



**180: Becoming The New You**  
By Dillon Schupp

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## INTRO: Before You Start...Read This.

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An 180-degree turn means change. That's exactly what Jesus calls us to when we step into a relationship with Him.

Jesus saves us, not so we can be more like us, but so we can become more like Him. This doesn't happen overnight. In fact, it's a life-long process. Thankfully, He has given us a beautiful gift to help us along the way:

His Word: the Bible.

The challenge for many of us is the Bible seems overwhelming. What does it all mean? How do I understand it? *Can* I even hope to understand it? If I can't understand it, what am I even supposed to do with it?

I remember being there. It was discouraging and made reading the Bible something to be endured rather than enjoyed.

And then I experienced someone's preaching that showed me how I- on my own- could read, understand, and apply Scripture to my life. That literally changed everything for me!

That's why I wrote 180. There is no more life-changing habit than daily reading, understanding, and applying God's Word. 180 will help you do just that as you read through the Gospels- the written accounts of Jesus' life- over the next 6 months.

Understanding the Bible starts with realizing that it's not about how much you read; it's about whether you understand and apply what you read. That's why each day's reading is not multiple chapters, but a portion of a single chapter. Every day is a chunk that is perfectly manageable, whether you're just starting a daily habit of reading the Bible or you're life is so busy that you barely have 10 minutes to spare from the time you get up to the time you lay down at night. **That portion of Scripture is the most important thing you will read every day. Don't skip it!**

The next step is beyond reading: it's asking "What is God saying to me? What does He want me to do?" That's why each day highlights a single verse from the reading, and it

includes an observation and a practical next step so you know what to do with what you just read. That next step is called “180”- because each next step is a part of the journey to becoming the new you that Jesus calls you to be. It’s a change for what you are doing to what Jesus calls you to do.

The final part is what is often left out of a devotion plan: prayer. To grow deeper in any relationship requires two-way communication. God communicates to us through His Word and we communicate back to Him in prayer. Each day will include a prayer based on the highlighted Scripture to conclude to conclude your time with God.

My hope is this is just the beginning of a life-long habit of spending time with Jesus every day, and I pray that at the end of the next 180 days you will see a 180 degree change in your life, which in turn will encourage you to continue going to God in His Word every day, armed with the knowledge that you CAN read it, understand it, apply it, and pray it- all on your own.

There’s nothing more life-changing than that!

So let’s get started.

Dillon Schupp

### **Day 1: You’re Part of Something More**

**Reading: Matthew 1:1-17**

**Matthew 1:1- This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:**

The first words of Matthew’s account of the life of Jesus are more than just the introduction. These words define the purpose of Matthew’s writing. More than that, “This is the genealogy of Jesus” shouts at the introduction of the New Testament one simple fact:

This is Jesus' story. Jesus is the focus. Jesus is the object. Jesus is who the entirety of Scripture revolves around.

Better yet: Jesus is who the entirety of creation revolves around. And He's who are lives are meant to revolve around. The opening statement of Matthew is driving at this point.

Our story isn't really our story. Our story is meant to be a part of his story. Our story is meant to be a part of the symphony that God has been writing throughout the ages that points to Jesus Christ.

We're a part of much more than just working a 9 to 5, paying the bills, and trying to just get by. We were created to be a part of something glorious and majestic that will echo through eternity: the story of Jesus Christ.

**180: If my life is meant to be a part of Jesus' story, then my life is not meant to be lived for myself. This is why, as a church, we like to define our purpose as a church and individuals as, primarily, "Live for God."**

As you journey through these 180 days, start with this prayer:

*Father, I so often live for myself; for my hopes, my dreams, and my goals. Yet your Word makes it clear that I am meant for something more. I am meant to be a part of Jesus' story; I am meant to live for you. Show me where I am living for myself, and change me to live for you. In Jesus' name, amen*

## **Day 2: Just Do It**

**Reading: Matthew 1:18-25**

**Matthew 1:24- When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.**

In our context, it's difficult to imagine just how difficult this step was for Joseph. In a nutshell, taking Mary as his wife would have meant embracing public shame and disgrace. Mary, in being found pregnant before marriage, would have been shunned by the community she lived in (and, come on- who was going to believe that it was a miracle that she was pregnant?).

No “self-respecting man” would take such a woman as his wife...unless he was the father to begin with.

The community at large would have concluded that Joseph was *not* a faithful and just guy- but a fool at best and the immoral father of an illegitimate child at worst.

And yet Joseph did exactly as he was commanded. And all indications are that he did so as soon as he had the opportunity.

This is how change happens in our lives. Change happens when we hear what God commands us- and we obey without delay.

**180: To begin to “live for God” means that we start obeying what He says- and every single one of us has something in our lives that God is commanding us to do right now. The question is simply whether you are being obedient. Yes, it will be difficult, but as Joseph shows us, the difficulty of obedience does not relieve us of the responsibility to obey.**

As you reflect on this passage, chances are something comes to mind that you have failed to obey God in. Today as you pray, take time to repent for your disobedience, and ask God to give you the courage to obey what He has commanded.

*Father, I realize that, as you have commanded me to \_\_\_\_\_, I have not been obedient. I have delayed obedience, which is disobedience. I am sorry for my actions, and I pray you will give me the courage to listen to what you tell me to do- even when it is difficult. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

**Day 3: If You Want to Find Jesus...**

**Reading: Matthew 2:1-12**

**Matthew 2:1-2- After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one**

**who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."**

Have you ever seen someone who you thought took Jesus a little too seriously? Chances are you thought they were a little nuts. "Surely," you've thought, "They are a little extreme. Sure, Jesus wants me to follow Him...but He can't possibly want me to be over the edge about it. He can't possibly want me to look so...different. At least not so much that I look crazy to others".

No one know how far the Magi came to see Jesus- but it's reasonable to assume that it was a very long way and it took a very long time.

Most scholars agree that Jesus was almost two years old by the time the Magi came to visit him. The star's appearance is believed to have coincided with Jesus birth. That means the Magi's took not just days, weeks, or months- but up to two years just to find Jesus.

That's not logical, reasonable or rational- and it probably would have looked nuts! Yet it's exactly what they did. And in doing so, it shows us how to live for God.

**180: Living for God is not about reading a few verses and a devotion each day- though that does help. Living for God is nothing less than the type of life-rearranging devotion demonstrated by the Magi. No matter the time commitment or the difficult, this is the type of devotion Jesus desires from us. Yes, we'll certainly look a little crazy. But the payoff is that we get the one thing better than everything else: closeness with Jesus Himself.**

Let's be real: chances are you may have talked yourself out of obeying what you believed God wanted you to do yesterday. Maybe you even used some of the same thinking highlighted at the intro to this devotion. But today, as you pray, ask God to move you towards the kind of radical devotion to Jesus displayed by the Magi.

*Father, help me to pursue Jesus ahead of everything else. I confess that I've often felt like it was extreme to take you at your word- especially when it felt time consuming or challenging or- from my perspective- illogical. Help me to trust you above every else and to live for you in a way that goes where you tell me to go and does what you tell me to do- regardless of the cost. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 4: Hidden Motives

### Reading: Matthew 2:13-23

**Matthew 2:16- When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.**

Yesterday, we read that Herod claimed he wanted to worship Jesus. Now, we see his true intentions.

Herod wasn't interested in Jesus because he wanted to worship Jesus. He was interested in Jesus because he wanted to get rid of Jesus.

Put another way: his interest in Jesus was solely limited to his agenda. He had no interest in Jesus agenda.

Here's a question for you to wrestle with: What's *your* interest in Jesus? Is it to get stuff from him? To get a ticket out of hell? For an easier life? Does it only go as far as whether He can advance your agenda?

Or is your desire to worship Him for who He is: as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one to whom we owe complete allegiance?

**180: To live for God is not “making a deal” with God. It’s not “Jesus, I’ll worship you if you’ll do \_\_\_\_\_.” Living for God is devotion to Jesus because of who He is- not because of what we think can get.**

If we're not careful, even our best efforts in following Jesus- even in obeying Him like we've talked the last couple of days- can be tainted by impure motives. Today, let's ask God to help us identify our wrong motives- and move us to a heart of pure worship.

*Father, I've often approached you with the wrong motives. I've often been more interested in what I can GET from you rather than simply worshipping you. I am so sorry for my wrong attitude. Help me to live for you unconditionally, because you alone are Lord, and I owe you my life. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 5: Turn Around**

### **Reading: Matthew 3:1-17**

**Matthew 3:1-2- In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”**

“Repent” is not a word you hear much in modern Christian vernacular. However, it is a word that characterized Jesus’ teaching and- in the time leading up to Jesus’ ministry- the teaching of John the Baptist.

“Repent” literally means “to change one’s mind.” It implies an 180-degree turn. It pictures the idea of going one way, and then stopping in response to something and going to opposite direction (like the time I almost stepped on a snake in the woods. I hit an octave I didn’t think possible).

So- what are we to change our mind about?  
Our sin.

We are to stop thinking that our sin isn’t that bad- and realize it is completely evil. We are to stop thinking that our way is best- and realize we don’t know what we’re doing. Then, we are to turn and begin obeying Jesus. In a nutshell, repentance is turning from sin and towards Jesus. It is to stop doing things our way and start doing things God’s way.

**180: One of the most interesting things about the word “repent” used here is that it is actually an ongoing command. To live for God isn’t to think of yourself as a spiritual giant. It’s more along the lines of realizing the depths of your sin and developing a habit of repentance. It’s that habit that literally causes an 180 in our lives and leads to the change God wants to see in us.**

When was the last time you said these words: “Lord, I repent for \_\_\_\_\_”? The closer we get to Jesus, the more sinful we realize we are because the closer we get, the



more He exposes our sinful thoughts and behaviors. Let's begin today with developing a habit of repentance as we pray. It's this habit that is crucial to an 180-degree change in our lives.

*Father, I repent for not repenting for so long. I've failed to see my sin for how it is: evil. IN light of that, Lord, I repent for \_\_\_\_\_. It is sin. I pray that You will empower me to turn from it so I can live for you, and I pray You will develop in me a habit of repentance as I grow closer to You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 6: The Source**

**Reading: Matthew 4:1-11**

**Matthew 4:4- Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

Chances are you ate today. I know I did. I had breakfast. And lunch. And dinner. I might have even had a snack and dessert. I wouldn't dream of not eating- at least not for an extended period of time.

We all recognize the need to eat to survive. We all know that if we don't eat, we will die. Is it any wonder, then, why we so often- even as genuine followers of Jesus- feel so weak spiritually?

The way we grow spiritually is by reading, understanding, and applying the Word of God. Without God's Word in our lives, we will be very weak spiritually. We will not be able to navigate life's challenges and pressure points without a steady diet of God's Word.

Here's the point of God's Word, though: It's not just to read and apply information. It's to be with Jesus! That is *the purpose* of time like this. It's not to find out Bible trivia or even to find out what to do- it's to be with Jesus. And as we spend time with Jesus, He changes our lives.

**180: One of the primary goals of 180 is to develop in you a daily habit of reading God's Word. God's Word is what changes us because God's Word is made up of**

**God's very words. When we develop a habit of reading and applying God's Word each and every day, that begins to change our lives because God's Word reveals our sin and moves us to repentance and obedience.**

Be honest: Have you done the reading each day? Or...have you just skipped over the reading, looked at the verse, and read the devotional content? If you're doing that, you're robbing yourself of literally the most life-giving part of this process. God's Word- not someone take on God's Word- is what you need every day. The only point for the devotional content is to show you how to understand and apply God's Word so that, once you're done with this resource, you can continue to do that on your own. THAT is the win!

*Father, I am often slack in reading Your Word. I often claim I am too busy, but that's not really the case. The truth is I prioritize other things ahead of you. From this day forward, I will choose to read Your Word daily, seeking to both understand it and apply it to my life. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 7: Break Up**

**Reading: Matthew 4:12-25**

**Matthew 4:22- ...and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

Have you ever had to walk away from something that was a good thing? James and John did. They left behind both the family business...and their father.

We often think of following Jesus as a process of walking away from obviously bad things. While there is much truth in that, following Jesus will also include "breaking up" with something that is a good thing- and it begs the question: "Why"?

The answer is actually pretty simple: Even good things can keep us from following Jesus. It's not because they are evil. It's because we tend to value those things over Jesus.

Our failure to Jesus is not always because we ran after something bad. It's because we chose something good- and that good keeps us from who is best: Jesus.

**180: What is something “good” in your life that is keeping you from following Jesus? Maybe it’s something as simple as sleep- that snooze button takes up 10 minutes that you could be pursuing Jesus. Maybe it’s a TV show that takes your time. Maybe it’s a hobby. None of those things are bad- unless they are keeping you from Jesus. If they are- then it’s time to break up.**

What about when the “good” things are things we should not break up? Like our spouse or our children, or perhaps our job? Sometimes "breaking up" doesn't mean "throwing away." Just as often, it means re-assigning those things to their proper place- which happens when Jesus gets first place.

*Father, I recognize that I have often allowed the good things in my life to keep me from you. Lord, where those things need to be let go of, give me the courage and strength to walk away. If something simply needs to be reassigned, enable me to do that through your Holy Spirit's power. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 8: Make It Better**

**Reading: Matthew 5:1-16**

**Matthew 5:13- "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."**

There are many things that are simply gross without seasoning; other things are disappointing- like meat. There are fewer things more sad than a beautiful, juicy piece of

chicken, or steak, or fish that has absolutely zero salt. It's especially a let down when you've gone out to eat and paid for it!

The purpose of putting salt on something- food especially- is to make it better. Salt brings out the flavor of what it is placed it. Salt enhances eggs, meat, vegetables, and is even found in small amounts in most sweet foods- it adds something special to it.

This is how followers of Jesus are to be to their families, their friends, and in the world. Jesus didn't save us to go and hide from the world. He saved us so our presence in the world could make the world a better place.

How do we do this? We do it by living in a way that makes things better. We love like Jesus. We serve like Jesus. We give like Jesus and forgive like Jesus.

That's what will make the world a better place.

**180: What's the one way you can make the most important relationship in your life better today? Whether it's your marriage, your mom or dad, or perhaps even a relationship with a friend or simply your office environment, pick one way to be "salt" today and make it better.**

Many times when we begin to focus on "one way" in one relationship, the attitude can spill over into other relationships. If I'm looking for the best way to serve my spouse, for instance, that will develop the attitude of a servant that will infiltrate other areas of my life.

*Father, make me "salty" in the environments I am in each day. Show me how I can make them better, and in the areas I am contributing to the problems- because I often do- correct me quickly and show me how to be someone who is a part of making things better and thus pointing people to you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Day 9: Before Anything Else...**

**Reading: Matthew 5:17-32**

**Matthew 5:23-24: 23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.**

I enjoy cooking, and one of the fundamental facts about cooking is that you have to do certain things in order...or things just don't work. For instance, if you're going to boil spaghetti noddles, you need to boil the water, which means you need to turn the stove on to boil the water in the pot first. Few things are worse than getting halfway through getting ready and realizing you skipped a step.

When Jesus made the statement in the above verse, He was teaching us something very important: In order for us to experience closeness with God, we have to make things right with those who are upset with us.

When we've done something wrong against someone, Jesus is basically saying this: Go and say you are sorry before you come to see me.

**180: Most if not all of us know something we have done that has hurt someone...and we know it was wrong. Today: call them, text them, or send them an email apologizing. Make it right.**

It's not easy to admit you were wrong- even when you know you were. It hurts our pride- but the simple fact is this is what leads us towards growth and maturity: being able to recognize our wrong and make it right.

*Father, I repent for what I did to \_\_\_\_\_ through my actions. I was wrong. Give me the courage and humility to sincerely apologize and I pray you will restore the relationship. Help me to be sensitive in the future to when I may have done something offensive, and make me quick to apologize and reconcile. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Day 10: The Standard**

**Reading: Matthew 5:33-48**

**Matthew 5:48- Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

Perfection was only possible for one person: Jesus Christ. Perfection is not possible for us. We are flawed beings who make mistakes every day.

Yet Jesus does not back off of God's standard.

This leads us to two ideas: First, we will always have something to work on. Not a single one of us will ever "arrive" spiritually. We always have a next step.

Second and perhaps more importantly: this points us to our need for a Savior in the first place. If God's standard is perfection, we cannot possibly meet it. That's why Jesus came to live in our place. He lived the life we could not live, and in dying the death we should have died He was the perfect that God required. And through His perfection, we have new life when we follow Him.

**180: We often make excuses for our behavior: "That's just the way I am," we'll say. Under this Scripture, however, that is not an option. Today, identify where you are falling short of God's standard- and commit to letting Him change you.**

The word for "perfect" also means "mature." To be mature is to be able to see your shortcomings. In fact, the more mature we are, the more aware we are of our failures- and, as a result, our need for a Savior.

*Father, I certainly fall short of your standard. Help me identify the areas in my life where I am not "perfect." Shape me to be more like you. Make me teachable so that, when you identify my imperfections, I do not try to justify them. Rather, I repent and let you change me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Day 11: Not Mine**

**Reading: Matthew 6:1-15**

**Matthew 6:10- Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

This is so different from the prayers we tend to pray. Most of our prayers focus on God giving us stuff, or God doing something for us. In short, most of our prayers sound like this:

“God- my will be done. Now, please make it happen.”

True prayer does not focus on our will. True prayer focuses on God’s will. In fact, that is the purpose of prayer to start with.

Prayer is not about God giving us stuff. Prayer is about aligning our hearts will God’s will. When that happens, we will pray for what God wants- and those prayers are the ones He always answers.

**180: Think about the last time you prayed. Was it FOR something- or was it about seeking what God seeks? Today, as you pray, ask that God will change your will to align it with HIS will.**

It’s sometimes hard to tell where our desires end and God’s will begins. How do we tell the difference? We ask what the motive is. Is the motive for my benefit- or is the focus God’s glory, even if it costs me?

*Father, I have put my will ahead of yours. I have rarely, if ever, sought whether something was your plan or not. Change my heart, and align me with your will. Help me to see where I am pursuing things for myself and leaving you out. Show me what needs to change in me, and lead me to put your will as the focus of my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

**Day 12: Urgent**

**Reading: Matthew 6:16-34**

**Matthew 6:33- But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

Isn't it interesting how this time often gets pushed to the back burner- or even off the calendar?

We've all got busy lives. We have jobs to get to, projects to finish, kids to get to and from ball practice and dance, family gatherings, friends to see, and that's not even including our dear relative that just came down with something and we need to go visit them in the hospital.

Life is often defined as "urgent." We have to do things- right now. The tension we face is that we often sacrifice the important on the altar of the urgent.

That's why Jesus tells us to seek God's Kingdom first; to make God's priorities ours. To put our pursuit of Him and our participation in His mission as the focal point of our lives.

And God promises that when that happens, He will enable us to take care of the other things. He'll provide for us, lead us, and guide us into the decisions we should make- and we'll be better able to know what those are, because we'll be embracing the important over the urgent.

**180: Are you trying to simply "fit God in" somewhere? Or do you have a planned time where you intentionally and willfully take a few minutes to read God's Word and understand it? This is too important to just "hope" it happens. Make it happen. It's too important to leave to chance.**

One of the things that helps us make the important a priority is when we plan it. Don't be afraid to have an "appointment with God" each day- and keep all other things out of that time slot!

What time of each day are you going to meet with God? Write it down here:

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*Father, I am often more concerned about the day-to-day of life than I am over meeting with you. I often focus on what I need to do, forgetting that you are able to do far more than I can ever ask, think, or imagine. Help me to put you first, starting with intentionally setting aside a time each day to pursue you. In Jesus' name, amen.*



## **Day 13: Do I HAVE to be nice?**

**Reading: Matthew 7:7-14**

**Matthew 7:12- So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.**

It sounds so simple, right? If you want someone to be nice, you should treat them nicely. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

But let's be honest. That isn't easy. Not when someone just treated you poorly. Are we really supposed to be nice to THEM? To be kind to THEM? To forgive THEM?

When we ask that, we often forget that we've been unkind to others- and we wanted them to forgive us. We didn't want our unkindness held against us.

Jesus even went as far to say that all of God's commands up to that point- the Law and the Prophets- could be summed up by treating others the way you want to be treated.

Think of how different our world- or your life- would be!

**180: Whose “that person” that just grates on your nerves and you have a difficult time being kind to? Be kind to them today. Do something kind for them today. That shows Jesus to them.**

Here's something else interesting- the more we treat others the way we want to be treated, the more we will find ourselves having greater compassion, concern, and care for them. That's what Jesus is after!

*Father, I often forget that I have disobeyed you. I have rejected you and not listened- and yet you still sent your Son, Jesus, to die on a cross and save me. In light of your forgiveness, help me to forgive others and treat them as Jesus treated me, being kind to them and loving towards them with no strings attached. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 14: How to Never Break

**Reading: Matthew 7:15-29**

**Matthew 7:24-25- 24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.**

Now that you're two weeks into this, it's important to remember something crucial: it's not enough to read God's Word. It's not even enough to understand it. We have to do what it says. We have to put them into practice.

Jesus says that makes us wise. He tells us that when we put His Words into practice, doing so will enable us to not break apart when life hits. And make not mistake- life will hit, and it will hit hard. The question will then be whether our house is built on a solid foundation.

And the only foundation strong enough to keep us firm is obedience to what Jesus has said.

**180: Take a few minutes to review the last two weeks. Each day you've been given a practical next step. Have you been applying God's Word- or have you been letting it slide? Today, commit to obeying where God has told you to obey.**

This is where the difference lies between the person who experiences the 180-degree turn Jesus wants to do in us and the one who stays the same. The difference is in whether we apply what we hear.

*Father, I confess that I have often heard what you wanted me to do...and ignored it. Doing so is wrong, Lord. You tell us to not just be hearers of the Word, but doers also. Holy Spirit, strengthen me and prompt me to obey when Your Word commands me. Don't let me put it off; make me swift to obey. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 15: Saved people serve people**

**Reading: Matthew 8:1-17**

**Matthew 8:14-15: 14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.**

There's a tremendous lesson in what happened here with Peter's mother-in-law. After Jesus healed her, she began to serve Jesus.

When Jesus saves us, He doesn't just give us a ticket to heaven. He gives us a new purpose: to serve Him. In the day-to-day, that means being involved with His mission in a way that advances His agenda.

Jesus didn't save us to sit on the sidelines, but to get in the game.

**180: Are you involved in Jesus' mission yet? The simplest way to do this is to serve in the context of the local church. Visit [lifespringnc.com/serve](https://lifespringnc.com/serve) to discover how you can begin serving Jesus through the church.**

A closing thought: at the end of the day, we serve because it makes us more like Jesus. Jesus came to serve by giving His life, and when we serve, we show Him to the world.

*Father, I want to be more like Jesus, and I realize serving is a tremendous step in that direction. Help me to serve others as you served, and help me to serve you by investing my time and talent into your mission on earth. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 16: I Don't Want To Let It Go**

## **Reading: Matthew 8:18-34**

**Matthew 8:34- 34 Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.**

This may be one of the saddest moments in all Scripture. Here were two guys who were demon-possessed- and Jesus healed them!

The response of the town? “Jesus, please leave.”

Sure, Jesus cast the demons into the pigs- which represented financial profit for the town. So, at first glance, it would seem that Jesus harmed this town and the people.

But the townspeople missed something: If Jesus had authority over demons, then it should have followed that He had power that was over anything and everything else. In fact, Jesus had just show His disciples His power over nature.

The townspeople missed that the One who could command demons could have surely provided for their needs- and more. In short, simply having Jesus was infinitely more valuable than any other financial gain! However: because they were more focused on what they lost than what Jesus did, they missed their opportunity to experience what Jesus could do.

**180: What area of your life are you keeping Jesus out of because He wants you to let go of something? Let go of it- and trust Him for something better.**

We often don't let Jesus in our lives because we are afraid of losing something, but in Him, anything lost is not needed- and He will give us something better.

*Father, I realize that I cling too tightly to the things I want, and I'm reluctant to let go of what you tell me to. Help me trust your power and your character to the point that I am willing to lose or let go of that which I think I "need". Help me to trust that, even if I lose something, simply having YOU is better. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 17: It Doesn't Mix

**Reading: Matthew 9:1-17**

**Matthew 9:16- 16 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.**

Have you ever tried to put something where it didn't belong? Perhaps you were trying to put something together and not really following the directions and just guessing at it (guilty!!), and you tried to put a part where it didn't belong?

It just didn't work.

That's the point Jesus is making here. One of the temptations we face when we follow Jesus is we try to fit out “old” way of doing things into our “new” life in Christ. It just does not work. The “old” way has to be discarded- or we will not become who Jesus wants us to be.

**180: In what way(s) are you still acting and thinking like you did before Jesus? Identify them, and begin making decisions that align with what Jesus has said instead.**

This is much easier said than done. It's difficult to give up old habits, especially when they are entrenched. That's why Jesus' gave us the Holy Spirit when we surrendered to Him. The Spirit gives us the power to live according to our new life- and not our old.

*Father, I realize that I try to “mix” my new life with my old. That is wrong and I repent. Show me the “old” ways that I am clinging to, and empower me through your Spirit to change and live according to what you command and according to who I am in you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 18: Into the Field

### Reading: Matthew 9:18-38

**Matthew 9:37-38- 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”**

In some circles of Christianity, the world is seen as unreachable. Things are just “too bad”, and the result is treating the church like a fortress to keep us safe from the world until Jesus returns.

The problem with that thinking is that Jesus indicated the opposite! He taught that the world was primed to be reached- that the harvest was plentiful! The problem is that more workers are needed.

That’s why it’s critical for us to invite those around us to church. That’s why it’s critical for us to be sensitive to the opportunities Jesus puts in front of us to have Gospel conversations. And, that’s why we need to ask God to send more workers into the field- because the world is ready to be reached!

**180: When was the last time you intentionally invited someone to church? Make it a point this week to invite someone- even if it’s simply the cashier at the store!**

Why do we not do this? I think it’s because we’re convinced it won’t work. However, it’s a serious mistake to say “no” for someone. Let’s not say “no” for people- let’s extend the opportunity for them to say “yes”.

*Father, I want you be about your business, and your business is reaching people. Help me be sensitive to the opportunities you place in front of me and bold enough to give people the chance to follow you. Make me a bold worker in your field, and raise up others who will likewise go into your field to work. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## Day 19: Taken Care Of

### Reading: Matthew 10:1-20

**Matthew 10:9-10- 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 was teaching His disciples something by commanding this: that when we are about His business and listening to Him, He will provide for us.

In our context, this doesn't mean that we should not have a job, or not save for a rainy day. The greater point is simply to follow Jesus- even when it doesn't make sense on paper. And if you are following Jesus, there will come a point where it *doesn't* make sense on paper!

In those moments, Jesus teaches us not to trust what we have- or to be afraid because of what we don't have. Rather, we are to obey Him- and trust Him to take care of us.

**180: Our concern over the “bottom line” can lead us to make decisions Jesus never told us to. Are you wearing yourself out to take care of yourself- or are you diligently obeying what Jesus *has* told you to do- and trusting Him with the rest of it?**

Perhaps a major point is this: what do you *know* Jesus has told you to do? Do that and do it well- and if He hasn't told you to do something, don't do it- and trust Him to take care of you.

*Father, I often trust my own instincts and plans to take care of us rather than you. I'm prone to follow “my plan” instead of you. The real problem is I trust myself more than you. I repent for that. Help me to stick to what you have told me to do, let other things go, and trust you to make up the difference where it's needed. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 20: Alone At the Top

Reading: Matthew 10:21-42

**Matthew 10:37-39- 37 “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.**

Following Jesus means placing Him above everything else- even above the most important relationships in our lives. That’s difficult- but it’s what He calls us to.

Following Jesus also means willing to lose everything for His sake. That’s what picking up a cross meant. Following Jesus is a call to come and lay down your very life.

This is a far cry from what we often see in American Christianity, where we are often taught that we can have whatever we want and Jesus. However, Jesus taught the opposite. To follow Him is a call to lay down that which you love most.

**180: In what ways are you placing your goals- and even your family- ahead of Jesus? Spend some time asking God to show you how you are doing this- and see what changes He wants you to make.**

Believe it or not, this is actually the best thing for our family. When Jesus is in the top place and the center of our lives, it makes us a better spouse, parent, child, etc. When Jesus is at the center, even loss is actually gain.

*Father, show me how I’ve placed my own goals- and even my family- ahead of you. I recognize I’m prone to that, and I repent. Redirect me to where you alone are at the center of my life, and enable me to make the changes necessary to place you there and keep you there, knowing it will be the best thing for me- and my family. In Jesus’ name, amen.*



## Day 21: Outside the Walls

**Reading: Matthew 11:1-19**

**Matthew 11:19- 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”**

Jesus had the reputation of being a friend of the worst of the worst. In fact, people even assumed he did what the worst of the worst did.

Of course, Jesus did not engage in the behavior of those He was around. However: he was around them. He had relationships with them; He was their friend.

What a far cry from how we often operate in the church! We often have only “Christian” friends; and yes, we need the community of fellow believers.

However: we can’t truly accomplish Jesus’ mission- reaching lost people- unless we are in relationship with them.

**180: Are you friends with someone who is lost? If so, spend time with them this week- and make it a habit. If not, ask God to put someone far from Him in your path with whom you can develop a relationship with.**

The worry in this is “bad influences.” However, Jesus called us to be the influences. He called us to be the ones who influence others, and we cannot influence lost people when we are hiding behind the walls.

*Father, make me bold to engage with people far from you. Help me develop true friendships with people who don’t know you. Help me love them and point them to you, and give me the words to say to share Jesus with them. In your name, amen.*

## Day 22: Burned Out

**Reading: Matthew 11:20-30**

**Matthew 11:28-30: 28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

Ever felt “burnt out”? Like you were so tired that you just couldn’t take it anymore? That you were so busy that nothing else could fit on the calendar?

We’ve all been there- and we wish we could just STOP. We just aren’t sure we can.

There’s a freeing truth for us found in this verse, but it’s difficult to accept. That truth is that, if we find ourselves burnt out, it’s not because Jesus led us that way. Jesus leadership leads us to thrive.

That doesn’t mean we sit in a rocking chair all day. However, it does mean that Jesus never drives us to the end of our rope. If we’re there, it’s because we have chosen to do things Jesus didn’t tell us to do in the first place.

**180: What is it in your life that’s the “final straw”? What is it that makes you so busy? Take some time to identify what you are doing...and what Jesus has actually told you to do.**

One of the things that helps us identify what Jesus actually calls us to is understanding who we are in Him and what we are responsible for. You can [GO HERE](#) to download a free E-book that will help you step away from burnout and into the gentle leadership of Jesus.

*Father, I often take on things you never told me to take on. As a result, I’m tired and overwhelmed. Give me the wisdom to know what you have told me to do- and the things that I have chosen to do that are unnecessary. Give me the courage to make the*

*changes I need to make so that I can come under your light and easy yoke. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 23: What Kind of Tree Are You?**

#### **Reading: Matthew 12:1-33**

**Matthew 12:33- 33 “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.**

How do we tell the difference between an apple tree and a peach tree? The answer: one has fruit that produces a great ice cream, and the other does not!

I'm joking. The answer's obvious. An apple tree bears apples and a peach tree bears peaches. The kind of fruit on a tree identifies what it is.

But here, Jesus isn't talking about trees. He is talking about our lives. His point is that you can identify who we are by what our life produces. If our life produces that which glorifies God, we are His. If not...well, then we aren't.

**180: Consider your life. We don't get it all right all the time, but in general: what is the fruit of your life? Better yet, ask someone close to you- and don't be defensive. Listen.**

This brings up one of the most important realities of the faith: One of the ways we know we are saved is the change Jesus brings in our life. We cannot be saved and remain unchanged!

*Father, help me honestly evaluate the fruit of my life. Help me identify what is good- and what is not. Make me teachable to listen to those around me who point out what is unhealthy, and empower me through your Holy Spirit to change. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 24: Overflow

**Reading: Matthew 12:34-50**

**Matthew 12:34- 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.**

What's inside something always comes out at some point. For example: say you want to watch a movie using your DVD player. Whatever movie you put in the DVD player is the movie you're going to get. If you want to watch Iron Man and you put in The Notebook...you're going to get the Notebook- no matter how much you want to watch Iron Man (the same applies in reverse...to be clear).

In the same way, what is in our hearts always comes out of our mouth. The way we speak to people and about people indicates what is in our hearts. If our speech is harsh, unloving, and unkind, it's because something is broken in our hearts.

A heart that has experienced the grace of Jesus will produce speech that is likewise full of grace.

**180: What is your speech like- really? Do you find yourself harsh and critical, or gentle and patient? Do you find yourself gossiping, or do you always speak well of people? None of us get it perfect, but what generally characterizes your speech? When our words are unhealthy, it means our heart is broken.**

We must not excuse our speech by saying "This is the way I am" or "It's because of what I do/ where I work/ who I'm around." Our personality is not a prison, and other people do not create our character- they reveal it.

*Father, I realize my speech has not been healthy- and I see now that means something is broken in my heart. Show me what is hurting and broken inside me, and show me the steps I need to take to let you heal that wound. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 25: How to Guarantee THIS Won't Work

**Reading: Matthew 13:1-23**

**Matthew 13:22:** The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

It's great that you're almost four weeks into reading God's Word. Hopefully, each day is helping you take practical next steps to apply God's Word to your life, and perhaps you're beginning to see God change you for the better.

However, there's one thing that will always keep God's Word from working in our hearts. When we place "the worries of this life" ahead of obedience to God, it prevents the Word from penetrating and changing our hearts. When we allow "the deceitfulness of wealth" (whether that's cash, stuff, or experiences) take precedence over Jesus, God's Word proves unfruitful.

**180: Answer this honestly: what's the one thing that you tend to put ahead of Jesus? Whether it keeps you from this time each day or from gathering with the church on Sunday, what's the one thing that keeps pulling you away? Once identified, that thing either needs to be put in its proper place- or completely rooted from our lives. Nothing is worth pulling us away from Jesus because nothing else compares with Christ.**

That's much easier said than done. It's not usually "bad" things that keep us from Jesus- it's "good" things. This requires wisdom and discipline to navigate keeping "the worries of this life" in their proper place!

*Father, I'm often distracted by the things of this world- the relationships, the fun, the things thrown my way each day. Help me identify that which is pulling me away from you, and show me how to prioritize it correctly and place you ahead of it- or give me the courage to remove it from my life if that's what it takes. Nothing and no one is worth more than you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## Day 26: Total Change

**Reading: 13:24-58**

**Matthew 13:33-33** He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

I love a good yeast roll. Especially with butter. REAL butter. Not the fake stuff. Real, made with cream butter.

A yeast roll wouldn't be a yeast roll without...yeast. And yeast completely changes the nature of the dough. It makes it rise. It doesn't remain flat- it becomes fluffy.

That's what knowing Jesus does to us. He changes us- as completely as yeast changes bread, and in many ways, the same way yeast changes bread- from the inside out.

**180: This is a good time to evaluate- how has Jesus changed you? If you claim the name of Jesus, then what has changed? It's impossible to know Jesus and stay the same, just like it's impossible for the yeast to not affect bread.**

What if I look at my life and see no change? The answer is simple: I probably don't know Jesus. Knowing Jesus changes us completely- and if we remain unaffected, then we simply don't know Him.

*Father, help me honestly evaluate whether I have changed. If I am the same person I've always been, then I repent of my sin and I turn to Jesus. Lord Jesus, control my life and lead me to live for you and you alone. Change me completely and use me for Your glory, and keep changing me to be more like you- one day at a time. In Your name, amen.*

## Day 27: Impossible

**Reading: Matthew 14:1-21**

**Matthew 14: 17-18- 17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.18 “Bring them here to me,” he said.**

Imagine the surprise the disciples experienced when a lunchable feed over 5,000 people! In fact, since only men were counted, the number was probably closer to 20,000 when including women and children.

That’s impossible...but not when Jesus is involved.

We often forget just how powerful Jesus is. He is all-powerful. Nothing is too hard for him. That means that no matter what our situation is, no circumstance is beyond His reach and His ability to work things out for His glory and our good!

**180: Is there something in your life right now that seems too difficult for God? Is there something that you are facing that seems impossible to deal with? You can’t overcome it- but Jesus can!**

We often fail to pray simply because we fail to remember the power of our God. He is able- trust Him!

*Father, I confess that I’m not sure how this thing I’m facing will work out. It seems too much to get through- but I know you are greater than all things. I know, Jesus, that you can do more than I can ever imagine. I pray that you will work in this circumstance and work it out for your glory. In your name, amen.*

**Day 28: Out of Focus**

**Reading: Matthew 14:22-36**

**Matthew 14:30- But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”**

Peter gets a bad rap so often- at least he got out of the boat...and he walked on water. Until he looked at his circumstances. In that moment, his boldness evaporated and he began to sink.

This happens to us so often. Remember yesterday, when we prayed God would work out our difficult circumstances? Chances are it may not have happened yet. God often doesn't answer immediately- and we can begin to look at our situation and begin sinking.

**180: Faith doesn't mean pie-in-the-sky optimism or denying reality. It does mean focusing on Jesus and filtering how we see our lives through His power and His ability- not what we see. It doesn't mean denying our challenges. It simply means re-framing them.**

Many times what determines our focus is what we think about. What dominates your thoughts: the challenges of your circumstances or the power of your Savior? The battlefield is often our mind!

*Father, keep my eyes on Jesus. I know my circumstances are challenging, but I am trusting that He will bring me to where I need to be. Help me to keep my mind fixed on You and not allow the circumstances I'm facing and the endless "What if's" to dominate my thinking. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Day 29: Lip Service**

**Reading: Matthew 15:1-20**



**Matthew 15:8-9- ““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.””**

Let's be honest: no one enjoys it when someone says one thing and then does another. We have a name for that person: A hypocrite. It's easy to spot.

It's much more difficult to see it in ourselves. It's perhaps even more difficult to admit that we often act this way towards Jesus. We say we love Him more than anything else, yet over and over we find ourselves doing the very things He despises.

What's the problem? Our heart. When our heart is far from Jesus, it's easy to say one thing and do another.

**180: We often deal with “hypocritical behavior” by trying to improve our behavior, but Jesus isn't after our behavior. He's after our heart. Ask Jesus today to really look at your heart and show you if it is close to Him...or not.**

The fact is our heart is prone to drift from Jesus. No one's spiritual journey is always “up and to the right”, so to speak. We all have peaks and valleys. What keeps the valleys to a minimum is keeping a heart close to Jesus, and our heart stays close when we stay close. That's why we do this every day.

*Father, my heart is prone to wander. I often find myself saying you are Lord, yet acting as if you are not. Show me where my heart is today. Identify and remove the idols that draw me away from you to where what I say about you matches the way I live. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Day 30: Jesus For Everyone**

**Reading: Matthew 15:21-39**

**Matthew 15:26-28: 26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” 27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” 28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.**

NOTE: The word “dog” here is more accurately translated “puppy” or “house-dog.” It’s a reference is to a pet.

This seems like such WEIRD interaction! So what’s going on?

Jesus is using this interaction to show His Jewish disciples that He is for every person. The woman was a Gentile- not an ethnic Jew. In the disciples’ minds, this meant the Messiah (Jesus) was not for her. They even wanted to send her away.

Jesus’ comment about tossing the children’s bread to dogs is meant to show that He is committed to His primary mission on earth- the fulfillment of prophecy as the Jewish Messiah. Yet the woman sees something the disciples did not- and that Jesus wanted them to learn: Namely, that even the Jewish Messiah was not limited to the Jews. He is the Savior of the whole world. Jesus commends the woman’s faith- and heals her daughter.

**180: Are we tempted to think that Jesus is only for us? We may not say it- but we can act like we think it when we never interact with people who are unlike us and never pursue people who we think are “too far gone.” This week, invite someone to church who is unlike you.**

This is often difficult to put into practice! Our preconceived ideas and prejudices towards other people are often ingrained in us on a subconscious level. However, the closer we get to Jesus, the more we realize that His heart is for EVERYONE- and that leads us to pursue people unlike us.

*Father, I realize that I often have a difficult time accepting the fact that you also came for people unlike me. Sometimes I have a hard time believing that you love people who think so differently than I do. Keep me from “spiritual elitism” and help me to realize there is no favoritism with you- and that you desire to reach every person. Help me show your love accordingly. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## Day 31: THE Question

**Reading: Matthew 16:1-20**

**Matthew 16:15- “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”**

People have lots of opinions about Jesus. Some say he was a good man, others say he was a prophet. Our faith holds that he is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

But what do you believe?

This is THE question each of us must answer. We must answer “This is what I was taught” or “This is what my parents or grandparents believed.” We must answer “Who do YOU say that Jesus is?”

Have you ever answered that question- really? Have you answered it...but only in an intellectual way? Is the answer that He is Lord a piece of knowledge- or is a life-changing relationship

**180: Many “Christians” would claim Jesus as Savior- that He saves us from sin. However, many of those same people do not submit to Him as Lord- the one who is now in charge. Jesus came as both Savior and Lord- and we do not get Him as one without embracing the other. If He is your Savior, then He must be Lord...or else He is not Savior at all.**

This can be a big gut check for many of us. It calls us to examine our motives and our decisions. It requires us to evaluate what or who we are really living for. It can be scary to look at this- but it can also be the most freeing and life-changing moment we’ll ever experience.

*Jesus, you are not just Savior. You did come to save me from sin, but you also came so that you could be Lord. I want to submit to you as Lord and live my life for your glory. Keep me from taking back the reins and help me to follow you wherever you tell me to go and to do whatever you tell me to do- regardless of the cost. In Your name, amen.*

## **Day 32: A Call To Die**

**Reading: Matthew 16:21-28**

**Matthew 16:24-25**

**24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.**

I love my rocking chair. I take awesome naps in it. A 3-hour nap is a thing of beauty. It's warm, comfortable, and pretty amazing.

Jesus did not call you or me to take up our rocking chair when we follow Him. He called us to take up a cross. He didn't call us to comfort. He called us to die.

Following Jesus is quite literally the laying down of your own life. Few, if perhaps any of us reading this will have that mean literal martyrdom. But this isn't just talking about

your physical life. It means laying down your desires, your hopes, your dreams and your goals- all for the sake of embracing what Jesus wants for you.

**180: Evaluate your life- are you living for you- or are you living for Jesus? Have you been following Jesus on your terms- or on His? Have you come to the place that you are sacrificing something for the sake of following Him? Because if we haven't had to give something up as a result of following Jesus, we are not yet truly following Him.**

We shy away from that because it cuts at the core of our existence. We think it means giving up what we often consider to be the most important things in life. And yet Jesus said that in doing this, we will find true life.

*Father, I often want my comfort over Christ. I repent for that. I struggle to lay down my hopes, dreams, and desires for your sake. Show me what I need to walk away from- and empower me with your Holy Spirit to do so, knowing that in laying down my life- my goals and my dreams- I actually come alive. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 33: Listen**

**Reading: Matthew 17:1-13**

**Matthew 17:5- While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

There's a difference between hearing and listening. I experience this occasionally when I'm "multi-tasking." I may be hearing what someone is saying; I might be aware they are talking to me- but I'm not actually listening.

This really gets me in trouble if I do this to my wife, Grace!

If we aren't careful, we can do this with Jesus. We can read His Word...but never really hear it. We can hear preaching...but let it only skim the surface of our souls.

**180: Make a commitment to not just fly through the reading each day. Go through it slowly. Take time to notice things- and you'll discover that God is speaking clearly. Don't just hear (or read)- listen.**

The danger in letting God's Word only skim the surface of our heart is we can deceive ourselves into thinking we're in great shape. After all- we went to church and read the Bible! We must avoid this- or we become nearly immune to what God is actually saying, and when this happens, we miss out on the work God wants to do in our hearts.

*Father, I often fail to listen. Help me slow down to do so. Keep me from being satisfied with a "surface" relationship with you and your word. Give me the patience to be still and listen so that you can speak into my life and work deeply in my heart- and bring about true, lasting change in me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 34: Big Faith**

**Reading: Matthew 17:14-27**

**Matthew 17:20- 20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.**

What does it mean to have "big faith"?

Does it mean you have no fear? Does it mean nothing frightens you? Does it mean that you always trust God and never waver?

Nope.

Faith can be small- as small as a mustard seed (which is pretty tiny). However, Jesus said even small faith can move mountains. That's because faith is not a feeling or sensation. Faith is expressed in steps. Faith- true faith- is taking the next step Jesus puts in front of you- even if you're scared spitless as you do it!

**180: What is Jesus calling you towards right now that you are scared to do? It's ok to be scared. It's ok to be afraid. Faith is not the absence of fear. Faith is obedience in spite of fear. Whatever God is calling you to do, say "Yes"- especially if it scares you.**

Interestingly enough, the way our faith grows is when we keep taking steps. And yet each step is often bigger than the last. Each step is more intimidating than the previous one. I'm not sure we are following Jesus if we ever get to the place where we have no hesitation- because true faith always has an element of the unknown and risk! But true faith says yes- even when the risk is there and the fear along with it!

*Father, make me obedient to what you have called me to right now. It's uncomfortable, and even a little frightening- but I want to say yes. I know you are bigger than my fears, and that if you call me to it you will carry me through it. Give me the faith to act in obedience- and I will trust you with the outcome. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 35: Whatever It Takes- Remove It**

**Reading: Matthew 18:1-20**

#### **Matthew 18:8-9**

**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.**

Imagine you had a poisonous snake in your house. Also imagine you had a child, whether it's your own, a grandchild, or a niece or nephew with you.

What would you do with that snake?

Remove it from the house- and kill it if you could!

This is who we are to deal with sin. Jesus isn't teaching self-harm, but what He is doing is teaching us that we need to take whatever steps necessary to get rid of the things that keep us from coming to Him. Whatever it takes- period.

**180: What keeps you from following Jesus? Don't try to "get control" or "try harder". Chances are the step is to get it out of your life. Get a dumb phone. Get time limits on your apps. Block that number. Move, if you have to. Whatever it takes- get away from it- because nothing is worth getting in between you and Jesus.**

Why don't we do this? Because we often buy the lie that we can handle it. The reality is we cannot. We just aren't that strong- and it's when we convince ourselves that we are that we falter and fail.

*Father, help me take the steps I need to remove \_\_\_\_\_ from my life. Keep me from "playing" with it. Keep me from justifying anything less than utter removal of it. You alone are worth it all, and for that reason, give me the courage to do whatever it takes to cut out of my life that keeps me from you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 36: Let it Go**

**Reading: Matthew 18:21-35**

**Matthew 18:21-22**

**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"**

One of the most difficult things to do in the world is to forgive someone- especially when the hurt is significant.

It's even more difficult when the hurt is repeated. And repeated again. And repeated again.



And yet Jesus made it clear that there is no limitation on how much we should forgive someone. “77 times” is not the limit- it’s a number that communicates “Keep forgiving- even when you think you shouldn’t.”

**180: Who do you need to forgive? We often carry around hurt and resentment in our hearts towards people that have hurt us- and that only hurts us. Forgive them today. And tomorrow. And the next day. Forgiveness is a process- one we never stop.**

Forgiveness doesn’t mean we forget. It may not even mean we cease to be bothered by what was done. What it means is that we refuse to hold it against that person because, after all, Jesus has forgiven the unforgivable in us. We can do no less towards other people- so we forgive and keep on forgiving.

*Father, help me forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for what they did. Help me realize just how much you have forgiven me. I did not deserve your forgiveness, yet you gave it to me anyway. Empower me to “let it go”- and to view \_\_\_\_\_ through your eyes with grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

### **Day 37: One**

**Reading: Matthew 19:1-15**

**Matthew 19:6**

**So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

Marriage is nothing less than two people becoming one new unit. Sure, each spouse has their own unique personalities, desires, and preferences. However, in God’s eyes, they are no longer two- they are one.

This is one of the truths that, if embraced, can transform a marriage. The way you treat your spouse is the way you are treating yourself. When you hurt your spouse, you are also hurting you. When you disrespect your spouse, you disrespect your spouse. When you are unloving towards your spouse, you are unloving towards yourself.

Realizing that God has made you one will begin to change the way you treat your spouse- because you realize that to work or act against your spouse doesn't just hurt them- it hurts you.

**180: Have you considered this before? Have you realized the effect your treatment of your spouse has on you? How are you treating your spouse? Today, discuss with your spouse what they would like you to change- and then listen and apply it!**

This isn't going to be easy. None of us like change. But when we realize that our lives aren't our own and they are tied up with our spouse, we realize that our spouse's happiness is also tied to our own- and we will begin to realize that God's desire is for us to pursue our spouse's happiness!

*Father, help me realize that my spouse and I are one. Forgive me for when I have been disrespectful and unloving towards my spouse. Change my attitude and actions, and make me teachable enough to listen and apply what they ask me to change so that we can have a marriage that thrives for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 38: What's Behind The ONE Thing?**

**Reading: Matthew 19:16-30**

**Matthew 19: 20-21**

**20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"<sup>21</sup> Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."**

Jesus saw this young man's problem: he loved money more than Jesus. This young man was happy to live a nice, moral lifestyle- but he didn't want to give up his stuff.

What's the ONE THING that consistently pulls you away from Jesus And what's really behind it? Why is it that you can't put the phone down? Why is it you have a hard time reading Scripture? Why is it you don't want to be involved in a LifeGroup?

For the young man, the one thing wasn't so much money: it was his sense that money was his security. It was his belief that his riches gave him the security he needed- and he could not let it go.

**180: Get beyond the behavior- what's driving the thing that keeps you from fully following Jesus? Insecurity? Self-righteousness? Pride? Ask God to help you identify it...and how to deal with it. Then do the opposite of what the young man did- obey Jesus.**

This is often a challenging task. It's easy to identify behavior. It's harder to identify the motives and the underlying root cause behind our behavior. Yet it's only in identifying those root causes that can result in our freedom from a spiritual prison and enable us to follow Jesus more closely.

*Father, the thing I often run to instead of you is \_\_\_\_\_. Show me why. I know the behavior is wrong, but I'm not sure I know why I do it. Open up my heart and show me my motives. Expose my sin, correct it; replace the lies I've believed with your truth so that I can follow you closely for all my life. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 39: Upside Down**

#### **Reading Matthew 20:1-19**

##### **Matthew 20:16**

**16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."**

We often believe the great theologian Ricky Bobby- "If you're not first, you're last."

But Jesus turned that on its head. He said the last would be first- and the first would be last. What's He talking about?

Perhaps this is most practically applied around people. We all tend to want to be first- first in line, the highest paid employee, the winner of the tournament. And there's nothing wrong with pursuing excellence. However, true "winning" is not in being first. It's in choosing Christ- even if that means sacrificing "first place".

**180: Choosing Jesus, is always winning- even if it looks like losing in the moment. How do you need to choose what looks like “last” today, knowing it will be “first” in the long run?**

The bottom line is this: do we value Jesus over “winning”? Do we value Jesus more than being seen, promoted, or successful? Do we ultimately value Jesus more than everything else we could “win” in this life?

*Father, I’m often driven by a desire to succeed. I know you want me to show your glory in what I do, but often I slip into promoting myself over you. Help me to choose Jesus over “being first.” Keep me from valuing what this world has to offer over You. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

#### **Day 40: True Greatness**

**Reading: Matthew 20:20-34**

**Matthew 20:26-27**

**Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

All of us, I believe, have a desire to be great. In our culture, that means you have a lot of friends, have a lot of money, have a lot of popularity, and so on. It means other people look to you and attend to you.

But Jesus indicated that true greatness was found in being a servant. Jesus even said that being first meant being a slave- being someone whose primary focus was serving the needs of other people.

That’s not something we like to hear- and yet it’s exactly what Jesus said was true. The greatest legacies will not be those who were served, but the ones who served.

**180: How can you serve the people around you today? Think in terms of home, work, and church. Begin looking for opportunities to serve- and be a servant.**

Why do we do this? Because this is who Jesus was. Jesus served us by laying down His life for our sin. Our purpose is to show His love to others. For that reason, we show Jesus most clearly when we serve.

*Father, help me be a servant. It's so easy to think about how I want people to meet my needs, when you want me to show you to others. Help me put the needs of others ahead of my own and serve well, just as you, Jesus, served by giving your life for me. In Your name, amen.*

### **Day 41: Get Out of The Way**

**Reading: Matthew 21:1-27**

**Matthew 21:12-13**

**12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”**

If you grew up in church, you probably heard that Jesus’ anger was over the fact that people were “selling” something in the church- and so you shouldn’t sell things in the church lobby.

That wasn’t actually the problem at all. The problem was that the presence of the money changers was in the one place in the temple that Gentiles- the people the Jews considered furthest from God- could come in. The problem wasn’t selling- it was to keep people far from God from getting to Jesus.

Is there any area of your life that keeps someone far from God from seeing Jesus? Maybe it’s the way we act at the office, the way we speak to our spouse or about our spouse, or the way we conduct ourselves online. Jesus has no tolerance for behavior that keeps others from coming to Him- and engaging in such behavior literally “robs” people of their opportunity to see Jesus!

**180: Take an honest evaluation of your life. If you were not a Christian and you saw you, would you want to be like you- would you want to be a “Christian” if you defined “Christian”? Why...or why not?**

That kind of introspection can be exceedingly uncomfortable. None of us is naturally drawn towards it! Yet this can begin the process of God changing us in a powerful way so that we can be used to point others to Him.

*Father, show me the areas of my life that keep other people from seeing you. Keep me from making excuses, and make me humble, teachable, and repentant. Change my life to where it does not make those furthest from you want to stay away from you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 42: Fruitful**

**Reading: Matthew 21: 28- 46**

### **Matthew 21:43**

**“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.**

God wants a people who will be productive- so what does it mean to be productive in God's Kingdom?

It doesn't mean accumulating a bunch of knowledge. It doesn't mean being “religious.” It doesn't mean separating from the rest of the world.

Being productive in God's Kingdom means two things. First, it means our lives begin to display His work in us. We begin to act more like He would. Second, it means our lives result in other people coming to know Jesus.

Anything less is unproductive.

**180: Honestly- is your walk with Jesus productive right now? Are you becoming more like Jesus? Are others- including your family- being pointed to Jesus by you?**

This isn't about creating some sort of checklist. This is all about being close to Jesus. Fruit grows on trees when the tree is healthy- and spiritual fruit grows in us when we are close to Jesus. We don't generate fruit- it grows out of us naturally when we are staying close to Christ.

*Father, show me where I am currently unproductive- and show me how I may have drifted from you. Show me how I have allowed myself to take steps away from you and become unfruitful for your Kingdom. Move me back to where I choose you and pursue you above all else, know that will make me productive for your glory and for the good of others. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Day 43: Who does it belong to?**

**Reading: Matthew 22:1-22**

**Matthew 22:21**

**Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."**

The government can require things from us- like taxes, for instance. The government also determines the speed limit, what the penalty is for breaking at, as well as all the other laws that structure how we live in a day to day society.

When the government does not force us to sin, we are to live under the government's authority.

However, no government can have our ultimate allegiance. That's part of what Jesus is teaching here. Jesus alone gets our ultimate allegiance. Which means that, when the government and God conflict, our obedience is to God alone- regardless of the laws on the books.

**180: Think about this beyond the government in power. Think about political parties. Is it possible that our allegiance is sometimes too often to “the party line” instead of to God? Ask God to examine your politics...and to correct where you may be out of step with God’s Word.**

For some of us, this topic doesn’t bother us. For others of us, it presents something of an irritation- especially when we have strongly held political beliefs. However, at the end of the day, God alone must have our allegiance, and when governments- or parties- that call us to a position that is unbiblical, we must choose Jesus over politics.

*Father, examine my heart and see where I may have chosen the position of my party over you. I repent for when that has caused me to be silent on matters of truth. I repent for when that has led me to a greater passion for my party rather than your purposes. Help me to value Jesus above all else- including politics! In Your name, amen.*

#### **Day 44: Keep It Simple**

**Reading: Matthew 22:23-46**

**Matthew 22:37-40**

**37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

We often miss this in our English Bibles, so a little context helps: For the Jews, there were considered to be 613 commandments. 613! Not just 10- 613! And the religious elite loved to debate which one carried the most weight.

Then Jesus, when asked to weigh in, boils every command in Scripture down to just two- and really only one with two parts: Love God and love people.

Put another way: you can’t love God without loving people. And until you love God, you can’t rightly love people. They are two sides of the same coin- and cannot be split apart.



**180: We often default to “keeping rules”, and it’s exhausting. Jesus simplified the game here- love Him and love others. If you’re loving Him, you’ll love others naturally. So how do we love Him? We live FOR Him. Not to earn His love, but because we already have His love through Jesus.**

In living for God, the natural overflow is loving other people. In fact, if what is coming out of your life is NOT a love for people, then you’ve missed God somewhere along the way.

*Father, as I examine my life, I find that sometimes I do a poor job of loving others. I realize that means I’ve missed you in some way. Show me how I have stopped living for you and begun to live for myself. Convict me of where I’ve been wrong so that I can once again fully live for you and, in the process, show you to others by loving them. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## **Day 45: The Way to the Top**

**Reading: Matthew 23:1-12**

**Matthew 23:12**

**12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**

We live in a “selfie” culture. Photos on Instagram, Facebook, and so on, are often about how many “likes” we can get. While there’s nothing wrong with posting pictures, we rarely take a moment to examine the heart behind it: are we doing it because we want to share what’s happening, or are we sharing what’s happening because we want to say

“Look at how awesome my life is”?

Jesus said that’s the wrong way to greatness.

Jesus taught that the first step to promotion is humility. The first step towards the “top”, so to speak, is to run to the bottom. It’s to put others ahead of yourself; it’s not brash. It has the attitude of a servant.

**180: A gut check when it comes to humility is asking this question and answering honestly: why do I do what I do the way I do it? Is it because I want to help...or because I want others to see me as the hero? Moving towards humility starts with truly being helpful...instead of wanting to be the hero.**

That can be a difficult thing to honestly gauge, can't it? It's easy to disguise almost anything as "I'm just trying to help!" In that case, check your attitude- are you angry when people don't embrace what you're doing or the way you're doing it? If so...it may be because the goal wasn't to be helpful...but to be the hero.

*Father, I confess that I am often proud. I often promote myself rather than serving others. Help me identify the areas in my life where pride has run rampant, and change my heart to be humble so that I can serve others and show the heart of Jesus to them. In Your name, amen.*

#### **Day 46: The Show Doesn't Matter**

**Reading: Matthew 23:13-39**

**Matthew 23:27**

**27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.**

Not everything that looks good is good. I once upon a time was at a Western Sizzlin' Steakhouse and thought I saw a tub of ice cream on the buffet.

Wrong. It was butter. NOT the same!!

Appearances can be deceiving- especially in the church. We can look good, sound the part...and be completely dead inside- just like the Pharisees. They looked great on the outside, but Jesus saw right through the show to their own spiritual deadness.

**180: What's going on behind the scenes when no one is looking? When we aren't trying to "look" Christian or "sound" Christian, what is life really like? Better yet,**

**does the way we treat those closest to us look like the faith we portray on Sunday morning...or not?**

We all have moments where our lives don't match up with what we say; this isn't about perfection. It's about what is generally true about our lives. Do we look what who we say we are...or not?

*Father, there are times- perhaps even seasons- where I have looked good to the casual observer, but I've been faking it. Lord, work in my heart to change my attitude. Root out the sin and idolatry and pride that causes me to say one thing and yet live in another way. Show me what steps to take, and how to get help if that's what it takes. In your name, amen.*

#### **Day 47: That's Not Really Impressive**

**Reading: Matthew 24:1-25**

**Matthew 24:2**

**“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”**

Ever seen a building that obviously used to be VERY impressive...and yet is now little more than a ruin?

This is what happened to the temple the disciples were admiring. About four decades after the disciples admired this building, Jesus' words came true when the Romans came and destroyed it.

What we think is impressive isn't really all that impressive- unless it lasts.

**180: Are we living our lives- or giving our lives to- something that will last permanently? Is what we are living for or giving our life to going to outlive us and matter 100 years from now? That doesn't necessarily mean quit everything and become a missionary (unless Jesus tells you to). What it does mean is refocusing the direction of what we do to where the end goal is the glory of God and the sharing of the Gospel.**

Sometimes this is a challenge to figure out- especially in professions that do not easily lend themselves to sharing our faith. In those cases, simply be the best you can be. Go above and beyond. Be a great servant...and then when people ask "Why?", the door is open to tell them- it's because of Jesus.

*Father, I don't want to give my life to something that doesn't matter. I want to live for you. I want to live a life that ultimately points to you. Show me how to do that. Give me the boldness to speak when the opportunity comes, and empower me to live a life at home, on the job, and with my friends that compels them to ask "why?" In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### **Day 48: God Knows. Don't Worry About It**

**Reading: Matthew 24:26-51**

**Matthew 24:36**

**36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**

There are some things that we don't need to concern ourselves with. That's the point Jesus was making here with His disciples. In fact, Jesus even said that He doesn't know when He's coming back- only the Father does.

It's easy to worry ourselves over things we don't know. It's easy to get into debates about things we cannot know for sure. In those moments, the way to find peace is in one simple fact: God knows.

And if God knows, I don't need to worry about it. I just need to be faithful. I don't have to figure it out.

**180: Is there anything you are trying to "figure out" that you ultimately can't know for sure? Scripture commands us to not worry- but to trust God.**

We often disguise worry as “concern” or “due diligence”, when it’s actually our efforts to control things. We are not in control, and our best efforts at control are little more than an educated guess. However, we can take rest in the fact that God IS in control. Trust Him!

*Father, I worry too much- and it’s because I’m a control freak! Help me to stop worrying. Help me to meditate on the truth that you have everything under control, and in the moments I don’t know what to do or don’t know the answer, help me to remember that I don’t have to figure it out- I just have to be faithful. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

## **Day 49: Stay Ready**

**Reading: Matthew 25:1-13**

**Matthew 25:13**

**“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**

Is Jesus coming back today? Probably not.

Could he come back today? Absolutely!

Followers of Jesus are called to live in a way that reflects this fact. That means we are to be living faithfully each and every day. We are to be living in a way that counts, making the most of the opportunities we have been given.

Whether He comes back today or 1,000 years from now, He IS coming back some day. And on that day, will we be able to say we were faithful and made the most of our opportunities...or that we wasted our lives?

**180: What’s one change you would make if you knew Jesus was coming back today? Who’s one person you would share the Gospel with? Who’s one person you would forgive? Don’t put off that “one” thing- do it today.**

The imminent return of Jesus is meant to move us to action- to not procrastinate faithful obedience. Following Jesus is as simple as doing what He has put in front of you as He gives it to you.

*Father, help me to not put off what you give me to do. It's so easy to say "That can wait until tomorrow," or "I'll do that next time." Give me a sense of urgency that moves me to obey you promptly when you speak. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 50: What's the Goal?**

**Reading: Matthew 25:14-46**

**Matthew 25:21**

**"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'**

I love what the master said to the servant: "Well done, good and FAITHFUL servant!"

What the master commended was not the amount of return the servant received on the investment. What the master commended was the servant's faithfulness to put what was given from the master to work.

This is the goal of following Jesus: faithfulness. It's taking what He has put in your hands right now and doing what He wants you to do with it. We can never control the results- but we can control whether we are faithful.

**180: When we are results driven, we miss the point. When we become results driven, it's easy to begin to justify disobedience in the name of "results." Today, stop thinking so much about the results- and focus, rather, on faithfulness, whether in your marriage, parenting, job, volunteering, and more.**

This is often a challenge for us because faithfulness rarely, if ever, has an immediate payoff. The payoff for faithfulness often waits years and even decades down the road. That requires persistence- and remembering, like we discussed yesterday, that the Master is coming- and we will all stand in front of Him one day.

*Father, make me faithful. Help me to not focus so much on the results of what I do, but to rather focus on faithfulness in the process. Make me the best \_\_\_\_\_ I can be, regardless of whether I see a payoff now, so that you will be glorified through my life and others will be pointed to you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 51: Legacy**

**Reading: Matthew 26:1-30**

**Matthew 26:13**

**Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”**

What is a real legacy?

I would argue that a real legacy is made up of two parts: 1) Does it outlive you? 2) Does it matter in eternity? That is, did it point other people to Jesus?

Sometimes it's simple moments in time that define our legacy. It's not our career or our relationships- but the time when we went out of our comfort zone to worship Jesus. In that sense, you could argue that the greatest legacies are made when we're not even aware it's happening.

The woman in this story is known all over the world- and countless people have responded to the Gospel through this story. She didn't set out to create a legacy- it just happened because of a moment in her life where she set her mind to worship Jesus- regardless of what anyone else thought.

Her legacy not only outlived her- it has pointed people to Jesus she never even met!

**180: Yes- faithfulness is the goal. Yes, we want to live our lives in a way that matters in eternity. But the way we best do this is not so much by “trying to build a legacy.” We do this by simply being faithful worshippers of Jesus “in the moment”, because a legacy can be built in a moment.**

That changes the game for us. We often think of legacies as a long list of accomplishments and achievements rather than moments. But if a moment is all it takes, then that moves us from trying to “build” something to simply “being” someone in the moment- a faithful worshipper of Jesus.

*Father, help me realize that any moment can be so significant that it defines my legacy. With that knowledge, make me a faithful worshipper of you moment by moment. Help me BE who you want me to be, and impact whoever you will through that. May my focus be worshipping you- knowing that doing so always leaves an impact in some way. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 52: Follow the Plan**

**Reading: Matthew 26:31-56**

**Matthew 26:52-53**

**“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?**

It was no doubt admirable for the disciples to (initially) leap to Jesus' defense when the soldiers came to arrest Him. However, Jesus told them to put the sword back. Why?

Because Jesus was committed to the Father's plan. And the Father's plan meant the cross. There were no shortcuts.

God's plan for our lives also involves a cross- and there are no shortcuts. We try to get around this through our planning or through making decisions that don't really line up



with God's Word. But what Jesus teaches here is this: stick to the plan. Yes, it will be painful. But the resurrection is on the other side!

**180: Where are you trying to take a shortcut in your life right now? Where are you trying to get around the difficulty of what God has called you to? Don't take the shortcut. Go through the cross.**

This is not easy because we like to avoid pain. I get it- especially as a guy with a very low pain tolerance. However, we have to realize that when Jesus calls us through pain, real life is on the other side. Stick to His plan.

*Father, I am prone to take shortcuts- because I don't like pain. I'm like the disciples here- trying to put a stop to something you call me to go through. Help me to trust you even when the cross is right in front of me. Help me to trust you when your leading brings me to pain. And help me to trust that you will turn it all out for GOOD on the other side. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 53: We're All Capable Of This**

**Reading: Matthew 26:57-75**

#### **Matthew 26:75**

**Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.**

One of the most important things to recall about sin is that sin will take you further than you thought- or want- to go- and quicker than you thought you'd get there.

Just hours before, Peter swore he'd follow Jesus to death. Then he denied him three times.

We are all capable of doing the thing we never thought we'd do- and only by staying close to Jesus and His family will we avoid it.

**180: What the thing you keep saying “I’ll never do that”? That’s often a red flag that you’re already on the path to doing that very thing. We have to honestly evaluate where we’re going- and get off the path to destruction before it’s too late.**

This isn’t a call to fear- it’s a call to wisdom and humility. Humility recognizes we are all capable of falling. Wisdom recognizes that it’s better to not trust ourselves and stay as far from sin as possible.

*Father, help me to honestly evaluate where I’m at. I often catch myself insisting “I’ll never do that”- and then catching myself taking steps towards that very thing! Help me evaluate myself humbly, realizing that, but for your grace, I will walk headlong into sin. Keep me close to you so that I may avoid sin and glorify you in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

#### **Day 54: Yes...It's On You**

**Reading: Matthew 27: 1-31**

**Matthew 27:24**

**When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”**

There’s something in each of us that LOVES to pass the buck. We often love to avoid responsibility and make it seem like someone else is the responsible party.

Especially when it involves our own mistakes.

Pilate tries to do that here- knowing full well that he had the ability to set Jesus free. Like Pilate, blame-shifting eases our guilt- but it doesn’t set us free. Pilate couldn’t set Jesus free because he craved approval and he wanted to protect his position.

What are you blame shifting for?

**180: When we sin, we need to own it. Until we own it, we can't get free. Blame-shifting only blinds us to our own inabilities and failures. Accepting responsibility shows us the path to not just the right choice- but freedom.**

Granted, it was God's plan for Jesus to be crucified. However, that doesn't alleviate Pilate's sinful act of injustice. We must never attempt to use God's knowledge of past, present, and future as a further attempt to shift the blame off ourselves. We must accept responsibility for our actions- and repent.

*Father, I have often shifted the blame to others for when I have \_\_\_\_\_. I am sorry and I repent for this. Help me to own my sin. Help me to take responsibility for my actions so that you can show me the way forward into freedom. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Day 55: Forsaken For Our Sake**

**Reading: Matthew 27:32-66**

**Matthew 27:46**

**About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).**

No one likes to feel abandoned or left alone. No one wants to be neglected and shut out.

This is precisely what we face apart from the work of Jesus. Without Christ, God rightly- because of our sin- shuts us out from His presence. Without Christ, we face a future where we are abandoned in hell because of our sin.

That's what makes the Good News so GOOD!

On the cross, Jesus was forsaken by the Father for our sake. On the cross, the Father turned away from the Son because the Son became sin. Jesus became everything that makes us deserving of God's rejection.

And He did that so that we could be accepted by the Father- not on the basis of our actions, but on the basis of Jesus' work for our sake!

**180: Have you ever seriously considered the significance of this moment? Often we don't, because we often cling to some sense that "I'm a pretty decent person." Reality is we are not. Reality is we deserve God's rejection- and yet in Christ, the way is made for us to be accepted by the Father into His family! Realizing that will change how we live because we realize we have been treated better than we deserve.**

God treated Jesus like we should have been treated so that in Christ we could be treated as God's children. When we recognize that is who we are- that "child of God" is our identity- that is when we begin to live like Jesus would.

*Father, I realize now the depths of your grace shown to me. You are so much better to me than I deserve- infinitely so! Jesus, thank you for becoming my sin so that I could become a child of the Father. Help me live according to THAT identity! In Jesus' name, amen.*

## **Day 56: Why We Follow**

**Reading: Matthew 28:1-15**

**Matthew 28:6**

**He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.**

Why do we follow Jesus? Is it because of what he said? Is it because of the example he gave us?

Those are important- but they do not define why we, nor the first disciples, followed Jesus.

We follow Jesus for one primary reason: the fact that He came back to life! We follow Jesus because He said He would die and rise again- and then He did exactly that!

**180: Basing our faith in the resurrection of Jesus ultimately moves our faith from a “position” (i.e. what Jesus taught) to a “Person”- Jesus Himself. It’s faith in the Person of Jesus- not the positions He taught- that saves us. And it’s faith in the Person of Jesus as Lord and God that moves us to give everything to Him.**

If our faith is only based on what Jesus taught, then we will neglect to follow Jesus when what He taught conflicts with what we want. On the other hand, when we follow Jesus based on who He IS, then we move towards willing to lay it all down for His sake.

*Jesus, I believe you rose from the dead. I see that, in doing so, you proved yourself to be Lord and God. You proved there is nothing in this universe greater than you- and not even death could defeat you. You are greater, and you alone are worthy of my life and devotion. Help me live in the light of that truth. In your name, amen.*

**Day 57: Let 'Em Know!**

**Reading: Matthew 28:16-20**

**Matthew 28:19-20**

**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

When something awesome happens, we don’t keep it a secret. Whether it’s getting engaged, having a child, getting a promotion; we always share the good news.

The resurrection of Jesus is the best news possible, because it proves that Jesus made a way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be brought back to God- even though we

deserve punishment. It proves that Jesus has made a way for us to be saved from sin and hell.

That deserves to be shared!

**180: Our greatest purpose in life is two-fold: to know Jesus and to help others know Jesus. Who is it in your life that needs to know Jesus? Text them and invite them to church this coming Sunday!**

Why do we often neglect this? It could be because we've forgotten how good the good news was to us at first. Never forget where you were before Jesus, because that memory keeps fresh in our mind the goodness of the Good News and moves us to share it with others!

*Father, thank you for saving me from where I was. Don't let me ever forget that! Your grace truly is amazing and I want to share it with those around me. Give me the boldness to do so, and make me sensitive to the opportunities you place in front of me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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