesus said He would give them ⁴ *“the sign of Jonah.”* They had no idea what that meant, but it would later be made obvious. Soon Jesus would be crucified and buried in a tomb. Three days later, He would rise from the dead and come out of that tomb, like Jonah did from the whale. Jesus was hinting at His future and giving them a clue to help them know He was who they were looking for... the Messiah! The key for the people was this: **Would they remember His teaching and acknowledge it?**



Matthew 16:5–12

In this passage, Jesus reminded His followers of all the things that had happened recently and told them to ⁶ “*be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*” He was not talking about their bread-making skills; He was talking about their false teaching. Jesus knew that a little bit of yeast expands, grows, and spreads, just like lies. He knew that the teachings of these religious leaders would destroy His followers if they chose to listen to it. We know this from reading verse 12.

Be very careful what you read. Be careful what you watch. Be careful from whom you learn. Be careful whom you allow to influence your children, not because I say so but because Jesus said so. I have been blessed to travel all over the world, and the more I travel, the more I realize the power of learning. It can lead people to great places or very dark places. Be careful who influences you.



LIFE APPLICATION:

- Make a list of people who speak into your life; the papers or books you read; the shows you watch consistently; radio hosts, news programs, podcasts, and social media influencers that you follow. Consider whether their values and what they write or say reflect the kind of person you strive to be and God wants you to be.
 - In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
 - As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...
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CHAPTER 40

WHO IS JESUS



Matthew 16:13–28, Mark 8:27–9:1, Luke 9:18–27

When my daughter Belle was a four-year-old, she loved to be with us when we were cooking something on the stove. I would gently explain that it was too dangerous for her to be close to the burners. That is what a loving father does. It would not be loving for me to allow her to be close to the scorching hot burner and let her touch it to find out for herself. We all understand that. Likewise, it was also loving for me to discipline her if, after I taught her this important fact, she overstepped that boundary and got too close. As parents, we know things our children do not, and sometimes the most loving thing we can do is guide and discipline them to stay on the safe path. The same is true in our relationship with God. Sometimes when God tries to correct our course, we become angry at Him and ask why or why not, which means we really do not trust that He knows what is best for us. Consequently, instead of acknowledging that our all-knowing God knows best and that He is a Loving Father trying to keep us on the right path, we choose a different path that was never meant for us.



Matthew 16:13–28

In this passage, Jesus was north of Caesarea Philippi, away from the crowds on a leadership team retreat with His core group. This passage was another turning point in Jesus' ministry. If we were to put this story on a timeline, this was about three years into His ministry. Jesus was taking some time away from the crowds to see where His disciples were mentally and to see what they were thinking after everything that had been happening. Jesus was asking an important leadership question, not about how many followers He had, how many people were coming to their

rallies, or how many people were involved in ministry. Instead, Jesus simply wanted to hear what people were saying about Him.

¹³ *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”* From an eternal perspective, how we answer this one single question has eternal ramifications. How would you answer the following question?

Who is Jesus to me?

The context of His question matters. For the last six months of ministry, these young men had been involved in massive ministry events with thousands of people. These young disciples had been sent out on their own mission trips. They had miraculously fed 20,000 people through one kid’s lunch, saw Jesus walk on water, and then fed another group of 4,000 people. So now Jesus wanted to hear their take on the pulse of what people were saying, hence the question, “What are you hearing people say about who I am?” Jesus paused and waited to hear their answer, ¹⁴*They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* These were discouraging answers, to be sure. After three years of saying that He was fully God and fully man, that He had been born in Bethlehem, schooled in Egypt, raised in Nazareth, and had the prophesied pedigree to be the One they had been told would come, they still did not understand. After seeing the miracles that could only be done by God, they still did not understand. After all this time, they only saw Jesus as a prophet of the good old days, which was, no doubt, painful for Jesus to hear.

Some of the most painful moments in my ministry come from times like this. There have been people in my life who I thought I knew well, who appeared to “get it,” who knew who I was and what I was about. Then suddenly, they walked away from God and walked back into their old lives. As Jesus said these next words, I imagine Him with a wincing look on His face while wondering

what they would say, ¹⁵ *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”* In other words, “Okay, that is what all the others said, but what about you? Who do you say I am?” And I am sure Jesus braced Himself because up went Peter’s hand. I picture Jesus asking if anyone else wanted to answer first. We know Peter tended to lack a filter and blurt out, so who knew what he might say? Then, ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* I can see the tear in Jesus’s eye as He realized that impetuous Peter had gotten it! ¹⁷ *Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.”* Jesus’ face lit up; an ear-to-ear grin spread across His face. All the guys slapped Simon on the back and told him what a great answer that was. And about the time Peter started to puff out his chest, Jesus said, ¹⁷ *for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.* My interpretation is, “Check your pride, Peter.” Peter, don’t you realize that God spoke through you with that answer? Here is the point: **Don’t allow your knowledge of Jesus to become a point of pride in your life.**

God spoke through Peter, but Jesus reminded Peter that it came from God the Father and not his own intellect. Don’t miss that. Listen to this great blessing Jesus gave to Peter: ¹⁸ *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* ²⁰ *Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

What an incredible promise to Peter. Jesus was telling us that the power of the future church would come through Peter. Not even the gates of Hades (Hell) would be able to overcome the church. It is important to be connected to one another. Unfortunately, our culture teaches us to be individuals and that life is all about “us.” The world wants to isolate us: shop online, go through the drive-

through, take online classes, come home from work, close the garage door, and avoid talking to the neighbors. Those things we think of as modern “advances” are designed to isolate us more and more. Who wants us isolated? The enemy! Satan knows that he can defeat us alone much easier; and Satan knows that when we are together in Christ, nothing he does can stop us. Maybe this is a call for you to stop isolating yourself from others and the church and, instead, step into a relationship with Jesus because that could transform your life like it did Peter’s life.

Jesus moved on to tell the disciples about the near future. ²¹ *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.* Jesus would suffer at the hands of the ones who led the synagogue (or church), who taught the Scriptures to kids, who were the best pastors and seminary professors; these were the same people who recommended killing Jesus.

Peter got the “Who am I?” answer right, so he was probably feeling good about himself. In addition, since Peter was likely a bit older than Jesus, he pulled Him aside and told Him how things would really work; ²² *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”* This made total sense to Peter because he believed since Jesus was God, who could kill Him? As we keep reading, consider how Jesus had just praised Peter and said He would build His Church through him. ²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”* A minute ago, Peter had been leaning into God for wisdom and found it. Perhaps Peter’s pride once again appeared, and his human wisdom turned out to be less than wise. The result was that Jesus rebuked Peter and told him to stop worrying about human concerns and to refocus on God. If

we are honest as we go through life and learn things, we can tend to think we know what is “best” to do. At times we can be right, and at other times, we can be quite wrong. We need to learn this from Peter’s experience: **Never allow your human concerns to block God’s direction.**

Carefully read these final words from Jesus because they are all about the course Jesus desires for His followers. ²⁴ *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”.* Don’t allow the burdens of life to drag you down; ²⁵ *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”*

Jesus clearly said, “I will reward my followers based on what they have done.”

Read verses 18–20 again. In what posture do you see the enemy, and what does that mean for the Church in terms of war? Hades has gates. That is a defensive position, which means the Church is in the offensive position. The enemy cannot win when we are on the offense! Storm the gates of the community in which you live and take ground for Jesus!



LIFE APPLICATION:

- Write down what desires you have given up and replaced with God’s desires.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 41

JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION



Matthew 17:1–13, Mark 9:2–13 & Luke 9:28–36

Before we read the story below, think back to the last chapter and the leadership retreat, where Jesus told his disciples that the movement He started would be so powerful that even the gates of hell would never overcome them! Now they are walking with Jesus, and I am sure all of this was still sinking in when Jesus decided to share an insight into his relationship with God with his inner circle.



Luke 9:28–36

²⁸ About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. ³¹ They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

This passage has some very important points that we can apply in our lives. At the pinnacle of Jesus' ministry, thousands of

disciples followed Him. Jesus stood before all his disciples in Luke chapter six, and out of that massive group of disciples, He selected 12 to be his apostles. To highlight the obvious, did everyone get to be in Jesus' inner circle of 12 leaders? Did Jesus hold an election where everyone got to vote on who among them would help lead this movement alongside Him? Obviously not. We discussed this point in an earlier chapter, but it also applies here. **Jesus was not afraid to place the right leaders in the right places at the right time.**

Part of leading is making hard decisions, and one of the hardest things to do as a leader is to look at the people God has given you and make sure they are in the right seat on the bus. This is tough in our modern culture, where it has become the norm for everyone to win a ribbon or trophy. Many today want everyone to receive the same reward, regardless of how much effort was put in. You might not like to hear this, but that is a cultural view. That is not a **Biblical worldview**. God very clearly gifts us all differently, and God says that is a good thing.

Jesus very clearly calls people to different levels of leadership based on the gifts that God gave them. It is fully possible that in churches all over this country, there are leaders in ministry who Jesus did not appoint. There are people in leadership positions because they are the only ones willing to serve. Many of my pastor friends have to take any willing person because they are desperate for help. Others lament because their leadership is selected by popular vote or because of how much money they give to the church. And perhaps the saddest of all, some are in leadership positions because they are bullies, and people are afraid to stand up to them.

Do you ever wonder, "Why does God allow that to happen?" The good news is that the answer is in the Bible. One example is in 1 Samuel 8, when the Israelites wanted a King. God said no, but they behaved so badly that God said, "Okay, you want a

king...so be it.” The people got what they wanted, but the result was wars and being sent into captivity. Churches can die because they choose not to follow God’s plan. Sometimes, amazing God-gifted men and women are passed over for cultural views and cultural reasons.

This chapter’s Bible reading shows us when Jesus divided His small group of 12 leaders into an even smaller inner circle of three. Luke 9:18 indicates that all 12 disciples were with Jesus on His leadership retreat. As described in verse 28, eight days later, only three were with Jesus: Peter, James, and John. Nine of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples were not with Jesus. This smaller leadership team was about to become even closer to Jesus and learn even more about Him.

Compare this distinction to you reading this book. You all know something about me. Some of you know more because you Googled me. Some of you live in the same state as me. Others have come to Family Church and met me. Some of you I know well. Some volunteers serve alongside me. Then, there is staff whom I see and work with daily. And then there are those I disciple and go deeper with. Smaller and smaller circles of people. **Jesus demonstrated the need to have good friends with whom we can reveal our inner selves.**

There is something else we need to notice in verse 28: *About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.* Jesus again shows us the importance of getting away from everything, being alone with God, praying, and connecting with Him. Jesus is taking his closest friends with him to show them what he does when he prays. Jesus is modeling and leading his closest friends in connecting with God the Father. Jesus was being open and raw with his close friends so they could see Him fully.

We live in a culture that is all about posting the best version of you online. We are constantly looking at our friend’s social posts

about being at the gym looking good. Meanwhile, we eat ice cream in our fat pants and become angry. We see a post of a friend out on a date while we are sitting at home with our cat. We view that post from a friend looking perfect, and our hair looks like a flock of seagulls. We are constantly putting out these perfectly edited photos and posts of ourselves faking who we really are and what is truly happening in our lives. Jesus wants us to see the importance of taking time with real friends whom you can open up with and dig deep with.

Then the miraculous happened, ²⁹ *As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.* Jesus's friends caught a glimpse of who Jesus really was! And what they saw was awesome! Jesus was totally transformed, and they caught a glimpse of what God looked like! How exciting would that have been for these mere men! But this one verse begs an essential question for each of us. If you were to strip off all your fake faces, remove all the walls you have put up to keep yourself safe, remove all your filters, and show the real you, what would others really see? Who are you really?

One day, an awesome woman of God told me some great news about her husband. I was super excited for them, and she looked at me with a quizzical look. She asked me, "Is this really you? Why are you so excited for us?" I smiled and said, "Well, I guess you will need to stick around, and you will find out over time!" She asked if she knew the real Adam and if this really was the real Adam. She wondered because her past had taught her to be leery and careful. Most people put on these fake faces, and then they change and hurt you. So, who are you really? Does anyone know the real, unfiltered you?

This is the reason I believe everyone needs to be in a community with a small group of people. The reality is that any of us can show up in public and look great on the outside but be hurting and broken on the inside. And the reality is that most of

us do not want the world to know we are broken and hurt. But when we get into smaller groups, we open up, and it changes us from the inside out. And what I know about those small groups is this—inside those groups, even smaller groups of friends exist where people will go even deeper in their relationship, just like we saw happening with Jesus and the three disciples.

Jesus chose three of the 12 to go into a deeper relationship with Him. They eventually became His leaders of leaders. From this point forward, you will see Jesus escaping with this group of three more and more. Jesus knows for His movement to grow, He will need some high-level leaders to continue to expand His ministry. Jesus pulled aside those three to give them some insights that would help them lead. Note here that not everyone needed to know everything. Some people like to think everyone needs to know everything. Clearly, we see that is not the case when we study the Bible!

Let's keep reading, ³⁰ *Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.* ³¹ *They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.* ³² *Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.* ³³ *As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)*

Can you imagine being there, praying with Jesus, and then suddenly seeing Him transfigured? Can you imagine two long-dead superheroes of your faith suddenly appearing? How did they even know who these people were? They had lived and died generations ago, and there were no pictures of them circulating. This means that Jesus must have called His new leaders over to meet Moses and Elijah. Think about Jesus saying, "hey Peter... come here...you know we have talked a lot about Elijah and

how many miracles he did...would you like to meet him?" How humbling would it have been for these three Jewish men to stand before these men who were considered the greatest Pillars of their faith! Bear in mind that Moses and Elijah were considered far more significant than Jesus at this point in time.

They were experiencing this amazing moment when Peter yet again opened his mouth and stuck his foot into it! Peter was so excited about what was going on he blurted out, "Let's build all three of you shelters!" You may wonder what that was all about. Peter was putting Elijah and Moses on the same level as Jesus, which he probably thought was a compliment. Back then, it was common to put up shelters or monuments to remember important events or people. Similar to how today we put a statue in a park to commemorate a great person or event. But Peter had something to learn about Jesus' place in the hierarchy of things.

God the Father jumps in, ³⁴ *While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.* ³⁵ *A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."* God stopped Peter mid-sentence because God HATES idol worship. God stepped in to explain to Peter that there would be no setting up idols to return to and worship and that Moses and Elijah were not even close to the level of Jesus! Peter needed to get past his traditions and upbringing and realize Jesus was God's SON and Chosen One. Jesus was the only one Peter needed! No altars should be built for mere men. Peter had good intentions, but as we see with him often, he did not stop to think before he spoke.

Peter was caught up in hero worship. We still have this problem today. You can see it any day of the week at concerts, sports events, political rallies, famous business leader forums, and even in churches. It is so easy to get caught up in all the hype that we do not even realize we are worshiping someone or something other than God!

Let me give you an example of how we still struggle with this today. Men, how many of you struggle to raise your hands in church or get excited about what God is doing? Yet, you can go to a football game and go nuts, raise your hands, cheer, clap, and high-five total strangers. Yet, you would never be caught dead acting like that at church. Ladies, many of you struggle to sing at the top of your lungs at church. Yet, you can go to a concert and sing with all you have alongside this or that star. Do you see how we are like Peter?

In Jewish culture, people idolized Moses and Elijah because of what God had done through them. They placed them on pedestals as if they were like God. That is why Matthew 17 says that when the transfiguration happened, they fell on their faces and were terrified. When these three leaders heard the voice of God speaking over their good intentions (that they now realize were misplaced), they fell on their faces in fear.

And look at how Jesus responded, ³⁶ *When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.* In my mind, I see Jesus coming up to them, reaching down and touching their shoulders while saying, “It’s okay, Peter. Get up, James, John, you too. It was just my Father. He was frustrated at your lack of understanding and misplaced hero worship.”

And don’t miss this: God spoke about Jesus being His son, and they got to hear it! Few people got to hear God’s voice like that; Adam and Eve did, Moses did, Elijah did, and now they did as well! God repeated the same thing He said about Jesus three years ago when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River! I LOVE the Bible! I LOVE studying Jesus’ life! Let me close this chapter with a point I took away from my study: DON’T put leaders on a pedestal. Hero culture has been around as long as we have had people.

- We LOVE to celebrate the most intelligent people.
- We LOVE to celebrate the most remarkable athletes.

- We LOVE to celebrate people who do great things.
- We LOVE to celebrate pastors who brought us to Jesus or seem to be great teachers.

It grieves God's heart when Christians worship people and not Jesus. After all, Jesus is Everything!



LIFE APPLICATION:

- Who are you really? Does anyone really know you? The real unfiltered you? Spend some time looking for some lurking idols or hidden heroes you idolize or worship.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 42

WHAT IS TRUE GREATNESS



Matthew 17:24–27 & 18:1–14, Mark 9:33–50,
Luke 9:46–50 & Luke 15:3–7

In every field, there are those who are considered great and those who are simply average. We all knew who the great athletes were in our schools and who rode the pine. We all knew who the great students were and who barely passed. The Olympics began centuries ago to allow people from around the world to compete for greatness. Today, we have spelling bees, quiz bowls, super bowls, and championship games, all with one goal: to be first and to be the greatest! Sadly, we also know that greatness can be tarnished by the things people do outside of their “greatness.” For example, Lance Armstrong’s and Michael Phelps’ greatness was tarnished by drugs. Tiger Woods’ greatness was tarnished by terrible life choices. Martha Stewart’s greatness was tarnished by financial choices. All of that is evidence that greatness is more than just being the best at something.



Matthew 17:24–27

It is interesting to note that the story you just read was recorded only in Matthew’s book. I suppose that makes sense because Matthew was a tax collector before he came to know Jesus. I am sure his interest was piqued when the temple tax issue arose, while the rest of the guys tried to block it from memory because, like most of us, they probably hated tax time. Let’s see how Jesus felt about taxes.

Often, background information helps us understand something new. I think it is particularly helpful for this story because of the way taxes worked thousands of years ago compared to today. In the time of Jesus, the temple tax was normally collected in the

spring, but this story took place in autumn, an odd time to have it collected. However, since Jesus and his disciples had been out preaching, teaching, healing people, and doing miracles when this tax was collected, the tax collectors made a special point of approaching Jesus out of tax season. We have no idea why, but it could have been to fill their quota, fill a deficit, or to try to trap Jesus or catch Him in a moral dilemma.

In the book of Exodus 30:11–16, we find the basis for the temple tax that was instituted 1,250 years prior to this event. Nehemiah 10:32 says, *we also obligated ourselves to contribute annually a third of a shekel for services relating to the Temple of our God*—so we see that the $\frac{1}{3}$ shekel became an annual tax on all Jews. It was imposed long before the time of Jesus and continued after His death. Let me add one more layer to this. Approximately 70 years after Jesus died, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome. This was a major blow to the Jewish people, and to make it worse, the Romans took control of this tax under the name of Fiscus Judaicus. To add insult to injury, this tax was paid into the treasury of Jupiter, a pagan god in Rome. Imagine being a Jew and having to pay a tax to a foreign god by your own law.

It is interesting that Jesus did not resist the payment of the tax. In Matthew 22, Jesus said, ²¹ *“we should give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s.”* The tax collector raised the question as to whether it was proper to impose this tax upon Jesus. Since the temple was the house of God, Peter was asked as to the appropriateness of taxing Jesus. Peter knew that kings of the earth who levied taxes levied them against those who were not members of their own family. Thus, Jesus would be exempt from the tax because, as Peter had recognized, He was the Son of God. But Jesus proceeded to address the issue from another perspective. It was better for Him to pay the tax so that He would not be a stumbling block to the revenue officers and others. Here is the point: **Jesus endorsed paying taxes. Greatness is found in**

doing the right thing, even when culture suggests otherwise.

Although Jesus told us there was a loophole He could have used, it was more important for Him to be a good witness and not a stumbling block. So, He chose to forgo His rights. Jesus then sent Peter out fishing to demonstrate that He was, in fact, the Lord over creation. He sent a fish with a shekel in its mouth to Peter's fishing line. Jesus paid for Peter and Himself, but not for the rest of his followers because this law only applied to men over the age of 20. From this, we can assume that the other disciples were likely under 20 years old. If Jesus had been with these young men for three years, some of them must have been under 17 when Jesus' ministry journey began. I hope you see that God can work through the younger generations in ways you cannot imagine. But the main point here is this: **Jesus demonstrated that no one is above the law and that part of "greatness" is never causing another to stumble. This includes doing the right thing with your taxes—even if no one is watching.**



Matthew 18:1-5

Greatness is something many people strive for, yet it is hard to define. The main problem with a person striving for greatness is that it feeds one of mankind's chief problems, which is pride. As pride rises and is displayed, true greatness diminishes. We see Jesus' response to the pride He saw in His disciples. In Luke 9, you can read this same story, and you will find that this "greatness" conversation came up because they were competing against each other for greatness in Jesus' Kingdom.

"Who will be the greatest?" they asked Jesus. We can surmise some of their thoughts. Would it be Peter since he seemed to be in the mix so often and was the oldest? Maybe, but Peter was also the one who received the most rebukes from Jesus. He was the only one whom Jesus called Satan. What about James and John? They

also seemed to have a special relationship with Jesus. What about Judas, their trusted treasurer, or Matthew who had certainly left the most behind to follow Jesus? Who would be considered the greatest? You can easily imagine the pride rising to the surface. The push to be the “greatest” is not always an outward display. It can also be in the quietness of our hearts because we would be embarrassed to say aloud the kinds of thoughts we have, such as, I am doing a better job than... I am more spiritually mature than... I know better than... I am more important to God’s kingdom than... **We are no different than the disciples. Spiritual greatness is found in humility. We, too, must guard against pride and the spiritual arrogance of placing self above others.**

As humans, we like to compare and put ourselves on top. In the foolishness of our depraved minds, we want to be more important, superior, or more skilled than someone else. This point is proven by how often we compare ourselves to those we see as lesser or greater, for whatever reason. We would benefit from looking at those who display superior character traits as modeled by Jesus and learn humility. Sadly, though, we often do the opposite, and that is what was happening among the disciples. Nowhere in the Bible does God instruct us to compare ourselves to anyone. On the contrary, we are called to do what God designed us to do. Here is the point: **I am not called by God to compare myself against others.**

Since you are called to be who God made you to be and since greatness is found in doing exactly what you were designed for, then what needs to change for you to become your best self for Kingdom purpose? This is a critical question, and we each need to answer it. We are always going to be able to look at someone else and find ourselves either wanting or superior. But what good does that do? It does nothing for you or for them. Look how gracious Jesus is in correcting them.

² He called a little child to him and placed the child among

them. ³ And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Jesus used a child as an object lesson about what it means to be great in God’s kingdom. Entrance into His kingdom is not through pride or accomplishments but something different. Could it be that greatness has never been defined by talent but by something totally different? The nature of a child: what does that even mean? How do we convert and ³ *become like little children*? Do not miss that statement from Jesus to his followers. Perhaps this should worry us a bit because Jesus didn’t say this to unbelievers. He said this to the same people who already said they believe He is the Son of God.

Now we may ask, how do we convert and become like a child? This clearly means we must lead a life unlike other people, and our lifestyle must never lead people astray. We are to live a lifestyle of constantly breaking away from influences of this world and embracing the things of God. And we must do this to the extent that we would give up anything to follow Jesus. So, I ask the question: How do we convert and become like a child? A huge piece of this is found in our repentance and conversion and in going “ALL IN” for Jesus.

Repentance plays a huge role because it focuses on the change that takes place in the mind. There is a recognition that you cannot save yourself and that you are doomed to eternal separation from God unless something changes. You realize that you are helpless. Repentance also involves sorrow for sin. Repentance comes when you recognize that your life is going in the wrong direction and must go in a new direction. Repentance puts emphasis on the change in and of the mind, resulting in a change in the attitude of the heart.

Conversion means to “turn around” and puts emphasis on a change in the will. You change your direction to match your changed mind. It is not enough to just repent. There must be a conversion also. In Peter’s message shortly after Pentecost in Acts 3, he told the people to ¹⁹ “*repent and return* (be converted), *that your sins may be wiped away...*” and he declared to them, ²⁶ “*God raised up His servant* (Jesus), *and sent Him to bless you by turning* (converting) *every one of you from your wicked ways.*” Conversion reflects the outward visual evidence of true repentance. It is the outward evidence of what has occurred in the heart. Salvation occurs when a person is converted from sin to righteousness.

Jesus is not saying in this passage that the disciples could be “converted” by their own power. That is an impossible task; the verb form here is passive. The action is by a force outside of the self. The acting of the Holy Spirit convicts a person of their sinfulness and need for the Savior. The Spirit prompts the human heart to turn from sin and turn to the Savior. No one is going to enter the Kingdom of God without being converted first. To be converted requires a person to become like a child. A child is not sinless. They inherit a sinful nature as a descendant of Adam and Eve, and they display it very early in life, often from day one. I did not teach my kids to lie, cheat, steal, and so on; yet they somehow picked up some of these things quite naturally. A child is not sinless, but most children do possess certain characteristics that are needed for a saving faith to develop.

Take my daughter Belle as an example. She trusts me to provide for her. She believes what I tell her. She submits to my authority. If she does something wrong, she wants to be reconciled to me with hugs. Those are all things that are marks of saving faith (except for the physical hugs).

Salvation is impossible without a recognition of sin and a desire for reconciliation with God. Peace with God cannot be

attained without a submission to His authority. A relationship with God cannot be established without believing what He says and trusting in Him. This is why Jesus used a child as the model of what is needed for a person to enter the kingdom.

A person who remains proud, arrogant, boastful, and insincere has not been converted because their vanity will always keep them from admitting their sin and seeking forgiveness. Pride will keep them from believing what God says and from trusting Him, and their arrogance will keep them from submitting themselves to God's authority. Unless a person is converted from those things and becomes like a child, they will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They will not spend eternity with Christ.

God is not interested in what you may have professed once and never lived out. What He is interested in is whether you are following Jesus. Today is the day to begin that journey if you have not yet done so. Your starting place is to seek after Jesus. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that God rewards those who believe that He exists and seek diligently after Him. Are you seeking after Him as a fully grown adult or as a trusting child? This is good to remember: **God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humility is a sign of true greatness.**



Matthew 18:6–14

We must never forget that sandwiched in between the importance of becoming child-like and the rejoicing over one sinner repenting is this: ⁶ *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”* ⁷ *Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!* ⁸ *If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life*

maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

Clear words that need no explanation. But it does beg the question:

What is your responsibility in keeping children safe from future stumbling blocks?



Luke 15:3-7

Jesus made an alarming statement. ⁷ *“There will be more rejoicing when one sinner repents!”* This should cause each of us to pause and take a serious look at the life we are living. Are we concerned with reaching lost people more than just being in the “church flock?” We need a balance in this segment of our lives. To achieve humbling greatness, we must balance our love for the lost with our love for our church family. And frankly, it should tip in favor of the lost.

True greatness can never be stripped from you because when you live a life devoted to God, nothing this world can throw at you can tear you down. One example would be Billy Graham. How is it possible that he was loved both by such great leaders as presidents, kings, queens and by everyday people? How is it possible that no skeletons ever climbed out of his closet to tear him down? How is it that when his life ended, he was still considered the greatest evangelist for God in history?

- Because he was humble like a child.
- Because he was focused on His Father like a child.
- Because he was not a prideful man.
- Because he was a God-focused young boy...
- Who grew into a God-focused man...

CHAPTER 43

CONFLICT, SIN & FORGIVENESS



Matthew 18:15–35

Conflict is part of life on planet Earth. It began the day Adam and Eve listened to the snake in the Garden of Eden. The problem for Adam and Eve was that they did not recognize the serpent as an enemy. (This serpent is also known as Satan, The Devil, or Lucifer). Conflict begins the same way for us by not recognizing to whom we are listening. Spoiler alert! The moral of this story is to be careful of who talks to you and even more careful with anything they try to convince you to do or believe. This is a tricky thing to learn! Once I was embroiled in a conflict that was one of the hardest things I have ever gone through. It was not because of the conflict per se but because of the men of God around me who should have stood up and helped but instead caved to peer pressure. This chapter is unlike all the others because it is a guide written in hopes that no one who reads this will ever have to experience what I went through. This teaching from Jesus is something we cannot skip over even though it might be difficult to live out; and it may require us to change our attitude, behavior, or actions.



Matthew 18:15–35

You can use this chapter as a guide to resolve conflict and sin issues in your life or as great advice for conflict resolution with someone else. Before writing this part, I spent much time in thought, in Scripture, and in prayer. All of us who are still breathing will have or have already had someone sin against us or hurt us. How we respond to these events is of critical spiritual importance.

Out of the gate, let me share a few things before we walk through Jesus' guidance.

1. If you claim to be a Christian, you must follow what the Bible teaches. The Bible is very clear that when someone hurts you or when someone sins against you, no matter the situation, you do not go to your best friend to vent. Going to anyone other than the person who hurt you is called gossiping, and gossiping is a sin.
2. Please re-read this chapter before meeting with whomever you are trying to help resolve a conflict or sin issue.
3. Make sure to pray and ask God to give you the words to speak. The goal of this entire process is to bring all parties back into unity with God and each other because when we are unified in God, there should be no conflict or sin present.
4. If you are going to sit down with someone and call out sin issues or tell them how they hurt you, the best thing you can do before you say anything is to ask the person if you can pray together. Then pray for each other in love.
5. After prayer, let the person know specifically why you are there. Do not beat around the bush! They need to know the truth, but make sure to do it in the most loving way possible. Let them know you are not there to sit as their judge. The goal of your telling them this is to follow what the Bible says and nothing more.

This process begins with understanding our responsibility found in Ephesians 4:1–3: *“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* Everything we do or say needs to be rooted in the Word of God. God’s desire is for us to be in unity with each other. We must make the difficult choice to never allow sin and conflict to separate us. If we are honest, it is far too easy to get angry at someone and simply write them out of your story. However, that is not God’s desire for our relationships.

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us four very clear steps.

STEP 1

Verse 15 very clearly tells us the first thing we do if we have an issue with a brother or sister. ¹⁵ *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.”*

It all starts with going directly to the person who hurt us personally.

- That does not mean we talk to a best friend and vent first. That is gossip and sin.
- That does not mean we talk to someone else asking them to go to rebuke this person or side with us. That is gossip and sin.

When matters are handled privately, misunderstandings can be addressed, and there is greater potential for the other person to respond positively. A private meeting helps avoid the problem of gossip that can occur when a matter is taken to others instead of going directly to the person involved. The great news is that if you work out the problem, it is finished with step one! You can pray with him or her and leave with the conflict resolved and unity restored! If things do not go well, Jesus tells us what to do next.

STEP 2

If the issue is not resolved through step one, Jesus gives us a second step in verse 16: *“But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’* The person sinned against, hurt, or offended then takes one or two other people to help them talk with the person with whom they have a conflict. An important note we cannot miss is the end of verse 16: *“that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses,”* This refers to the Old Testament law that required a charge to be supported

by two or more witnesses to be valid. A witness is defined as “a person who sees an event take place, or a person with evidence or proof.” A witness is not the best friend to whom you vented. Ask yourself if this person was a witness. If the answer is “no”, they should not be involved. A witness is a person who saw it happen or who has proof it happened. Those are the people Jesus said to take with you. If there are no witnesses, then you can take godly, levelheaded people with you who can help to try to resolve the problem. If this step works, the conflict is over, and unity is restored! If things do not go well, Jesus gives us the next step.

STEP 3

¹⁷ *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.* The matter is to be taken before your local church, or your leadership circle. I would say from my experience that only in rare cases will a Christian who is seeking to follow the Lord refuse to resolve conflict when the leadership of the church is involved. Rarely will people refuse, but if they do, there is one last step.

STEP 4

If the issue is not resolved by step three, Jesus moves on by saying, ¹⁷ *“if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”* We need to make sure we understand what Jesus means here. This is something that is easily misunderstood. Think about Jesus and His approach to pagans and tax collectors. It should mean we love them as much as we do any lost person. This does not mean you hate the person. This does not mean you stop all interaction with the person. Jesus showed us this with the way He treated pagans and tax collectors. He was compassionate, loving, and respectful to them. Jesus did everything He could to teach them about the ways of God and draw them to God.

If you are honestly and lovingly trying to work out an issue with someone who refuses to resolve it with you or with two or three other people or with leaders, then that person is clearly not walking with God. I know it might sound harsh to say, but it is true. At times we might need to distance ourselves from people who are like this, but the goal should always be restoration.

There is a notable example of this in 1 Corinthians 5 when we see the apostle Paul speaking about a believer who had been sexually immoral with his stepmother. Rather than condemning the sin, the Corinthian Christians tolerated the sin. The church was clearly okay with this sinful person and his actions. However, it is never acceptable for us to allow sin to run free in God's church. So, Paul taught that they should remove this person from their church family (1 Corinthians 5:3). Later, in 2 Corinthians, this same person turned from his lifestyle, and Paul advised the Corinthian believers to accept him back. The goal of discipline is not to be mean or cold-hearted, but we must condemn sinful behavior and issue a call to change. Christians are called to handle disputes in love, with the goal being restoration. Conflict should be handled according to the steps listed in Matthew 18. This style of conflict resolution is based on a desire for holy living and love for the person who has hurt you.

On the heels of this lesson on conflict resolution, listen to what Jesus said next to drive home an even more important part of this delicate process in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant: *²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."* After this teaching from Jesus on how to deal with people who hurt us, Peter asked a question that we all want answered. How many times do we have to forgive someone, what is the limit, and what if someone keeps on doing the same thing over and over? When do we say, "Forget you"? The point

Jesus made to Peter and to us is this: **We are never to withhold forgiveness! We are not the judge! Our job is to freely forgive.**

I would encourage you to think about something. We have been walking through the life of Jesus for a long time now and have witnessed Jesus talking over and over about the issue of forgiving people. Jesus keeps reinforcing the idea that it is critical that we do not hold offenses, that we must freely forgive people, and realize that it is not our job to judge others. The reason is quite simple. We are all broken sinful people, and our sin is just as bad as the sin of others. **Stop judging and start forgiving!**

Jesus drove His point home with another illustration. ²³ *“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.”* Let’s put this into perspective. I did some research and calculated what this debt would be worth today. Each bag weighed one talent. While I was writing this, you could buy gold for about \$38 per gram. A talent weights 33 kg. So, each bag of gold would have been valued at \$1,400,117 as of the time I wrote this! If we put that into a day’s wage for a person back then, we are talking about owing the equivalent of 200,000 years of work! Jesus was making the point that this man owed an impossible debt and would never be able to repay it!

You and I have an impossible debt to pay for our sins. Do not forget that Jesus was teaching about the kingdom of God. This was an example of teaching what happens in the kingdom of God when we come to God in our sin. ²⁵ *Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”*

Can you imagine a blessing of that magnitude, to have a debt

that massive lifted off your shoulders and hear words of compassion and forgiveness? That is exactly what Jesus has already done for you. We have had our impossible sin debt forgiven!

But this story is not over: ²⁸ *“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ²⁹ ‘His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ ³⁰ ‘But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² ‘Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he could pay back all he owed. ³⁵ ‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

Do not miss this last sentence. Jesus said that since He paid the price for our sins and has forgiven us a debt that would otherwise be impossible to repay, we, too, must freely forgive others. Here is the ultimate point: **Forgiven people forgive.**



LIFE APPLICATION:

- Who have you not forgiven? Who are you holding a grudge against? Who do you avoid? Who do you gossip about? Ask God to forgive you for your unforgiveness and then truly forgive.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 44

BROTHERLY LOVE



John 7:1–52, Luke 9:51–62

If you grew up with brothers, this chapter may bring back a few memories. I grew up with two brothers, and our house was crazy at times because boys are crazy! We did not have a sister around to talk us off the ledge, which meant we did a lot of crazy things. Now, as I think back, I feel sorry for my little brother Luke. Growing up the youngest of three boys meant he was always trying to keep up with us. That was impossible, and sadly, he was naive enough to listen to everything we told him. Consequently, Luke cracked his head open several times as a kid. Once we convinced him to do some sweet flips on steel equipment, which resulted in him getting stitches. We also had diving contests next to our real stone fireplace, which ended up with another cracked-open skull and stitches for him. We had Superman contests by diving down the stairs on sofa cushions, which led to my older brother breaking some bones. Boys are crazy! When we got together with our cousins, with six times as many boys as girls, and reminisced about our growing-up experiences, it sounded somewhat like we lived in the movie “Lord of the Flies.” However, ask any of the boy cousins about Christmas night at our Papa and Nana’s house, and you would hear this:

As kids, we spent every Christmas evening with my mom’s family. After we ate, all the boys went downstairs, where a wood-burning fireplace would be roaring. We were expected to stay down there while the adults were free for hours upstairs having a wonderful time together. It always started out great. We wrestled and played, but then came the game—“Cheetah and the Antelope.” This was a vicious game where older

cousins would stalk the younger cousins, and if they caught you, they would almost rip you apart. By then, the basement was nearly 1000 degrees, and we would be sweating profusely! On occasion, a mother would throw a cup of water down the stairs, and like crazed beasts, we would fight for it. We were ruthless with each other because that is how boys are.

Okay, so maybe that was a slight exaggeration. Still, it was crazy, tons of fun, and slightly dangerous! You might be wondering what that story has to do with Jesus. Nothing! I just wanted to share a memory with you! Just kidding! In this chapter, you are going to see Jesus' brothers ripping on Him a little bit. Let me show you what I mean.



John 7:1–9

Did you notice the absence of brotherly love in this passage? The doubt in what they said? The subliminal message of “we have a crazy big brother” could not have been more obvious. We read that the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was coming up, and it was a big deal. It was the time of the year when all Jewish men had to report to Jerusalem and present themselves at the feast. This was an Old Testament mandate. It was a seven-day male retreat each year, not a bad idea if you think about it. (Read Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16 if you want to learn more about this feast.) Jesus and His half-brothers would have gone to this feast year after year.

In this story, they were getting ready for their yearly pilgrimage, and the brotherly love started flowing. ³ *His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.* Did you hear that? They were saying to Jesus; “Why don’t you head off to the place where you are wanted because if you are really the Messiah, what are

you worried about? Man up, and stop being scared!” And they kept mocking him, verse 4 says, *“For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”* They had been continually hearing about the things Jesus was saying and doing, so they were now chiding Him to come out of hiding and show Himself. Do not miss that first word “If”. This was another way of saying, “we do not think you really are doing all this stuff” because ⁵ *His brothers did not believe in Him*. James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon were Jesus’ half-brothers; and they clearly doubted that Jesus was the Messiah. Then we read that Jesus told them to go ahead without Him. This must have sounded odd to them because going together to the feast would have been a normal ritual of their Jewish life, but they listened to their big brother and left for Jerusalem.

Why do you think Jesus stayed behind?



John 7:10–30

Jesus needed alone time with God to receive His Father’s plans for Him. It was midway through the feast when Jesus made His appearance, and He began instructing people from the Old Testament. He was teaching them that what He was doing was the will of God the Father. People were objecting because they believed that Jesus was breaking the Jewish laws and customs. Jesus mentioned the fact that people were angry at Him because of the law that no work could be done on the Sabbath. You have seen people act this way, too. An example would be the time I was a new senior pastor. One Sunday, I mowed my lawn, and the Elders showed up to confront me on what they believed to be my sin of mowing my lawn on Sunday. I also know of people who grew up not being allowed to play on Sunday because of a religious tradition. All kinds of rules have been put in place to try to control people. It was no different then. Some people

were mad at Jesus because He was not following their rules, so Jesus brought up an example of their hypocrisy. Look at verses 22–23. Jesus asked them why their activities on the Sabbath were acceptable, yet He should not heal a person on the Sabbath? The people listening were angry because they did not like being called out for their hypocrisy. As a result, they tried to seize Jesus. I wonder where his brothers were? If my brother was about to get beaten up, I would be there to defend him. Maybe they were there, or maybe they were on the other side of town. But it made me wonder: Was the real reason they made fun of Jesus at the beginning of the story because Jesus called them out for placing religious traditions above God?

How do you react when someone challenges your religious traditions?



John 7:31–52

In verse 32, we see the Pharisees step in. *The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.* Jesus ignored the obvious and, instead, talked to His disciples about His coming death. Jesus knew that soon He was going to be rejected by the Jewish leaders and then sent to His death. He was telling them that He knew the end was coming, and they had no idea what He was talking about. Jesus then predicted His resurrection by saying that after He was gone, He would come back. Then, He would leave again and go to Heaven, and they would not be able to follow Him or find Him. Still, they had no idea what Jesus was talking about, so they assumed He was going to run for the hills to hide. Jesus continued to teach, and some people believed while others doubted. Again, they tried to arrest Jesus, but their attempt was thwarted because it was not yet the appointed time for Jesus to die. There was still more for Jesus to do before His

return to Heaven.

This passage takes a turn at verse 45. *Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?"* ⁴⁶ *The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!"* ⁴⁷ *Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived?"* ⁴⁸ *Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?* ⁴⁹ *But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."*

The church leaders sent their soldiers to get Jesus and to stop Him, but the soldiers heard what Jesus was teaching. Something was different, and it just did not feel right to arrest Him. So, they showed some brotherly love toward Jesus, unlike his real brothers or those who were supposed to have recognized Him. As a result, they went back empty-handed, which infuriated the religious leaders.

However, in verse 50 we find one religious leader who truly knew and respected the law. *Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them,* ⁵¹ *"Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?"* ⁵² *They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."*

They snapped back at Nicodemus, one of their own, because he was agreeing with Jesus and siding with what the law really said. They were angry with him because he was trying to be fair. Obviously, they did not want to even consider what Jesus was saying.

Our nation is struggling with this. You can no longer talk politics without someone becoming quite hostile. Many are written off and characterized as not having true knowledge. We tend to label people based on things we assume about them and not always by their actual position in society. The same thing happened to Jesus. Some people looked at Him and had no desire to get to know Him because of what they assumed. Instead, they judged Jesus and tried to bash Him or shut Him up. Sadly, His

brothers were in this same camp.

We have no Scripture that tells us exactly when Jesus' brothers came to believe that He was the Messiah, but we know that at least two of them did because we have a book in the Bible from James and another from Jude. We know that James became a core leader in the early church movement. James even had a sweet nickname: Camel Knees. He was given that because he spent so much time praying and seeking the will of his brother Jesus that his knees apparently looked like camels' knees. One habit James picked up from his big brother was a passion for getting alone with God in prayer.

Do you think this happens today? Where, when, how, why?

Is there a place in your life worth taking a deep dive to ask these questions of yourself



LIFE APPLICATION

- We live in a harsh culture. Take time this week and handwrite a note to a person who has impacted your life and give it to them. It could be a note to your spouse, your children, a spiritual mentor, a parent, a teacher, a coach, a boss, a pastor, etc. Choose to show love.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 45

JESUS' VIEW OF ADULTERY



John 7:53–8:11

Today's text is most likely in italics in your Bible because many ancient manuscripts do not contain this story, and a lot of scholars believe it was added later to the gospel of John. The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years. The Old Testament was not officially compiled as the books we have until about 100 years after Jesus' death. The New Testament books were first listed in 367 A.D. or almost 400 years after Jesus' death. It was not until 400 A.D. that the Bible was translated into Latin and not until almost 1000 A.D. that it was translated into English. Therefore, scholars believe that at some point, this story was added to the book of John.



John 7:53–8:11

This took place the day after the guards refused to arrest Jesus. The story ended with; ⁵³*Then they all went home,* ¹*but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.* Everyone, including the Pharisees, returned home, and started scheming again. What happened in the last chapter was not the first time that people tried to trap Jesus with religious rules. However, He did not come to uphold the religious man-made rules but to offer us forgiveness from our sins!

This might sound surprising to some of you, but if you closely examine Jesus' life, you will find He was not a hyper-religious person. He was not interested in making new churchy rules for his followers to follow. He did not get all worked up over how people dressed. I want to encourage you to pause and detach from your personal views for a few minutes and engage in this story from Jesus' point of view. If you look at this story through the lens of "the reason" Jesus came to earth in the first place, it totally

changes your perspective. Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins. I know that you and I tend to rate sins on a scale of justice. We think that some sins are heavy and horrible while others are considered not so bad, yet God does not look at sin that way. From a God-sized perspective, being a constant gossip is as bad as being a prostitute. Lying all the time is no better than having sex outside of marriage. Sin is sin. Jesus came to help each of us climb out of our sins. That fact should give all of us a lot of hope. No matter what you did yesterday, no matter how many mistakes you have made, Jesus is there for you with open arms. He is not condemning you to hell but loving you toward eternity by helping you turn away from your sin patterns.

Let's look at this with fresh eyes. ²*At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.* ³*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery.* The hypocrisy in this is disgusting! Where was the man? The last time I checked, it takes two people to tango. This looked like another set-up. So, what happened here? ³*They made her stand before the group.* Imagine the shame of this poor woman; she was being made a pawn by these religious men. ⁴*and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.* ⁵*In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"* What they just said was 100% true. Leviticus 20:10 says as much. It also says to stone the man, but since they set this up, they did not want their set-up man, who likely lured this poor woman into this situation, to be put on trial. Verse 6 reveals their plan; ⁶*They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

Note how Jesus responded when put in a trap. He knew that if he cried out for her to be stoned, these religious leaders would have cheered for Him being a great law keeper. But that would have also signaled to everyone else to stay away from Jesus because He was just like the Pharisees. For those of you who are

regular attenders in church, do not ignore this: Jesus did not want to be associated with the two main church movements of His time. He did not want to be a Pharisee or a Sadducee with their 516 man made religious laws. Jesus chose, instead, to hang out with the people who knew they were sinners but wanted a new way of life. Please do not miss that.

Sinful people avoided synagogues because they felt like the religious leaders condemned them for their sin issues. Jesus did not. He saw being judgmental as a problem. Here is why: ⁶ *But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.* We do not know what He wrote, but let me give you some ideas:

- Have no God but me.
- Do not take the Lord's name in vain.
- Keep the Sabbath holy.
- Honor thy father and mother.
- Do not kill.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not bear false witness.
- Do not covet your neighbor's spouse.
- Do not covet your neighbors' possessions.

As Jesus wrote, they tried to ignore Him and even kept questioning Him! ⁷ *When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."* Jesus did not stand up; He just looked up. He did not respond to their first question; He did not respond to their other questions, either. He finished writing and said, "Whoever is perfect here... go ahead throw the first stone... kill her." ⁸ *Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.* He did not wait to see what they would do. He simply bent down and began writing again. Jesus did not back down or give in to the mob mentality.

Perhaps He began printing the names of all these religious

leaders next to their personal hidden sins: Gossip, slander, lying, deceiving, stealing, gluttony, and so on. Jesus just kept writing, and we know it must have been personal because of what happened next; ⁹ *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.* Everyone... the entire mob... left. Not one person threw a single stone. And when they were all gone, when it was just Jesus and this woman who had been shamed beyond measure, ¹⁰ *Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”* ¹¹ *“No one, sir,” she said.* Can you hear her voice trembling? Can you see the tears in her eyes as she stood there, her head still lowered in shame, still terrified and having no idea what Jesus would do next? Can you see Jesus standing by her and lifting her chin so that she could look into His eyes? ¹¹ *“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

Jesus does not condemn you for your past or for your past choices, nor does He consider you unworthy or worthless. He does not look at you like all those religious people. He looked at her (and He looks at you) with compassion overflowing and said to her (and He says to you), “Go home and change the direction of your life.” With Jesus, you get a second chance. So, make it count. Stop sinning, change the direction of your life, and live in freedom because Jesus loves you and designed you for something far greater than a sinful and scar-laden life.



LIFE APPLICATION

- What is your sin issue? Identify one area of sin in your life and ask Jesus to help you step out of its grip and into freedom. Lead with compassion, imitate Jesus, let Jesus live through your actions, love first, forgive freely, and do not judge. Pray and ask God if there is someone to whom you need to extend

- a helping hand.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 46

DOES SIN = SUFFERING?



John 9:1–41

Today's Bible reading is a very real and personal issue for me for two reasons. One, I have an AMAZING, AWESOME, LOVING nephew named Noah. Noah was created by God differently than you and me. Noah was created by God with what is known as Angelman's syndrome. Apart from a miracle, Noah will never talk or advance past the abilities of a young child. However, Noah does communicate with clarity in his own unique way. Noah was not a mistake. Noah was a gift from God to our family. Second, when my mother-in-law was pregnant with my wife, tests showed that she would be born with a variety of issues. So, the doctors told her it would be best to abort her child. A few months later, Jen was born on time and with no complications. Had my mother-in-law listened to our culture that has no compassion for the unborn life, my wife would not be here today. My mother-in-law would never have seen her daughter become an All-American runner in high school and college. I would never have married her, and we would never have had our four children. We must never forget that we have no idea how God will be displayed through the difficulties (sufferings) in our lives.

In this chapter, Jesus will shatter another belief some of us have. Jesus was on his way to yet another festival, the Festival of Lights. This Jewish festival was not one from the Old Testament but was added to Jewish tradition closer to Jesus' time. It was started to honor the miracle God did when He supernaturally provided light in the temple lamps when there was not enough oil to keep them burning. This occurred when the temple was being taken during the Jewish Maccabees revolt. It was important then, as it is now, to celebrate the ways that God keeps showing up in our lives.



John 9:1–7

During the time of Jesus, people thought that if someone was suffering or if something bad happened in their life, it was because that person or their parents had sinned. This passage indicates that Jesus' disciples clearly believed in this cultural norm. They assumed this man was a serious sinner or that his parents were. They believed it was the reason this man was born blind. They assumed that being born blind or with any kind of disability was a dreadful thing. If we are honest, most of us feel the same way today. Our culture still endorses this mindset.

Think of a time when you heard of a family who had a special needs child. What did you think? Did you say how sorry you were, or were you excited for them? Did you simply assume that God knew they were the perfect family to care for that child? God creates every human being. Our culture tells parents that if their child is going to be born with some disability, they should choose abortion because life would be easier without the child. Yet, if we believe that God created everyone, then there is a plan and purpose for each child, even those born with different gifts.

Jesus wasted no time in correcting this cultural mindset with His disciples; ³ *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”* God had preplanned how this man, who was born blind, would one day show His power.

Think back to my nephew Noah for a minute. My brother, his wife, and a few other like-minded people have launched an amazing ministry for children like Noah at their church. They did this not for praise, but so that all kids could be in an environment conducive to their learning style. This was not just for the kids but for their parents, as well. Unless you have a special needs child, you have no idea how hard it is to connect. God prompted them to create a room that would help these amazing kids connect with God while their parents were also connecting with God in the

worship service. At the time I was writing this chapter, my brother and his wife had just received Michigan's award for Parents of the Year for Exceptional Children for all the work they do to help other families with special needs children. If Noah had not been born, they would have been unaware that this need even existed, like most of you. I am confident that my brother and sister-in-law have never thought about all the people who, one day, will stand in Heaven because of this special environment that helped parents and their children to not only thrive but, most importantly, to meet Jesus. The works of God are on display through Noah.

It is still a commonly held belief that pain, suffering, and hard life conditions are the result of sin or laziness. I have learned that most people see poverty and suffering as something to avoid. Families try their best to protect future generations from these. The prevailing thought in the West is that if you are poor, it is because you are not motivated to work. While that may be partially true because of terrible choices which may have led to an impoverished life, don't miss what Jesus was saying! God allows suffering. Let me say that again, God allows suffering. You may understand that adults suffer from bad choices, but you do not accept the suffering of children. I heard someone say that if there was a God, He would not allow innocent children to suffer. It is hard to reconcile babies being born blind, child abuse of any sort, cancer, epilepsy, special needs, etc. Jesus answered these questions in this passage but be warned that this might seriously change your worldview and cause you to wrestle with justice issues in life. ³ *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”* **Sometimes people suffer for reasons other than their own poor choices or the sins of others.**

This man was designed by God. It was not a mistake and was determined by God for something bigger. This man endured a beggar's life. Jesus, God made flesh, was about to walk by. Jesus,

the true Light of the World, could open the man's eyes. In doing so, Jesus would bring glory to God through this man. Jesus would also open the spiritual eyes of those around him to see Who He was. It is so hard to wrap your mind around this story and around God allowing suffering to bring Him more glory. It does not sound like a loving God, does it? So how do we process this? The problem is that we are "me-centered" people. The world revolves around me, my family, my desires, my career. The problem we struggle to understand is how God allows undeserved human suffering. How can God allow evil? The problem is not God's problem... it is mine, and it is yours, too. We think God exists for us, our pleasure, our ease in life, our joy and our happiness when in truth it is we who exist for God. **I exist for God, not God for me.**

That is a lot to chew on from just three verses, but let's keep reading because I think it will help us process. *⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "Wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed and came home seeing.*



John 9:8–23

Then the religious leaders entered the scene. *¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.* We know this is not the first run-in that Jesus has had with the religious people for working on a religious day. This reminds me again of the lawn mowing experience I mentioned in the last chapter. Wow, did the religious people jump all over me, exclaiming how dare I mow on the Sabbath! And while I get the gist of that theology, the last time I checked, Sunday is not any

pastor's day of rest! It was not my Sabbath! Sunday is a pastors most important day of their "work week." The same issue you saw here made the religious folks all worked up. How dare Jesus work on the Lord's Day! ¹⁵ *Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."* ¹⁶ *Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."*

For these religious people, you are obviously a godless person unless you check off all their religious boxes. Who defined their boxes? The answer is they did—not God. Look at how hypocritical they were: ¹⁶ *But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.* ¹⁷ *Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."* ¹⁸ *They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents.* ¹⁹ *"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"* ²⁰ *"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind.* ²¹ *But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself."*

Read these next words and internalize the sadness in what they said. ²² *His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.* ²³ *That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."*

They were afraid to stand up to the church leaders because they did not want to get kicked out of their Synagogue.



John 9:24-41

I love the response of the healed man. But listen to the religious leaders' response and think about how hypocritical they are:

²⁸ *Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's*

disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ *We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.*" They called Jesus out for doing something good on the Lord's Day but seemed to think it was fine for them to sin, threaten people, set people up, and participate in all kinds of shady things on the Sabbath. They believed it was fine for them because they were the leaders. Sadly, we can do the same thing.

However, the man, no longer blind, was not yet finished. He had a few more things to say to the religious leaders. ³⁰ *The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.* ³¹ *We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.* ³² *Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.* ³³ *If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

I wonder if they even cared to listen. Did they even want to find the truth anymore? The answer should make us investigate our own hearts, to see if we already have our minds made up or if we are open to finding the truth. ³⁴ *To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.* The hypocrisy was so thick; the false theology was so obvious. This story begs the question, who was truly blind?



LIFE APPLICATION

- Are there areas of your life where you are clinging to an ideology? Are there people in your life you have judged because they did not meet your personal preferences? Pray and ask God to reveal the areas of your life where you need to lay something down to better align yourself with Him.
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 47

DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE



John 10:1–21

Discerning God's voice sounds like an impossible task. Often, we wonder how to know for certain that what we are feeling is from God and not a dream. How do we know it is not just a voice in our head or an instinct or our inner Jiminy Cricket? The question I am asked most is, "How do I know if this is God's leading?" I will admit that for most of my life, I had no idea how to discern God's voice or His will in my life. It took me almost 30 years and over 10 pastors telling me God had a calling on my life before I finally listened and enrolled in seminary. I am no expert in this area, but I have learned discernment through the school of hard knocks. God can speak to us through the Bible, through people, through feelings, through events, through an audible voice, and in so many other ways. We are about to see what Jesus said about discerning God's voice.



John 10:1–16

Learning how to discern the voice of God is an important skill. Everyone makes decisions, and none of us plan to make terrible ones. The decisions we do make affect our entire life: our dating years, our spouse, our kids, our career, to name a few. Since most of us would love to know how to make the best decisions possible, it would be helpful if we learned how to tap into God's guide for our decisions.

Does God speak to you? If so, how?

Let's take a closer look at this passage: ¹ *"Very truly I tell you anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in*

by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

Jesus said He was like a shepherd, and they were like sheep. In case you are not aware, this was not a compliment. Sheep are some of the dumbest animals in the world. Not only that, but sheep are also helpless when it comes to defending themselves against predators. If you let a sheep go into the wild, that would be like throwing a bag of Doritos into the middle of your youth group... It will be devoured in minutes! Sheep do not have claws, fangs, or anything else with which to defend themselves. They are not fast runners, especially when their wool is thick. And that was what Jesus said we are!

However, there is something unique about sheep. Sheep, unlike most other animals, can discern the voice of their shepherd. Sheep can literally pick out the voice of their shepherd in a crowd and obey it with flawless execution. Frankly, that is something that would be amazing for my kids to learn, but apparently, that will never happen (or so I am told by other parents). Sheep can also do things that even we, as far more intelligent beings, would find astounding. If you want to see this firsthand, search the Internet for videos about "extreme sheep herding", and you will be amazed. Here is the point: **When we know God's voice, we can live beyond our abilities.**

When we know the voice of God, we can be like sheep and live beyond our abilities. When we know the voice of God, we can accomplish feats far beyond the range of our normal intelligence. Let me give you some examples found in the Bible:

- David learned to listen to God's voice. He was the son no one

thought would amount to anything, and he became both one of the greatest warriors in history and a celebrated king.

- Mary listened to God and gave birth to the Son of God.
- Moses learned to listen to God and went from living in exile to leading God's people.
- Ruth listened to God after her husband died, and it led to her next marriage.
- Noah learned to listen to God's voice and saved humanity by building the Ark.
- Esther followed God's leading, and it saved the Jewish people from being slaughtered.
- Abraham followed God, left everything he had ever known, and became the father of many nations.

Similar stories could be told by you and me. If we can learn God's voice, we will do things beyond our abilities! But that isn't easy. Look at what it says in the Bible. ⁶ *Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.* ⁷ *Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.* ⁸ *All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.* ⁹ *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.* ¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.* ¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

They had no idea what that meant, but we do. Jesus was going to lay down His life for us, His sheep. We can trust in the words of Jesus far more readily than the people to whom Jesus spoke because Jesus gave up His life for humankind, then and now!

Let's continue: ¹² *"The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.* ¹³ *The man runs away because he is a hired hand and*

cares nothing for the sheep.”

People do not lay down their lives for something they don't believe in. This should give us hope. Jesus said He would die for us, and He did. We know Jesus' closest followers were killed for their belief in Jesus. We know Jesus' own brother died because of his belief that Jesus was the Son of God. This should build your faith by knowing you can trust in the voice of God and the Word of God.

Jesus continued: ¹⁴ *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”*

So, there were some outlier sheep, but, of course, Jesus was not talking about sheep. There were some outlier people who didn't know Jesus, people who would learn to listen to His voice. Jesus is still reaching out to such people because, as in the end, there will be just one flock and one Shepherd and one group of people worshipping the one true God for all of eternity.



John 10:17–21

The primary way we learn to discern God's voice is by studying the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God. When we have thoughts, feelings or inclinations, or when someone tells us “God told me to tell you _____.” Discern what they said through the lens of what the Bible teaches us. We do this because if something does not align with the Bible, it is not from God. God will never whisper into your ear that it is okay to get drunk just this one time because the Bible says getting drunk is sin. God will never tell you that it is okay to tell your friends any sensitive information regarding another person because the Bible is clear that gossiping

(talking about another person without them being present) is a sin. God will never tell you to do things that contradict His character or teachings in the Bible. And when we know our Bible well, it helps us know the difference between what God’s voice is and what is not.



LIFE APPLICATION:

- If we are followers of Jesus, we will know His voice and His ways. Commit to becoming a student of the Bible. Learn how to know God’s ways by learning His Word. Find another person for accountability and study the Bible with them.
- In today’s reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today’s reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

CHAPTER 48

JESUS SENDS OUT 72



Luke 10:1–24

I love the phase of Jesus' ministry we are entering now because there is so much that we can learn. As we read, we see Jesus began multiplying leaders. I wish I had learned how to do this when I worked in construction. When I started my career, I thought it was all about making myself look as good as possible. I did not help my co-workers become the best they could be. I was only concerned with my growth. It was many years later, when two godly men who worked in my company began to take me under their wing to mentor me, that I learned what Jesus is teaching us here.



Luke 10:1–24

What you just read in verse one is the exact same thing Jesus did when He sent out His inner circle of 12 apostles to go out to share the good news on their own: He sent them out in pairs.

In verse two, He gave them something to think about, ²*He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

In this book series, we are well into the life of Jesus now, and we have never heard Jesus say, “You know, we just need to kick back and relax. We have built this movement substantially, and we have enough people now. It’s time to stay in our comfort zone and coast.” Yet, you and I often think that way when we have finally “arrived” in our career or lives. Americans dream of getting to retirement and living the “good life.” Once we achieve a certain goal, we often call it “good” and stop growing. I want to challenge you with something. Find anywhere in the Bible where we see Jesus telling us that we can stop growing, stop reaching

lost people, or stop sharing our faith. You will not find it because it does not exist.

We've learned from our study of the life of Jesus that He never stopped growing His movement! Listen to the pep talk Jesus gave this next wave of leaders! ³ *“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”* How is that for a pep talk? I am sending you out like defenseless and dumb sheep among sly wolves. And it gets worse. ⁴ *“Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.”* I think I would have said, “Hold up here, Jesus. We take nothing, no money, no extra bag of stuff, no extra clothes? We can’t get sidetracked by the side-street vendors, our favorite coffee shop, or our favorite donut shop? We must keep focused on the mission?” I cannot imagine just rolling with that, but not one person objected or questioned Jesus. Perhaps that was because six months prior, Jesus had said the exact same thing to the 12 apostles, and they came back rejoicing over how God had shown up! I suspect that this sounded vaguely familiar. We know from the last time this happened that the news of God showing up spread throughout the rest of Jesus’ followers. So, now they are ready to step out in faith and follow Jesus because they know God the Father is going to show up and help! **Is your faith in God strong enough that you will follow His call to trust Him to provide, no matter what?**

It wasn’t just the 12 who were stepping out in faith, trusting Jesus at His word, and trusting God the Father to jump in at the right moment. There were 72 regular people, just like you and me, who were being called up into service. They would need to learn how to trust God because if they went out into the world and God did not show up, they would be finished!

Then Jesus gave further instructions in verses 5–15. ¹⁶ *“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”* This is important for us to understand. When you are talking about Jesus to a friend,

a co-worker, a boss, an employee, or a family member who will not listen, remember this: **They are not rejecting you; they are rejecting Jesus!** And don't take it personally! Jesus knows what they need, and He will minister to them through the power of the Holy Spirit. Do not feel the need to confront them. It is not your job to win them to Jesus. Your job is to plant the seed, listen to God's Spirit, and follow what He tells you to do.

Next, we learn what happened when they got back. ¹⁷ *The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."* Can you see this large group of followers gathered around, jumping up and down with excitement and sharing in amazement at how God showed up? Even the demons submitted to them because of Jesus. They were blown away and filled with joy because now they knew Jesus really was who He said He was.

Listen carefully to Jesus' reply because I want you to catch something, ¹⁸ *He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However,*—what does "however" mean? It is used to contrast or contradict what was said previously. It means that what was just said was good, but what is coming next is more important. Jesus continued with, ²⁰ *However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

In other words, Jesus said do not get excited about the authority I granted you but, instead, be excited about the fact that you have received eternal life! He instructed them to celebrate that and the fact that the people they led to Him also have their names written in the Book of Life! Jesus reminded them not to get more excited about the temporal than the spiritual. He was saying, "Lives and eternal destinies were changed on your trip! Rejoice in that! THAT IS WHAT MATTERS MOST!"

Often, we get confused. We focus on temporary things more than eternal things. We can be more excited about a bonus at work than four teens accepting Christ. We are more excited about our sports team winning than our friend who came to church for the first time. We become more excited when our kids get into their first choice for college than for them choosing to be baptized. **Jesus was pointing out a human spiritual problem.**

How would you handle this problem in your life?

I love what comes next; it is for my Spirit-filled friends! Jesus is about to bust out into a praise break! *²¹ At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. ²² "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." ²³ Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. ²⁴ For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."*

What specifically was Jesus so excited and overjoyed about that He broke out praising God? It was knowing that His Father was pleased with Him and that the plan was working! The disciples had been made into men with a passion and with a heart to tell others the Good News! **The will of the Father was that Jesus would die on the cross so that all people could be saved from their sins. The work of the Father was that Jesus would make disciples who could make disciples who could make disciples.**

Jesus was excited to see the work of the Father happening. His **work** was ending, and the **work** of making disciples who would make disciples and who would change the course of the planet was

His **work**. And it was coming to life! Jesus was excited because He saw the excitement in His disciples. They were successfully leading people to Him. There is nothing like leading a person to Jesus! The joy that it brings to you is unlike anything else; it is amazing! My desire for you is to help you experience this joy of leading others to Christ because it will change your life. This entire passage is about Jesus sending out 72 regular people to do His ministry. They were a group of people just like you. I know that makes some of you uncomfortable, but the reality is this: **Jesus wants to be in ministry with you! Jesus wants to make disciples through you!**

This movement that Jesus started was never designed to be a movement with only a few select pastors, missionaries, Bible study teachers, etc. This movement was designed to be one where all believers work together to build the Kingdom of God!



LIFE APPLICATION

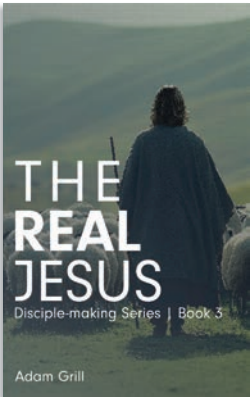
- Jesus devoted His life to making disciples who could make disciples who could make disciples. Who are you investing in to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ? Do you have spiritual grandchildren (someone you led to Christ who has led someone to Christ)? Who could you begin studying these books with?
- In today's reading, what did you learn about God, yourself, and mankind?
- As a result of today's reading, how will you apply what you learned? Answer as I will...

FROM PASTOR ADAM

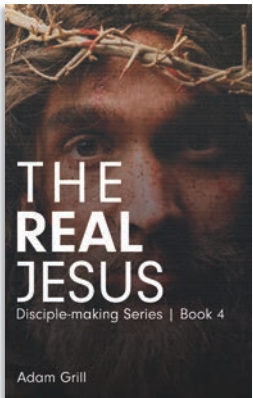
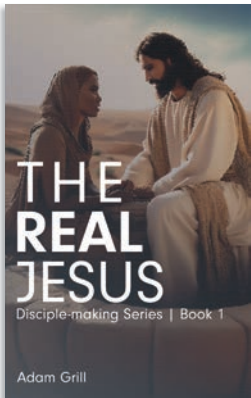
Congratulations on finishing the second book in *The Real Jesus* series! I hope by now you have learned a lot about who the real Jesus was, is, and always will be... and you have become a disciple of Jesus who is making more disciples of Jesus. If that still seems too daunting, email us at, dm@familychurch.app and we will gladly help you however we can. We can even partner you with someone to help you walk through these books virtually or in person!

NEXT IN THE REAL JESUS SERIES

Grab a copy of Book 3 in *The Real Jesus* series so you will continue learning, growing, and making more disciples of Jesus! In Book 3, you will learn about Jesus’ view of hypocrisy and legalism, how to be a godly leader, what a genuine disciple of Jesus looks like, that the best is yet to come, Jesus’ view of divorce, and so much more!



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