



SAMPLE

FOUR SEVENS

A 28-DAY DEVOTIONAL EXPERIMENT

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Devotional Booklet
82 pages

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GROWING MOVEMENTS SERIES

A 28 DAY

DEVOTIONAL EXPERIMENT

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MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

BY TOM HUDZINA



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Four Sevens

Written by Tom Hudzina

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By TOM HUDZINA

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Preface

I remember the first time I thought about reading the entire Bible. I was sitting in the back row of a church listening to one of the few people whose walk with God really impressed me. He said, “If you want to say you know God, then you need to know God’s story. And if you want to know God’s story, you have to read the entire thing. Knowing God means knowing his story.”

The statement stuck with me. At the time, I was in desperate need of knowing God, his story, and how my story had anything to do with his.

But attempting to read the Bible cover to cover can feel like jumping into a marathon without training. Pretty soon your legs start to cramp, your lungs feel as helpful as a pair of flattened soda cans, and you either limp off the course or finish with a time more in keeping with the America’s Cup than the Boston Marathon. This was what my frustrated, first attempt at some kind of a daily time with God felt like.

I would not return again to Mount Sinai and significant face-to-face time with God for

a while. But then, toward the end of my sophomore year in college, a friend of mine—another Christian on campus who knew I was a believer—asked me, “How are your quiet times going?”

To which I responded, “My what?” The term “quiet time” evoked nothing for me, except perhaps a vague memory of lying on a Snoopy mat after a lunch of P, B, & J and a pint of 2 percent milk in kindergarten.

But with a little encouragement and guidance, I began having my own daily ... well, quiet time. And it has completely revolutionized my walk with God.

So what’s a quiet time? Well, it says in Scripture that Jesus would often withdraw to a quiet place in order to pray. “Very early in the morning,” says Mark 1:35, “while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (While admittedly quiet time might sound a little juvenile, as you read this verse, what else would you call it? Solitary time? That would sound like a prison sentence, so we’ll stick with quiet time.) During this daily quiet time, Jesus habitually removed himself from the busyness of life and spent time in intimate communion with his Father.

If Jesus needed this time apart with the Father, it would seem logical to assume we need it just as much, if not more so. Let’s define quiet time as “a point during each day when we remove ourselves from the busyness of schoolwork, dorm life, and the ever-increasing demands of Facebook to spend time praying, reading God’s Word, and quietly listening to what God has to say to us.” As it took someone to kick-start my quiet times, so I’m going to do everything I can here to help you make this a part of your daily routine and establish a habit that will carry you through college and beyond.

Consider me a guide. While I cannot wake you up and get you out of bed for your quiet time, I will walk with you through it and share some things that should be helpful—things I’m grateful someone took the time to share with me. Each day we’ll read a passage from Scripture and meditate on it. I’ll point out a few things that are obvious and then a few things that are not so obvious.

While reading the entire Bible is a noble goal, it’s not where we’re going to start. We’re not going to be running a marathon; we’re going to take a short jog. We’re going to make our way through just a single book, the Gospel of Luke, and even here we’re going to do some skipping around. A simple undertaking, but one more inclined to success. Rather than ordering the triple patty bacon cheeseburger, we’re going to go with a snack wrap and Diet Coke.

We’ll spend twenty-eight glorious days together developing a habit of spending time in God’s Word and talking with him. They say it takes about twenty-one days to establish a habit, so—who knows?—maybe you won’t even need me for the last week. But either way, I’ll be here for you.

THE FOUR SEVENS TEMPLATES

Once we get into the twenty-eight devotions, you'll find that they follow a regular pattern. Something I selected randomly, pulling it out of the air? No. Believe it or not, I used some well-thought-out templates for constructing the devotions. And these are templates that I think you could benefit from understanding and turning into a habit.

I'm talking about templates for:

Bible Study

Prayer

Quiet Times

A TEMPLATE FOR BIBLE STUDY

When one is studying a passage of Scripture, a basic but helpful pattern to follow is the threefold process of observation, interpretation, and application.

Observation

This is pretty straightforward: observe what the passage is saying and describing.

First, read through a portion of Scripture and then go back and make some initial observations about it: Who are the characters? What's going on? Where is this taking place? Revisit the part of your brain that houses all of that literary criticism stuff your English teacher went on and on about while you doodled with your new four-color ballpoint pen. As a quick refresher, remember to ask yourself some basic who-what-when-where observational questions:

WHO is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters?

WHAT is the subject or event covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, event, or teaching?

WHEN do/will the events occur or did/will something happen to someone?

WHERE did or will this happen? Where was it said?

WHY is something being said or mentioned? Why would/will this happen? Why at that time and/or to this person/people?

HOW will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

I can never remember the "how," because it rebelliously begins with an h instead of a w. Maybe it's the same for you. If so, that's okay. This is just a general template; it's not meant to be a science or a straitjacket. Once you get a feel for some of these questions, try to keep an eye out for key words or phrases, repeated words, contrasts and comparisons, and terms of summary and conclusions ("so that," "for this reason," and so on).

Interpretation

Often observation slides right into interpretation. But strictly speaking, observation refers to trying to understand what's being said, while interpretation refers to understanding the overall meaning.

From what you've learned in your observation of the text, you are trying to discern a primary meaning of the passage—what the biblical author was seeking to communicate and what God was seeking to communicate through that biblical author. A particularly fruitful way to pull these things out of the passage is to ask questions such as "What sinful, broken, or fallen condition is being addressed or corrected by the passage?" "What is the deeper sin beneath the behavior?" and "What prompted the author to write this passage?" Keeping these questions in mind can help you uncover the primary meaning of the text.

Application

So, how does the passage apply to you and to others? And what are some actions you need to take in order to apply God's Word directly to your life?

Let me suggest something here. I think our reflections tend to skip along the surface level of behavior or habits that need changing. This is okay, but often a more significant application resides at the level of our relating to God—our experiencing his grace or trusting in his character or promises. In light of this, I like to pray through certain questions that help me to apply what I've been reading to my walk with God.

God, what are you trying to say to me through this passage?

In what ways am I looking to find life in things besides you, Lord?

In what ways am I seeking to earn your favor rather than live by grace?

What do my actions suggest that I'm wrongly believing about your character, our relationship, and what you've said in your Word?

In what ways do we need to be more intimate in our relationship?

In what way is Jesus the answer to my problem?

I particularly like thinking about the last one: In what way does Jesus provide an answer or solution to my sin problem? It's hard to get into too much theological trouble with a question like this.

In the daily devotions that follow, I've tried to draw out some key observations for you. I'm going to map out a little of this process so you can get the hang of it and feel confident that at any time you want to just skip class (though I'm not condoning this) and go and have a quiet time, you'll be able to get some quality insight from the Word.

A TEMPLATE FOR PRAYER

When I spend time reading Scripture, I often find that I have an intense desire to talk with God before I'm even finished reading the passage. I'll read about God's mercy and want to thank him for his mercy. Or I'll read something about God's power and glory and want to tell him again how awesome he is. Sometimes God's holiness comes through the passage and I'll feel the need to confess some sin that comes to my mind or some attitude I've had hidden in my heart that doesn't reflect his character.

By spending time in God's Word, we open ourselves up to his voice and he can speak to us directly—something he often does.

Prayer is a natural response to God's work in our life. A helpful model for me as I respond to God in prayer is the ACTS model: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

- Ⓐdoration: Telling God how great he is, why he's great (merciful, kind, and so on), and how much we love him for it.
- Ⓒonfession: Acknowledging to God any known sin that is displeasing to him so that we can come to him unhindered, completely surrendered and cleansed.
- Ⓓhanksgiving: Thanking God for his grace and forgiveness in our lives, and thanking him for all the things he's done for us and given to us.
- Ⓔupplication: Asking God for things that we want.

Let me give you some reassurance about this last piece of the puzzle: supplication. Once your heart and mind are in alignment with God, it's okay to go ahead and ask him for

stuff—personal stuff, physical stuff, an A on your statistics paper, whatever. He wants you to come to him with everything. There's nothing too big, nothing too small, so ask away, no matter how ridiculous you think it sounds. And the closer you grow to God through praying and reading Scripture, the better you will get at discerning his will for you, at knowing what he wants you to pray for. This is prayer that moves mountains.

Using this pattern of ACTS has helped me when I've not had the desire to pray. I've had to jump-start with ACTS when I've been confused, weary, sad, depressed, and outright weak. I just say to myself, Okay, adoration, right. Then I begin to pray: "God, you are greater than I am." On many an occasion, ACTS has guided me into an intimate time with the Lord when an intimate time with the Lord seemed impossible.

A TEMPLATE FOR QUIET TIMES

The template for our quiet times, then, is as simple as combining our templates for studying the Scripture and our ACTS template for prayer. But with one little nuance: sandwiching your Scripture reading between the prayer so that you're praying before and after.

It looks like this:

1. TALK TO GOD

Adoration: "Lord, I praise you for ... (some quality of attribute of God)."

Confession: "Lord, forgive me for ... (for some sin or shortcoming)."

2. LISTEN TO GOD

Prayerfully *read* a passage. What does it say?

Prayerfully *reflect* on its meaning. What does it mean?

Prayerfully *apply* it to life. What does it mean for me?

3. TALK TO GOD

Thanksgiving: "Lord, I thank you for ... (some specific blessing)."

Supplication: "Lord, I ask you for ... (requests for yourself and others)."

Talk to God, listen to God, and then talk to God again. It's that easy.

If you get used to this basic template and get used to meeting with God every day, you'll be feeling closer to God, living in his grace, growing in holiness, maturing in your understanding of his Word, experiencing his forgiveness—rewarding stuff. But, remember, the key to all of this is creating the habit and being intentional. Make time each day when this routine can and will take place.

YOUR COMMITMENT

Okay, let's make a covenant, or agreement, with God that for the next twenty-eight days we'll take a journey together. We will develop the habit of spending time with him, consistently and with expectation.

I COMMIT MYSELF TO

this experiment of developing a habit of spending consistent time with the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, and for next twenty-seven days, I make this commitment to you, Lord, to:

:: spend thirty minutes each day talking with you, reading your Word, and writing out my thoughts and feelings in response to your Spirit

:: ask one other person in my life to pray for me and to keep me accountable to this commitment I've made to you

:: attend a fellowship each week where people are excited about you and serving you on a daily basis

DATE: _____

SIGNED: _____

AN INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

THE BOOK OF LUKE IS WHAT SOME MIGHT CALL THE GOSPEL FOR EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD. ITS NARRATIVE IS THE STORY OF GOD, HIS REDEMPITIVE PLAN BEING PLAYED OUT FOR ALL TO SEE IN THE PERSON AND ACTIONS OF HIS SON, JESUS. JESUS IS THE CENTRAL CHARACTER IN THIS GOSPEL, AND LUKE'S GOAL, AS STATED FROM THE FIRST FEW VERSES, IS TO "REASSURE YOU OF THE TRUTH OF ALL YOU WERE TAUGHT." THE TRUTH BEING WHO JESUS IS, WHAT HE DID, AND WHY HE DID IT. LUKE IS ESSENTIALLY SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT AND SETTING US ON THE TRAJECTORY OF GOD'S REDEMPITIVE STORY.

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK YOU'RE GOING TO FIND THAT LUKE HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S DESIRE THAT ALL MEN MIGHT BE SAVED. AND OF COURSE WE'RE NOT TALKING JUST THE MEN, AS IN ADULT MALE PERSONS; WE'RE TALKING "MEN" IN THE SENSE OF HUMANKIND—MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN. AND NOT JUST A PRIVILEGED FEW WHO CAN GET TO THE MORNING SERVICE TO HEAR THIS GOOD NEWS. IT'S FOR THE ONES WHO SKIP CHURCH AS WELL, WHO CAN'T MAKE IT BECAUSE THEY'RE WORKING THE SHIFT DURING THOSE HOURS, OR WHO, QUITE FRANKLY, HAVE BEEN LEFT OUT OF THE RELIGIOUS LOOP FOR SO LONG THAT THEY'RE SKEPTICAL ABOUT ANYTHING OR ANYONE SAYING ANYTHING ABOUT GOD HAVING A PLAN FOR THEIR LIVES. IT'S FOR THE POOR, THE HELPLESS, THE OUTCAST, THE FORSAKEN. EVERYONE. GOD'S SALVATION IS FOR ALL. HAVE I MADE THIS CLEAR YET?

IN THIS REDEMPITIVE NARRATIVE, WE FIND THAT LUKE IS SHOWING US HOW JESUS LIVED, WHAT HE DID, AND WHY HE DID IT. HE SHOWS US WHO JESUS IS IN THE DETAILS OF HIS MINISTRY HERE ON EARTH, AND HE REVEALS TO US JESUS AS A RADICAL NEW TEACHER WHO SAYS, "YOU'VE LIVED LONG ENOUGH UNDER A HEAVY BURDEN. LET ME SHOW YOU A NEW WAY TO LIVE THAT BRINGS YOU AND OTHERS PEACE." JESUS IS STEEPED IN THE OLD TRADITIONS AND YET GIVES FRESH AND LIFE-GIVING INSIGHTS INTO WHAT THE LAW AND PROPHETS WERE POINTING TO. HE IS SHOWING US THAT THERE IS A NEW WAY TO LIVE LIFE, AND HE IS SAYING THAT TO BE A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS TO BRING GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PURPOSES TO THE REST OF THE WORLD, NOT JUST TO THE SUBURBS OF JERUSALEM. AND, WHAT'S MORE, WE CAN BE A PART OF THIS PROCESS AND PRIVILEGE.

ENJOY THE SHOW!

Talk to God

Take time to praise God for some quality of his, such as his grace or mercy or majesty. Then confess any sin or shortcoming you need forgiveness for.

Listen to God

God does the impossible. Read Luke 1:1-38.

I want to say, here on day one of this month-long experiment, that by day twenty-eight, you, too, will be talking directly to angels. But that would be a lie and not a good way to start our month of quiet times. You probably wouldn't want to see an angel either, because when they appear, it's usually to convey a rather dangerous plan that you'll be in the center of, as was the case with Mary.

When the angel approaches Mary with news of God's plan and her role in that plan, she responds with the words "May it be so." It sounds like such a simple and obvious response, but what is not explicit in the passage are the implications of what Mary was saying yes to.

Mary was saying yes to public shame, the label of adulteress, the likelihood of her husband divorcing her, a possible future of raising a child by herself, a stigma that would remain upon her family for generations, and even the chance of being stoned to death—all the stuff that came with having a child out of wedlock sometime around AD 1. And whatever the consequences, they would only have been compounded by using the unbelievable alibi of a divine conception.

But in spite of all these factors, and knowing full well what she was inviting into her life, she said, "May it be so."

Mary sets the bar high for those of us who desire to say the same thing to God.

:: In your mind what would be the hardest thing God could ask you to do? Would you do it?

:: Why do you think the angel told her about Elizabeth, her cousin?

:: The passage states, "The power of the Most High will come upon you." What does this say about God?

:: How does it make you feel that the power of the Most High, his Holy Spirit, dwells in you?

:: When was the last time you said you would do something for God only to find yourself not following through on that later on? What might have been behind that decision not to follow through?

:: Mary was willing to trust God in his plan for her. Where do you have a hard time trusting God?

:: What areas of your life where you are doing well in trusting God?

:: What has God done in your life that you thought was impossible?

:: What are the nearly impossible things coming up in your life that you need to bring before the Lord?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for some specific insight or blessing he's given you. Afterward, pray through your requests for yourself and others, being sensitive to what God might want you to ask for.

02

Talk to God

Praise God for his goodness and faithfulness. Ask God to bring to mind any areas of sin that may be hindering your fellowship with him.

Listen to God

Glory to God. Read Luke 2:1-20.

Shepherds minding their own business, quite removed from any rumors of a pregnant virgin, were the first ones told of the greatest news ever to be proclaimed. Go figure.

It seems that God's greatest pleasure is rooted in the birth of a Savior for all mankind. "Good news of great joy," the angel says, "because a Savior has been born for you." Why is this such "good news of great joy," anyway? Well, maybe it would help to consider the opposite: what would have been bad news of great sorrow?

A religious rulebook with another eight thousand commandments touching down in Bethlehem—that would have been bad news. By contrast, the good news (that which roused the shepherds out of their midnight grog) is that God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves by sending his Son to die for our sins. Good news is that salvation is by grace, a gift wrapped in a diaper, lying in a manger.

Shepherds care about few things. Food for the sheep, a safe place to lay their heads, and making sure all the flock are accounted and cared for. Perhaps God wanted to share the good news first with those who could understand some of the simple things that were on his own heart.

:: What do you think is so terrifying about the glory of the Lord? Do you ever think that it would be fearful to stand before God?

:: The angels proclaim that there is "peace on earth for men on whom God's favor rests." What in your life keeps you from believing that God's favor rests on you?

:: The birth of Jesus is described as "good news" and "great joy." Sometimes we lose that sense of joy and excitement over our Savior. What has stolen that joy from your heart?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for all of his blessings, mercy, and grace expressed to you through the gospel. Then present him with any and all of your prayers, petitions, and requests.



Talk to God

Praise God as you read through one of the Psalms, echoing the words to God and making them your own. Then go back through yesterday in your mind and ask God to bring to the surface any sin that needs to be confessed.

Listen to God

God follows through on his promise. Read Luke 2:21-52.

Way back in history, God made a promise to an otherwise insignificant man from Iraq by the name of Abraham. What made Abraham significant was God's promise to him: that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars and that through him God would bless all nations. That's quite a promise! And for centuries God's people waited for the fulfillment of that promise.

Simeon is an old man who had faithfully trusted God to increase Abraham's descendants and bless the world through them. We might say that Simeon represents all the generations of old men, waiting and watching for the fulfillment of God's promises to them. Waiting for their Messiah. They've seen it all, they've waited patiently, and now here it is. The time has come.

At the sight of Jesus, the Holy Spirit leads Simeon in praising God for what he has done. God follows through on his promises. And he shows people he's done this.

:: Simeon it seems has been faithful for years to worship and follow God. The text says, "The Holy Spirit was on him." What evidence do you think there was that the Holy Spirit was with him?

:: What did the Holy Spirit actually do in this circumstance? Can you see the different roles the Spirit played and how he might still be playing such roles today in your life?

:: Praise filled with truth seems to be the biblical response to seeing God fulfill his promises. What is your typical response when you see God fulfill a promise in your life?

:: What promises are you waiting for God to fulfill in your growth?

:: What promises do you have trouble believing God will follow through on?

:: Jesus is just a baby in this passage, but what do we find out about him here even at just eight days old?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for some of the specific promises that he has given you in Christ, such as his promise of eternal life. Then present him with your requests, those things that weigh heavy on your mind and heart.

Boy, that chaffs.

DAY

04

Talk to God

Praise God for his justice, judgment, and holiness and for the fact that he cannot tolerate or even be in the presence of sin. Confess to him those areas where you fall short of his holiness.

Listen to God

Beware the unquenchable fire. Read Luke 3:1-20.

You know what's missing from preaching these days? Fire and brimstone. I'm serious. If you were to chart how many times a week you actually hear about hell, and not in the profane sense, I bet the number would hover somewhere around zero.

In the best sense of the term, John the Baptist is politically incorrect. He tells it like it is. There is a holy God, and he is beginning to separate those who love him and follow him from those who don't. A winnowing fork was used to throw wheat stalks in the air. The heavy grains of wheat would fall to the ground, where they could be gathered into bags, while the light and useless covering would drift into piles nearby. The farmer would gather what was useful (the wheat) and burn what was not (the chaff).

Prophets were the voice of God, telling of things to come and things that needed changing ... now ... immediately ... or else. John is proclaiming in no uncertain terms, "The Messiah is coming, and he's ready to clean house, so you had better straighten up the place." John seems immune to social pressure, not fazed in the least by what people think of him (he wore camel skins and ate locusts—how could he?). We should be more Johnlike in this way, and we should heed his prophetic summons to align our hearts with God's.

:: Are you chaff or wheat? Seriously, this is an important question and sometimes it's good to reflect on the product of our lives. Would you be gathered for usefulness or burned for, well, not being so useful?

:: Who do you know who might be considered chaff? What does your heart feel toward them?

:: Fire is a cleansing agent; it burns off the impurities in precious metals and leaves behind the pure, uncontaminated metal. How does Jesus cleanse us with fire? What impurities have been or need to be purged from your life?

:: How does John portray humility toward the coming Messiah? How can you approach Jesus with the same humility?

:: Jesus is the one whom John is speaking of in this passage. What do we find out about Jesus and his role through John?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for his discipline in your life and for all the ways in which he lovingly corrects and convicts you. Pray for God to grow you in holiness and purity; pray for those areas where you want to be transformed.

05

Talk to God

Look around the room and see what comes to mind as to things you can praise God for. Then confess the ways you've yielded to temptation, where you've wanted and chosen to give in to sin.

Listen to God

Faithfulness under temptation. Read Luke 4:1-13.

I would probably do anything after spending forty days in the wilderness without food.

One time, after a weeklong backpacking trip in the Rockies with my buddy, we arrived in Aspen craving anything that used to be alive, so long as it was piled with large amounts of cheese and condiments. I'd have sold my arm for food.

Temptation is strongest when there is an overwhelming desire for something that the body craves, such as food or affection. So, after fasting and praying for forty nights, Jesus is approached by Satan, who tries to tempt him into doubting the Father's provision and plan. He essentially puts the tastiest, cheesiest burger in front of him and says, "With or without fries?"

It's important to note that in the midst of temptation, trials, and weakness, Jesus turns to God's Word, the only thing on the planet that's nailed down.

Growth can't happen without hardship, and hardship will always prove the faithfulness of God's Word. If we expect to grow, we should expect hard times, we should expect God's Word to always prove true, and we should expect to be tempted to think otherwise.

:: Why would Satan choose a time when Jesus was weak physically to tempt him?

:: What temptations come to you when you are physically weak?

:: In what ways can you identify with Jesus' temptation (fame, power, food or material things)?

:: In what areas have you failed to resist temptation? Why do you think that was?

:: Jesus emerged from the desert ready to go where the Father would lead him. How willing are you to go into the desert to prepare for God's calling on your life?

:: Having trials in our lives isn't something we look forward to. What is your current attitude about trials and hardship in your life?

:: What hardships have caused growth in your life recently?

:: In following Jesus' example, how can you make the Scripture more integral to your life?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to change, develop, or create in your life that will empower you to respond as Jesus does?

Talk to God

Thank God for all of the ways he has protected you and sustained you in recent trials and temptations. Among your requests, ask God to protect you from Satan and keep you from temptation.

Talk to God

Praise God for some quality or attribute of his (for example, faithfulness, mercy, or compassion). Then take some time for confession.

Listen to God

Jesus reads his mission statement. Read Luke 4:14-44.

Any decent organization or corporation will have a clear and concise mission statement. Nike's, for example, is "To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world." A mission statement is what the company is all about.

As Jesus begins to teach in the synagogues and his fame begins to spread throughout his home region, he makes a move toward clearing up any ambiguity regarding who he is and what he's all about. He gives his mission statement by reading from Isaiah.

Teaching from God's Word was customary in the synagogue. Teaching that you're the Savior of the world was not. To those present, it was clear that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, because only the Messiah could do the things stated in Isaiah 61.

Jesus was making a bold, seemingly blasphemous, and potentially suicidal

statement. After hundreds of years of people hoping, looking, waiting for a Messiah, this wasn't something taken lightly or taken at all. Everyone knew the implications of this passage in Isaiah, so Jesus' statement had all of the ambiguity of "I am the Messiah, and this is what the messianic mission is all about. Any questions?"

:: From what Jesus reads, how do you see the balance in his mission between caring for the poor and proclaiming the good news, i.e., evangelism?

:: What seems to be the overarching theme of your life? What's your mission statement and how well does it line up with the heart of Jesus?

:: How would people describe what you're all about?

:: Sometimes saying "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" would be received a lot better if an act of compassion were able to illustrate that claim. How could you show an act of compassion to someone to illustrate the claim that God loves them?

:: What might be some beliefs, lies, or misconceptions about the poor and oppressed that keep you from engaging in good works?

:: What is clear about Jesus as we read this passage?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank Jesus for who is and all that he's done, or at least for all that comes to your mind. Then give to God those things that you are struggling with, obsessing over, and worrying about. Ask him to lead and direct you in these areas.

Are you willing?

DAY

07

Talk to God

Praise God for his power, strength, and might. Then confess to God those areas where you've been weak, fearful, and passive in living out your faith.

Listen to God

Jesus heals the humble. Read Luke 5.

Few of us struggle with the doctrine of divine omnipotence (God as all powerful). No one wonders if God could lift a school bus or if he has the ability to heal and make us whole. The question is not usually about his power but about his intent—not "Can he?" but "Does he want to?"

I think the words of this man in Luke 5 are preserved for us so we can see it in ink.

The man asks, "Are you willing to?"

Jesus responds, "I am willing to."

This is one of the biggest struggles of the Christian life, believing that God wants to do things for us. Let's face it: we're not the most admirable creatures in the universe, especially before 6:00 a.m. I can be the most crass, arrogant, self-centered, ambitious, self-righteous jerk, and yet Jesus says that he wants to make me clean. It's hard to believe, but he is willing. Actually, he is more than willing—he eagerly desires to heal our brokenness.

:: In what ways do you struggle with feeling or believing that God is for you and not against you? What is it about yourself or your sin that lies behind these feelings?

:: There was no shortage of people coming to Jesus looking for healing, yet this man was successful in getting an audience. Why?

:: The opposite of coming to God in humility is coming with a demanding sense of selfish entitlement. Where does this come from and how would you cultivate humility in your prayer life?

:: Why do you think Jesus says "be clean" rather than "be well"?

:: If you could have Jesus make one thing "clean" in your life, what would it be?

:: What does this passage communicate to you about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for the ways he has changed you and all the ways he is still changing you. Present to him your requests, including those areas that you want to see him continue to transform.

Excursos: Journaling

Journaling is kind of like eating a balanced diet. Everyone knows that if we just followed the nutritional pyramid, we'd be much healthier. But in reality, eating a balanced nutritional diet, every meal of every day, just doesn't seem to work itself out in our daily lives. We don't exercise the discipline to balance every single dietary intake.

Taking the time to write down our thoughts and reflections can be extremely healthy for our spiritual growth. But because of our digital culture and lack of time, we'd rather text, e-mail, or instant message others our instant feelings (lol, =;), =(, or my favorite emotion, =:o) or post them on Facebook for all to see. The art of writing them down for posterity and future reminiscence has all but disappeared.

You know, nothing says fun like an evening of reading aloud to your kids what you wrote during those tumultuous dating years in college, including special tidbits that hint at how popular you were or how marketable to the opposite sex. Your kids are going to love it.

When was the last time you were able to look back on your spiritual growth through the months and note when and where the Lord taught you about a specific area in your life or where he showed his love and faithfulness to you in a specific way?

Writing down your thoughts and feelings in a journal does more than ensure a fun time

with your kids in the future. Writing something down is a way to document God's work in your life over a long period of time. You can easily take a few minutes each day to write down what you're reading in God's Word, some thoughts and feelings it evokes, and what your responses might be. Over time, it's interesting to look back and read what you thought God was doing and confirming through his work in your life—when you were especially right and when you were especially wrong.

Recently, I stumbled upon a journal I kept during a summer project at Hampton Beach, New Hampshire. I remember that summer as being a pivotal time in my spiritual growth and personal walk with the Lord. I was so thankful that I wrote down some of the important things that happened. As I looked through the journal, I was amazed at how some thoughts and hopes that I had at the time were eventually realized. I was also amazed to see that some of the struggles that I came across as I read God's Word are still being worked out today!

Here's an excerpt from my journal dated August 8, 2000:

I read tonight how they beat you, spit on you, mocked you. The pain you bore for me. I'm sorry, Lord. I don't ever want to blatantly sin against you, ever! Help me to rely on you for strength and to get rid of all that hinders me. I want to love you more and more.

Although I can't remember the circumstances of that particular entry, I can remember wanting that summer to be used by God and to grow in my faith for the rest of my life. As I reflected on that entry, I began to thank God for where I am now and for the fruit that came from wanting to sin less and less and love him more and more each day. My love for him has increased, and I don't sin in some of the same areas I did when I was a student. I began to praise God, to give him adoration for the things he's worked out in my life.

Here's another one, this time from March 25, 2006:

Realized on a trip to cabin with my guys how much of my self-worth and significance was wrapped up in how the guys in my study felt or act toward me. Had a great morning with you, Lord. I felt you refresh and hold me there at the fire until you had said everything and led me to prayer. Turning away from my needs and lifting others up really helps to bring life back. I have to begin by saying goodbye and find my strength not in what I do, or how well, but in you, Lord. Help me to do this. Going to bed. I feel refreshed. Thanks for the lesson today.

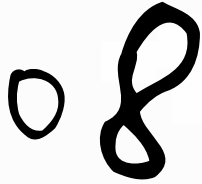
Journaling allows you to process the immediate, remember the past, and trust him for the future.

To get started, here's what I suggest. Go to your local bookstore or card shop and buy yourself a journal or something like one. Blank pages in a bound cover will do. I suggest a Moleskine. They have all sorts of different styles, and honestly, they increase your cool factor by 10.

Then find a pen that writes nice and smooth on the pages of said journal and begin to write. I like to date the page and dump my thoughts. Although I have to say that I'm not as consistent as I would like to be, I do try to journal often, especially whenever there's something major going on in my life.

Take ten minutes each day to sit and process your thoughts after you've had a quiet time. Write a few things down that might be important, or just write how you feel. What you write isn't as important as developing the habit of writing. You'll find that journaling will help you see God's faithfulness and work in your life over the years.

That, and it'll provide some humorous and possibly life-changing stories for your kids.



Talk to God

Praise God for the many aspects and expressions of his love. Then take time to deal with any sin that may stand between you and God.

Listen to God

Kindness to the ungrateful and wicked. Read Luke 6:1-45.

Love your enemies. This is a simple and basic commandment, but none could be harder to follow.

Loving your friends is easy. Lending someone five bucks when he says he'll get you next time is a breeze. But Jesus takes this up and way over the top. If Osama Bin Laden ran into you at a coffee shop in Kabul and needed a \$10 spot, would you lend it to him? Give to everyone who asks, this text says. This new commandment doesn't just reflect a heart attitude; it reflects an action.

Luke continues to show us that life in the kingdom, life as a disciple of Jesus, looks much different than life in the world. We are a new kind of person with a new kind of life, and we need to bring hope to those around us who might be sick and tired of life as they know it. Everyone, even enemies, need Jesus.

:: In what ways do you struggle with loving those who don't follow Jesus? How about those who are adamantly opposed to him?

:: What is it about yourself or your sin that lies behind these feelings?

:: Everyone lends to those whom they think will pay them back. Jesus says to lend to those who can't or won't pay you back. What's your gut response to that?

:: Who is it that you've been expecting a payback from? Perhaps you need to let them off the hook.

:: Where does loving enemies come into your prayer life? Who are the enemies you need to be praying for?

:: What does this passage communicate about Jesus?

:: What is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

:: Who do you need to forgive, confess to, believe for, and love in prayer?

Talk to God

Thank God for the ways he loves you when you don't deserve it. Then, as you make your requests to God, pray for those enemies, or difficult people, that this study has brought to mind.

Well-built sandcastles.

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

DAY



Talk to God

Read Psalm 59 and/or Psalm 62 and praise God for being a mighty fortress and firm foundation. Ask God to reveal areas where you have been depending on your own strength, rather than on him, and confess those things to him.

Listen to God

Build your house on the rock. Read Luke 6:46–7:35.

Sandcastles are amazingly fun to build ... for about ten minutes. Then you begin to understand why people don't build their houses out of sand, on the beach, close to the water. It's pointless.

We all know people whose decisions have equated to building sandcastles. You fear that any minute their lives are going to disintegrate, but they don't want to hear it, not from you. They don't want your direction; they don't want your advice.

In this passage Jesus connects the idea of building a house with building a life. Both take time and both need a secure foundation. Jesus offers us that secure foundation, but the price is humility. That's why giving someone full authority

in our lives is a hard step to take and many don't take it. Saying "Lord, Lord" is saying a lot. It's saying, "Okay, how do I build this thing?" and then doing exactly what the master builder tells you.

In this parable Jesus' building advice is simple: don't use sand. It's the question that follows that's difficult: "What—or who—am I currently building my life on?"

:: As you reflect on the decisions you've made in your life up until now, on what foundations have you built your life?

:: Jesus mentions floods and torrents as a metaphor for hardship, pain, and sudden disaster. Reflect on the ways you've dealt with these storms in your life. How has God been faithful to keep your foundation firm?

:: Words like security, firm, solid, and trustworthy come to mind when we think about our hope in Christ. Are there any other ideas, words, or thoughts that come to mind when you think about Jesus as the foundation of your life?

:: The parables Jesus uses to illustrate principles of the kingdom seem simple on the surface, yet some people don't seem to get their meaning. Why do you think that is?

:: As it relates to Christ's lordship, in what areas of your life does Jesus reign and in what areas is there a struggle for control?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, give him lordship over?

Talk to God

Thank God for what he has been showing you in his Word. Then talk to God about those things and people who weigh upon your heart.

A humble submission.

10

Talk to God

Praise God for his mercy, forgetting as well as forgiving all our sin. Confess those things for which you feel guilty and in need of his mercy.

Listen to God

Jesus forgives much. Read Luke 7:36-50.

Sin buried deep in the soul weighs a ton. It accumulates mass and gravity, and eventually the burden is so unbearable that if you don't confess to someone, you'll go completely nuts. I know. I've been there.

Whatever evil you may have committed, it's doubtful you've ever degraded yourself by stealing Tootsie Rolls from the Boy Scouts. I remember that very transgression vividly from my childhood, and I remember trying to keep it in and get away with it. Eventually I broke, because the need to be forgiven is a powerful thing.

When a prostitute shows up uninvited at the house of a Pharisee and starts weeping and cleaning the feet of Jesus, you know God must have been at work in

her life. For some at the table, it was—how shall we say?—awkward. But Jesus saw it as a humble and appropriate response of faith, and he forgave her many sins.

Perhaps if we were able to feel the weight of the sin that was lifted off her shoulders, we would weep as well.

:: How does your response to forgiveness compare to this woman's response?

:: Who do you most identify with in this story: Simon the Pharisee, the woman weeping at Jesus' feet, or someone at the table simply taking it all in? Why?

:: Our response to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins reflects how deeply we care about holiness in our lives. What areas of sin in your life do you view with the perspective of the Pharisee? What area do you view with the perspective of the woman?

:: In what ways do you struggle to receive God's forgiveness for sins you've committed in your past?

:: As it relates to your own life, in what ways do you put a limit upon Jesus' mercy?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: What do you need to confess, repent of, ask for, or weep for in prayer?

Talk to God

Thank God for the way in which he has forgiven all your past sins. (Be specific about the sins you recall.) And then, as you make your requests to God, add to that list an increased desire for holiness.

Going public.

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

DAY



Talk to God

Praise God for his knowledge and wisdom, because he knows everything about everything—and everything about you. Confess to him those deep issues that cause you the most embarrassment or shame; ask him to cleanse you of them.

Listen to God

Faith and humility. Read Luke 8:41-56.

It's kind of weird when you can walk into a room and sense the mood without anyone's saying a word. It's weirder still to be able to sense faith. Yet Jesus knows when he's approached with it or without it. The woman had faith, but apparently she was fearful to ask for help—fearful of Jesus, fearful of embarrassment, perhaps fearful that he might refuse.

All of us would like to be healed secretly from many things, that is, healed without anyone's ever knowing we had a problem. I imagine that for Jairus, as the spiritual leader of the synagogue, it was equally humbling to publicly grovel for Jesus' spiritual assistance. But getting well involves coming out of the darkness and exposing our sin and brokenness to the light of day, to the light of God, and to the light of other believers. (As James 5:16 says, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.") We all have issues that we try to conceal, but we learn in this story that Jesus wants us to get everything out on the table, so that we can encourage and pray for each other. So that we may be healed.

:: Why do you think the woman did not want Jesus to know she had touched him?

:: Do you think that Jesus' delay from helping Jairus was intentional?

:: Why would Jesus want Jairus to wait?

:: What are the issues you wish would remain concealed?

:: If you could have Jesus heal anything without anyone's knowing, what would it be?

:: Why is faith so important to Jesus?

:: Why is humility so important to Jesus? Why is humility so important to faith?

:: Who could you share and pray with about some of your deeper struggles?

Talk to God

Thank God for all the ways he shows his compassion and care for you. As you bring your requests to God, bring to him those deeper issues and habitual struggles, asking him to provide someone to share them with.

What, no extra shirt?!

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE
DAY

1 2

Talk to God

Praise God as our great provider, the one who knows and meets all our needs. Confess the ways in which you have failed to trust him to provide for you and the ways in which you've depended on other things.

Listen to God

Jesus sends the disciples off for an adventure. Read Luke 9:1-56.

Being prepared for anything that could happen is impossible. You just can't be completely prepared for everything that comes your way. God, however, is always prepared.

Jesus knew this better than anyone. I think he knew that going through something you're completely unprepared for and coming out the other end in a better place than you were before can cause incredible spiritual growth. Your understanding of just how dependable God is grows so much when you are given the opportunity to see that he's the one who is prepared.

It's kind of like that feeling you get when you're driving on a toll road and suddenly remember you don't have any money. You start to scramble around for dimes, nickels, postage stamps, anything. But then, after you come up with nothing except two pennies and what you think might be the corner of a five-dollar bill, the driver ahead of you pays your fare. Wow! you think. God is really with me. We can do anything. I'm driving to China.

Taking trust in God's preparedness too far, of course, makes you a nutcase. Taking it with a healthy perspective and dependence on God makes you a mature disciple of Jesus.

:: What do you think were the disciples' first thoughts when told to take nothing for their journey?

:: How hard is it for you to live without the "essentials"? What do you think lies behind the belief that you need all the "stuff" in your life?

:: I lost my cell phone once for several days and I thought life would end. It didn't. What is it in your life that might be an idol of dependence for you? How hard would it be for you to let go of it today? Why?

:: Trusting God to provide for our basic needs is easy, but what about the deeper needs like relationships, careers, or the future? Are you dependent on God for all things, some things, or nothing? Why?

:: The disciples are given power to proclaim the good news to the surrounding area; they are essentially ambassadors for Christ. What fears keep you from being an ambassador for him?

:: Can you trust God for the way people will either receive or reject your sharing of the gospel?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: What do you need to confess, repent of, ask for, trust God for in prayer?

Talk to God

Think of the ways in which, just in the past few months, God has provided for you—and thank him for all of it. Talk to God about the upcoming ways you will need him to provide for you.

Talk to God

Praise God for being worthy of following, of loving, of serving, and of giving one's life for. Confess to him those ways in which you have failed to love, serve, and follow.

Listen to God

Jesus reveals the cost of following him. Read Luke 9:57-62.

These days, it doesn't take much hard work or time to acquire just about anything you want. All you need is a credit card, \$19.95, or two friends who will recruit two more friends to sell home cleaning products online. It's that easy.

In light of how easy it can be to make a few bucks, I've often thought that it can't be all that hard to follow Jesus. I'll say to myself, I'll go anywhere or I'll do anything for Jesus. And sometimes I'll follow through on my determination. But sadly, I've balked a lot of times as well.

I've seen friends, family, and students I know do the same thing. Even some of the most well-intentioned people fade away when they realize that doing anything and going anywhere for Jesus can be a lot harder than they thought or truly wanted.

This is no new phenomenon. As Jesus' popularity grew, so did people's desire to walk with him and be his followers. But Jesus drew the line in the sand pretty clearly. Those who wanted to follow him wouldn't have a peaceful and

pain-free existence. It would be tough; it would be lonely at times; and most assuredly, there would be a cross in the future. Unfortunately, many decided they had better things to do than follow Jesus.

How about it, partner—are you in?

:: What is it about Jesus that would draw people to spend time with him, to follow him?

:: Impatience can often rear its ugly head in our lives. What have you been impatient about to the point that you took some shortcuts in your walk with God?

:: How often do you rely on how others view you as a gauge of your spiritual maturity?

:: Notice the repetition of the word "first." What things do you tend to place "first" in front of Jesus?

:: Why do you think Jesus is so harsh to some of those who wanted to follow yet had things to finish before they were able?

:: Has following Jesus made life easier or harder for you? Why do you suppose that is?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: What do you need to confess, repent of, ask for, or trust God for in prayer?

Talk to God

Thank God for the ways he gives your life purpose and direction and meaning. Ask God for the strength, passion, and desire to follow him wherever he leads.

Talk to God

Praise God for his salvation and his global plan of redemption, creating his kingdom from every tongue, tribe, and nation. As you confess your sins, bring before God those times you've failed to speak up and witness for him.

Listen to God

Jesus sends out the seventy-two. Read Luke 10:1-24.

As if we didn't already get the point in chapter 9, Luke gives another account of Jesus sending others out to do ministry in the countryside. This is something to mark in your mental notepad. It is important in understanding what Jesus is all about.

As before, Jesus sends out the disciples to heal the sick, exorcise demons, and proclaim that the kingdom of God has arrived. It was going to be an eventful week for people.

Furthermore, it's in this passage that we have one of the most quoted and revered teachings of Jesus on missions and ministry. You've probably heard it so many times that you already know what I'm about to write. But I don't care; I'm going to write it anyway: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." So true. And then Jesus sends the missionaries out with some words of advice, underscoring the need to rely on God for their provision.

There's so much more to this passage, and I wish we had time to go into some of it. Perhaps later. Just soak in the fact that Jesus continues to say "Go!" to his disciples. I think he really means it.

:: Go. What does that communicate to you? Be honest.

:: The metaphor of being "lambs among wolves" is significant here. A lamb in that day was the price for the atonement of sins. A lamb is also seen as pure, innocent, and needy. In what ways are you to be a lamb among wolves?

:: How can we respond to others who want to hear the message of Jesus? Or perhaps the question is more like, how should we respond? Hmm.

:: In what ways does the idea of going to tell others about Jesus excite or scare you?

:: The necessity of relying on God comes up again with the disciples needing to rely on others for their food, clothing, and shelter. In what ways do you struggle to receive from God or from others?

:: In what ways do you see Jesus using you as a laborer for the harvest? Where is the harvest field for you?

:: What do you think was most important for the disciples to learn here?

:: What do you need to learn concerning your desire to go?

:: What do you need to confess, repent, ask for, or trust God for in prayer?

Talk to God

Thank God for your salvation and the salvation of family and friends. As you pray, ask God for the salvation of specific individuals you desire to know him.

Excursos: Study Bibles, Niche Bibles, and Commentaries

Sometimes studying the Bible can get a bit confusing. So you push through it, keep reading, and hope something will make sense soon. I've done this. We've all done this. We get uncomfortable when we're confused by the Bible, and so we row onward, looking for familiar, or at least fairly clear, passages to sink our teeth into.

All of which is to say that sometimes it helps to have some outside illumination when trying to understand certain passages of Scripture. The Bible's authority, its historicity, and the application of a particular passage are all key elements in understanding the Word of God. It's helpful to have some other source of knowledge guiding you through difficult sections that sometimes can downright frighten you. In Deuteronomy, for example, it says that whatever you do, don't cook a young goat in its mother's milk. What's that about? Any scholars out there want to give this passage a look-see?

I'm going to suggest three sources that can help you understand a text without having to lock yourself in your room with a case of Red Bull and a large-letter edition of the Living Bible. These three sources are study Bibles, niche Bibles, and commentaries.

Study Bible. A study Bible is designed to help you understand, not only the meaning of God's Word, but also the history behind it, the characters involved in it, and other

places in the Bible that may shed light on the passage you're studying. Most study Bibles are put together by a scholar or a group of scholars who write notes on certain verses and passages to clarify them. Study Bibles can also help you organize a daily or an annual reading plan. Sometimes they are divided into various topics and give you reading plans so that you can study specific topics, such as sin, the Messiah, or the Holy Spirit. Study Bibles are great when you want to have helpful information right there on the page rather than having to go to another book. Some good study bibles are The NIV Study Bible or The ESV Study Bible.

Niche Bible. Niche Bibles are for different market segments made up of people with certain characteristics or interests. Examples of niche Bibles include men's and women's devotional Bibles, prayer-centered Bibles, and even musicians' Bibles. The point of a niche Bible is to reveal what the Scriptures say about a particular subject in a way that is relevant to a certain readership. While such a Bible can be extremely helpful for learning all you can about topics such as prayer or music or being a male, the viewpoint is limited and can actually narrow your ability to interpret God's Word on your own. While niche Bibles are great for motivating us to spend time in the Scripture, it's often healthier to have a broader perspective. I suggest balancing your time in a niche Bible with time in your run-of-the-mill, no-frills Bible. You'll be just fine.

Commentary. A commentary provides scholarly research, interpretation, insight, and comments on either the entire Bible or a book of the Bible. A commentary is not to be held as inspired Holy Writ but instead as a study aid with pertinent information and valuable insight. Having a commentary with you as you work through the Bible can add depth to your reading and illuminate key passages of Scripture that you otherwise might overlook.

Every year I try to read through the entire Bible. Often I'll get to a book like Leviticus and find myself halfheartedly going through the motions, reminding myself it's only another eight hundred pages till I get to the Gospel of John. So, in light of my lukewarm

relationship with Leviticus, one time I read a commentary on it that broke it down passage by passage. It was wonderful. I was able to enjoy and understand the book in ways I couldn't have on my own. I found that by reading another person's commentary on Leviticus, I was impacted by God's truth within the book and I was able to see new dimensions of Christ's atoning work for my sin.

Commentaries can be helpful when trying to understand a passage for the first time, reading through it for the fifth time, or simply checking to see if your gut instincts about a passage ring true with someone else's analysis. There's nothing more satisfying than finding out some really smart guy thought the same thing as you did.

For a great starter commentary, I'd suggest The NIV Application Study Commentary Series (Zondervan), written by various authors. This commentary is an entire series of books, one for every book of the Bible. The great thing about a series of commentaries is that you can order an individual commentary on any particular book you may be studying. You don't have to order the entire set, which could be expensive.

You also can't go wrong with the paperback Tyndale New Testament Commentaries or the Expositors Bible Commentary (Zondervan).

And finally, online resources can be of help as well. Crosswalk, Bible Gateway, and Desiring God are all well-respected online resources that can link you to commentaries and insights from different pastors, theologians, and authors.

Bottom line, having a broad range of influence and insight is important to a healthy understanding of God's Word. Perhaps you can start building your own personal study library by buying a study Bible or two, and a commentary or two, and begin to broaden your horizon of biblical insight.

Amazon will love you for it.

Whose prayer is it?

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

DAY

15

Talk to God

Praise God for some attribute of his—a quality that contributes to making him God. Then confess any sin, focusing on the ways you’ve hurt and sinned against others.

Listen to God

“When you pray, say ...” Read Luke 11:1-13.

Jesus wants us to understand three key lessons when he teaches us to pray. First, we can approach the Father with our needs. Second, God wants us to approach him boldly and without any pretense. Third, the gift that he gives us is the Holy Spirit, not a scorpion.

Often we view the Lord’s Prayer as something we pray alone—a formula, if you will, for our personal prayer times. I’ve done it that way many times myself.

“My Father in heaven ...” But this is not the way Jesus taught it.

In saying, “When you pray ... ,” Jesus used a plural “you.” It is meant to suggest prayer in community. This prayer, then, is about praying together for each other’s needs, for the forgiveness of our sins toward others, and for our Father to keep us all from temptation.

Often we blow through that prayer without even engaging in what it means to us as a group of believers. We’re all walking the same earth, experiencing the same kinds of trials and struggles, and we all have needs. Boy, do we have needs.

Perhaps you could gather some friends together (two or three) and share with them these verses from Luke. Then ask the following questions and pray about them with each other, in community and out loud, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

:: What attributes of the Father lead your thoughts to an attitude of reverence, awe, and wonder?

:: How could the kingdom come through you as a group of friends? How has the kingdom of heaven already come?

:: What do you need to eat today? What might be some other things besides food that you need (not want, but really need)?

:: What do you need to confess and ask to be forgiven for? Who do you need to call right now and ask for their forgiveness?

:: Who do you need to forgive and, with the Spirit’s help, love in return?

:: What temptations are present that would draw you away from God?

:: What things can you see coming down the road where you may be tempted to sin or cause others to sin?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

Talk to God

Thank God for his faithful answers to your prayers even when he said no. As you pray through your needs, pray particularly for the Christian friends God has put in your life.

Why worry?

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

DAY

16

Talk to God

Praise God for his sovereignty and his control over all things, including your future. As you confess your sin, confess the ways you've worried rather than trusted him.

Listen to God

You're much more valuable than birds. Read Luke 12:1-34.

Worry is one thing I can't seem to shake. Sometimes I wake up at 2:00 a.m. and begin to think about all the disasters that could happen in my life—not being able to pay my bills, having no place to live, sitting down to an exam I can't handle, having conversations with people I need to confront, and so on. I also frequently worry what others might be thinking about me.

The weight of worry and fear and doubt will often weigh heaviest in the earliest hours of the morning. So that's a good time to remember the point of this passage: that God cares for us more than we can imagine.

But there is a condition in this text that may explain why our worries sometimes linger. Jesus instructs us, "Seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well" (Luke 12:31). I don't know about you, but when I'm focused on God, and everything else in my life is taking a backseat to him, I don't seem to worry. About anything. I feel like I'm taking care of the main thing that I'm supposed to do (seeking God), and as a result, I can trust God to take care of

everything else.

Jesus is a genius. He doesn't just tell us not to worry; he leads us to change our focus and priorities. And this, as it happens, is the cure for worry.

:: What anxious thoughts, worries, or nightmares keep you awake at night? What sins in your life or doubts about God or decisions that you've made are affecting your ability to trust God?

:: Jesus calls us his "little flock." What do you think he was trying to convey to us by this?

:: We are called to run after different priorities than the world does. Are the priorities in your life causing you rest or anxiety?

:: How quickly do you draw near to God in moments of doubt and worry?

:: The heart moves toward whatever is most valuable to it. What is your heart moving toward? Why?

:: You might be worried right now. If so, what might God be asking you to do about that?

:: What do we understand about Jesus here?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for his leading and direction in your life and for all the ways in which he's guided you and is still guiding you. Then make your requests known to him, and as you ask, listen for those things that he's leading you to pray about.

Musical chairs.

Talk to God

Praise God for some quality or attribute of his. Confess any sin or shortcoming you need forgiveness for, so that your time with him will be unhindered.

Listen to God

Jesus encourages us to make every effort. Read Luke 13:22-30.

No doubt when you hear the word “suspense” you immediately think of the terror that is musical chairs. The music is playing and then it stops, and then there’s a mad dash. Find a seat and you’re safe. From what, no one ever told me. But the saps who can’t find one are out, and all they can do is watch others have fun while they stew in hatred for the game on the sidelines.

The end of history comes when Jesus fully ushers in his kingdom. Just as in musical chairs, the music eventually is going to stop and people are going to scramble.

As Jesus continues to teach about the kingdom of God, one person mentions the big elephant sitting in the room. “Are only a few people going to make it?” (Translation: “Am I?”)

We all have a deep-down desire to know who’s going to make it and who’s not. Reality television is based on this fact. Some of us want everyone to make it; others want only a select few. Jesus says it’ll be somewhere in between.

As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and a waiting cross, time was running out for Israel’s skeptics, cynics, and procrastinators. As we await Jesus’ return, at any moment the music may start to wind down, so we should make every effort to be sure of our seat.

:: It’s clear there are some who thought they were in but ended up being out. What do you think happened?

:: How does your heart respond to this teaching of Jesus?

:: Salvation is by grace alone and received by faith. There’s nothing you can do to earn it. You simply receive it as a free gift. When do you think this happened in your life? When did you accept that gift of salvation?

:: Why do you think these skeptics were hesitant to place their faith in Jesus?

:: It is inevitable that we will sin, and God has promised to forgive us when we do. What struggles cause you to come to God in humility and desperation, knowing how valuable his love and forgiveness are for you?

:: “I never knew you” is a scary statement. What is your heart’s response to that? Why?

:: Jesus is the ultimate authority in heaven and is worthy of praise. In what ways do you see yourself as “first” or “last”? How might you ask God to help you have a right perspective in this area?

:: What do we understand about Jesus here?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for any and every aspect of your salvation. And, as you make your requests to God, pray for those close to you who don’t know Christ. Pray specifically for their salvation.

Talk to God

Focus your praise on God as our heavenly Father, and as you confess your sin, ask God to reveal any ways in which your life is not aligned with his will.

Listen to God

Jesus teaches us about the Father's heart. Read Luke 15.

When something is lost, you have two options: give up looking for the lost item (Who cares? I didn't need it anyway) or go crazy looking for it, tearing everything apart and leaving no sofa cushion unturned until you find that thing. The difference between the two actions is how much value you've placed on the item.

My son has a million Matchbox cars. They're everywhere. And he loves every one. Sometimes, when we're ready for bed and I'm about to turn out the light, he'll pop up and say, "I need to get my truck, Dad. It's outside." At that moment my concern is getting him to bed. His concern is the lost truck—his lost and lonely truck, which is outside without any of the other cars and trucks to keep it company. He cares deeply (far more than I do) about that truck.

The Pharisees couldn't have cared less about sinners or tax collectors. But

Jesus cares deeply for them. He loves every one of them, like a shepherd loves his sheep. He will go after that one lost sheep if it takes everything he has. And though it's difficult to imagine, he's even more concerned for sinners than my son is for his truck.

:: Who do you care about enough to go after?

:: What is the heart issue Jesus is trying to identify here?

:: Is there any nuance of difference among the three different stories?

:: The Pharisees were the spiritual elite, the religious people on campus. In what ways might you act like a Pharisee toward the sinners around you?

:: Spending time with sinners meant Jesus was speaking words of truth to them. They wanted to listen. What keeps you from speaking truth to those around you who need to hear it?

:: There was no shortage of people coming to Jesus looking for forgiveness. Why were these people successful in getting an audience?

:: What is it about repentant sinners that causes all heaven to rejoice?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for some specific insight or blessing he's given you. Then present to him your requests, keeping this verse in mind: "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

My roommate is a punk.

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

DAY

19

Talk to God

Praise God with any words you can think of beginning with A and then B, and so on, and see how far you get. As you confess your sins to God, confess where you've held grudges or judged others or in some way continued to hold others' sin against them.

Listen to God

Jesus teaches us about forgiving others. Read Luke 17:1-10.

Forgiveness is a consistent theme in Jesus' teaching. Forgiving others reflects in our lives the forgiveness we receive from the Father. The strongest rebukes from Jesus come when one doesn't dish out what one has received.

Judaism in Jesus' day was entrenched in rules and law and a hierarchy of righteousness and holiness. If you didn't live up to the law, you had to try harder. There was an air of entitlement: "God should forgive me because I earned it."

When someone sins against you, Jesus says, even if that person is a repeat offender, you must forgive him or her. Why? Because we all are repeat offenders, and God continues to forgive us. Therefore, we must do the same.

Forgiving others has nothing to do with earning merit with God. It has everything to do with continuing the pattern God sets for us. As Jesus has taught and proclaimed the kingdom of God, whatever else we may know about life in the kingdom, we know this: the very atmosphere is one of continual grace and forgiveness, freely received and given.

:: Who are repeat offenders in your life? How does that affect your heart toward them and your ability to forgive?

:: Often our own struggle with certain sins yields impatience with others struggling with the same sins. What is it that you find hardest to give grace to? Receive grace for?

:: Causing others to sin seems to be an even greater offense than the sin itself. Why?

:: In what ways does Satan cause you to stumble and sin? What are some ways you may have caused others to sin and need to ask for forgiveness?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for all the difficult and trying people he has placed in your life (be specific). Then place your requests before him, "casting all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Talk to God

Read Psalm 28 and praise God for his being the source of our strength.
Confess any sin that may hinder your time and fellowship with him.

Listen to God

Jesus teaches us about persistent prayer. Read Luke 18:1-30.

On October 29, 1941, the prime minister of England, Sir Winston Churchill, visited his alma mater, the Harrow School, to speak. This became one of his most quoted speeches, partly due to distortions that evolved about what he said. The myth is that Churchill stood before the students and said, "Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever give in. Never give in. Never give in. Never give in" and then sat down. In reality, he made a much longer speech covering a great deal more than "never give in."

Fact or fiction, for decades, people have been moved and motivated by Churchill's imperative. Which begs the question "Who cares?" Seriously. I didn't know Churchill, so why should I press on because he told me to?

Motivational speeches, quotes, platitudes, inspiring movie moments, and the like are poor sources for continued stamina. The enduring reason to persist and persevere is because Jesus tells us to. And according to Jesus, there is no area where we are more in need of perseverance than prayer.

This is powerful because it's Jesus telling us to "never give up" and to have the faith to ask until the Father accomplishes what we've asked of him. And even if what we've asked for was not such a good idea and not in God's perfect will for

us, it is in the asking that God will reveal that to us; it is in the asking that he will realign our heart.

Ask and never give up.

:: What do you deeply want to see God accomplish in your life?

:: What does the widow represent to us as disciples of Jesus? What attributes were probably true of her that need to be true of your prayer life and approach to the Father?

:: Never giving up takes discipline and consistency. In what ways do you struggle to build those things into your prayer life?

:: Why do you think it is so hard to stay persistent in prayer?

:: Prayer is a powerful thing—it can move the heart of God. What would you ask God for if he told you the answer would be yes? What's keeping you from asking again and again?

:: What do you have trouble believing God for?

:: Who in your life models the persistence of the widow?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for what he is doing in your life right now, today. Present to him the needs, cares, and desires of your day.

Talk to God

Think of the many terms of royalty ascribed to God (majesty, king, and so on) in Scripture and use these to praise God. As you confess your sins, confess the ways you've failed to respond to Jesus as the true sovereign of your life.

Listen to God

Jesus enters Jerusalem. Read Luke 19:28-44.

Not understanding what's intended can be a frustrating scenario.

Some guys think a vacuum cleaner is a wonderful gift for their wife's birthday. They hear her say, "I wish I had a better vacuum cleaner," and then couple that with "Just get me something small," and they translate this as "I can score big if I buy her an expensive vacuum cleaner." No, no, she didn't mean that. These guys completely missed the point.

At no other time in the ministry of Jesus are the people of Jerusalem so missing

the point. They are so close to understanding who Jesus is and yet are so far away. As Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, the people cry out, "Long live the king." In Mark's report, when someone asks what the commotion is about, they say it's the prophet, Jesus. The Pharisees tell him to rebuke his disciples for essentially calling him Lord. And the crowds confuse him for a political Messiah rather than a spiritual one. King? Prophet? Lord? Messiah? Yes, all of these. But even when the people get the labels right, they get the meaning wrong, ascribing the proper titles to him for the wrong reasons.

Let's call him Lord Jesus and let's mean it.

:: The people shout, "Hosanna!" which means "the Lord saves." What is it that you need the Lord to save you from?

:: What is it that caused the people of Jerusalem to miss the point of who Jesus really was?

:: How can your heart sometimes mislead you to believe the wrong things about Jesus?

:: Scripture tells us that if there were no one to praise Jesus, the stones would cry out. How do you communicate to Jesus in prayer how wonderful and awesome he really is?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Think about Jesus and thank him for anything that comes to your mind. As you make your requests to God, ask him to make you humble and submissive to his will.

Excursos: Bible Translations

As long as I have been involved in any type of small-group study where a Bible is either needed or preferred, it never fails that there's another person with a Bible that says something slightly different from mine. While that can be confusing, it's not half as confusing as walking through the Bible aisle of a Christian bookstore. All of the translations and all of the acronyms bleed together: KJV, NIV, NASB, ESV . . . CIA, FBI, CNN, ESPN. So let me clear up some of the confusion and explain why we have so many translations and what's different about them.

We wouldn't need Bible translations if we knew how to read ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. But most of us don't, and so we leave it to the ones who enjoy doing that type of thing to translate it for us. What makes the process tricky is easily demonstrated by the verse "Adam lay with his wife Eve" (Genesis 4:1). I'll assume you know what's being said here. The translator also knows what's being said here, but what English word should she use to say it? If she translates it word for word, using "lay with," then you could misunderstand. Were they taking a nap together? If she uses an English equivalent like "had sex with," then your grandmother could have a heart attack. That should give you a broad picture of the tensions and issues involved in translations as well as introduce you to the three major types of translations.

Formal equivalence. Bibles that have what's called a "formal equivalence," or literal translation, will take the ancient Hebrew and Greek texts and translate them as closely as possible to the original words and sentence structure. This type of translation will keep the original and historical meanings intact while still allowing us to understand it in English. It is an

essentially word-for-word translation, giving the best possible reading of how the original audience would have read it.

To catch the only downside of this type of translation, think of the Spanish phrase *mesa verde*. If you translate it literally, it would say “table green,” as opposed to the “green table.” Maintaining the original word order can actually make reading it in English somewhat challenging.

Some translations that hold to a literal, word-for-word translation are the New American Standard (NASB) and the English Standard Version (ESV). Literal translations are helpful in keeping us connected to the history, nuance, and wording of the original text. However, in attempting to provide verbal accuracy, meaning can be obscured. An “ephah” of flour is meaningless to most of us, while a “pound” of flour is not.

And this brings us to the next type of translation.

Dynamic equivalence. Rather than requiring you to turn to the tables of weights and measures at the back of your Bible to figure out what an ephah is, a dynamic equivalent translation takes the next step and figures it out for you. The translators ask, “Okay, what would this be like today in as close as possible to the original words? How would we say it?”

In dynamic equivalency, idioms, words, and grammatical structure are all translated into our own equivalent, everyday usage of the same words, idioms, and grammar. This is sometimes called a thought-for-thought reading, as opposed to a literal word-for-word reading. This kind of translation can help increase the ease of reading or the flow of Scripture, matching it to the way we read today. Bible translations that use this method include the New International Version (NIV), Today’s NIV, or TNIV, and the New American Bible (NAB).

For the average Christian, using a Bible like the NIV as a primary source of reading is often the most helpful. You just need to decide if you are an average Christian and choose accordingly. I’m pretty average.

Paraphrase. A paraphrase, or free translation, adds modern slang to Holy Writ. And taking the liberty to put God’s Word into our own vernacular can be fun and helpful, so long as you take the time to study the text, understand its intended nuance and meaning, and then say it straight. That’s what authors writing a free translation have done. They have taken the original language, translated it into a native language, such as English, and then added their own style to it in an attempt to bring out shades of meaning hidden by cultural distance.

For example, Eugene Peterson, who wrote *The Message*, takes the account of Jesus’ birth and writes it like this:

The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit but he didn’t know that.) Joseph, chagrined, but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced. (Matthew 1:18-19)

If you’ve been to any Christmas Eve service, anywhere, you might not recall ever hearing this version read by the play narrator. But as you can see, a paraphrase can bring greater insight into the attitude or tone of a passage.

Another helpful free translation you may come across is the NLT, or New Living Translation.

Each type of translation has both an up side and a down side. The down side of the free translation is a little steeper than the others because to paraphrase you have to make some interpretive leaps and assumptions, and a translator risks saying or adding something that’s not in the original text.

I think through this survey you can see that it’s helpful to have a few different translations lying around to refer to, since each amplifies a different nuance of meaning. No matter what translation you use, I’d highly recommend to you the book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (Zondervan), which is filled with more insight on this issue and a number of other interpretive topics.

I'm the most humble.

DAY

22

Talk to God

Praise God as the ultimate source of life, love, and every good thing in our life.
As you confess your sins, focus on sins of pride and arrogance.

Listen to God

Jesus exposes spiritual pride. Read Luke 20:20-47.

There's nothing more repulsive than someone who talks about herself all the time or talks about others in a condescending manner. I had a youth pastor once who would say the same joke over and over again. "I'm the humblest guy I know. I wrote a book about it."

No one struggles with pride more than hardworking overachievers. Finding significance in the things we do and how well we do them can be the biggest source of frustration in our lives. And yet no form of pride is viler than spiritual pride, which Jesus encountered in the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They took pride in their religious achievements, in their social standing, and in being seen as righteous. At a severe loss for humility, they actually thought they knew better than Jesus, that is to say, better than God.

This whole scene would be nauseating if it weren't so convicting. I'd like to say that I don't try to keep up appearances in Christian settings, or act as though everything in my spiritual life is perfect, but I can't, because I do. I also tend to act as if my knowledge, my gifts, and my personality were my own creation. What do I have that I did not receive?

We are only stewards, entrusted with certain capacities and resources for use in loving and serving God and others. There's simply nothing to take credit for.

:: In what areas do you strive to excel? In what ways can you seek to bring glory to yourself instead of God?

:: Jesus brought religious pride into the spotlight as an example of what not to do. Why do you think that is?

:: How do you struggle with humility before God and others? Why should your attitude before God be a humble one?

:: What is it about faith and spirituality that can actually cause pride and arrogance in a person's life? Is there any evidence of that in your life?

:: How does Jesus model humility before God and others? How has his life influenced your desire to do the same?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for the gifts and abilities he has entrusted to you. And as you pray, ask God to show you how you might be a better steward of these gifts.

How much is a mite, anyway?

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

DAY

23

Talk to God

Praise God for his overflowing generosity. As you confess your sins to God, reflect on where you've been stingy with your time, money, and energy, that is, where you've failed to give as God gives to you.

Listen to God

Giving all you have to give. Read Luke 21:1-4.

Watching people pump money into slot machines is not my idea of a good time. I think that's why I've never gone to Atlantic City or Las Vegas. When the odds are significantly against a person's ever getting a payback, I just can't muster the desire to observe their pointless activity.

In the same sense, I can't see myself sitting in a pew on Sunday just watching as people put their money into the offering plate—or not.

So why would Jesus be camped out next to the offertory plates in the Jerusalem temple, watching with his disciples? Answer: Jesus was watching the hearts.

On the outside, wealthy people generally look wealthy and poor people look poor. But on the inside, it can be a different matter. So Jesus sits and watches the hearts of all those coming to the temple to declare their commitment to the Lord. Jesus wants to see just how much God is worth to them, his worship.

No, that's not a pun. Worship is actually the word from which worship is

derived. Quite fitting, no? The widow gave all she had because God was worth all she had. This is the heart that Jesus wanted to highlight—a heart worth preserving for all eternity.

CONVENTIONAL EXPERIENCE

:: How often do you give all that you have to God?

:: What is "all that you have"? List it. Seriously, list everything you own or will own, such as a college degree perhaps. Then ask God how you can give it all back to him.

:: It's clear from this story that God is not concerned with the amount you give but with why you give the amount you do. What might be the hardest thing to give over or give back to God? Why?

:: Financially, what could you be giving (even now as a poor student) to show God's worth to you?

:: How hard is it for you to trust God with the financial areas of your life? How often do you come to him in prayer asking for his provision?

:: God loves widows, orphans, the poor. He wants to take care of them. How much do you trust that God will care for your needs as well?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for the abundance you enjoy, given to you by him. Ask God to show you how you might be a better steward with your finances and where you might be more generous.

Body and blood.

DAY

24

Talk to God

Praise God as the author, defender, and perfecter of our faith. Confess to him any sins that stand in the way of your fellowship.

Listen to God

Jesus prepares for the cross. Read Luke 22:7-38.

During the Exodus, as the Israelites were preparing to leave Egypt, the Lord gave them instructions: eat quickly, paint the doorframes of your homes with the blood of a spotless lamb, enter into the home (past the blood), and await in safety as the Angel of Death passes over. If they did this, their firstborn sons would be spared. It was the beginning of what would become the Passover feast, celebrated by Jews to remember when God delivered them from slavery and brought them into the Promised Land.

With his disciples, Jesus was now celebrating this very feast (which I hope you

picked up on was about him). Part of the Passover feast was eating flat bread, which was broken and then shared. The wine, also a part of the tradition, was a symbol of the blood covenant between God and his people—a symbol of the shed blood of a sacrifice that atoned for sins. But Jesus declares that there was now “a new covenant” about to happen, a new Passover, a new lamb, a new sacrifice, a new Israel. God was about to shed the blood of his own firstborn—a spotless Lamb—making it possible for all the people of the world to be atoned for, to be passed over by (spiritual) death.

Jesus said, “This is my body, my blood, shed for you. Eat.”

:: Jesus said that he “eagerly desired” to eat with his disciples. Do you believe that God eagerly desires to commune with you? How does this play out in your prayer life?

:: What does the shed blood of Jesus accomplish for us? Why did Jesus’ blood need to be shed?

:: How eagerly do you find yourself longing for the coming feast, when we will eat and drink with Jesus himself? What things in your life keep you from getting excited about that?

:: Jesus gave his life for us. What must that have meant to his disciples who personally witnessed it? What does that mean to you?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank Jesus for his sacrifice and for all that was accomplished for you on the cross. As you make your petitions to God, express your desire to not simply ask but to trust and believe him for these requests.

Talk to God

Read Psalm 89 and use it to praise God for his faithfulness. As you confess your sins, confess those times when you've been unfaithful in your love for Christ.

Listen to God

I don't know the man. Read Luke 22:54-62.

Peer pressure can be a powerful thing. I can remember doing some pretty stupid things in high school simply because the other guys were doing it or because I feared what people would think of me if I didn't.

Peter can get a bad rap for his denials, but I, for one, identify with him. It's hard to go against the flow, especially if your life depends on it. I've never been in that situation, but I know why he did what he did, and I, most assuredly, would have done the same thing. The feelings of guilt that Peter suffered must have been horrendous. If a grown man who fished for a living and was the de facto leader of the disciples weeps, you know he has to be feeling serious remorse.

If you think about it, we actually deny Jesus every time we sin. We deny his power in our lives, our association with him, and essentially Jesus himself when we choose to go our own way. We live out Peter's denial almost every single day. But Jesus continues to love us and forgive us and work through us. I wish I repented as much as Peter did every time I deliberately choose to sin.

:: As you read Peter's denial, what is the Lord saying to you in this text?

:: How does sin in our life communicate denial of Jesus to those around us?

:: Have you wept bitterly over sin lately?

:: Jesus restores us and wants us to know that he loves us unconditionally. In what areas of your life is it hard for you to receive God's unconditional forgiveness?

:: Like Peter, we should respond to sin with remorse. What areas of your life do you need to confess to the Lord or ask for cleansing from previous sins you can't let go?

:: Unconditional means you need not do anything to earn God's love and forgiveness. What actions or activities do you do out of an attempt to earn God's favor or forgiveness?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for his grace, that his faithfulness to us is not based on our faithfulness to him. Pray about those areas where you desire to be more faithful, more obedient, and more courageous.

It is finished.

DAY

26

Talk to God

Praise God for his presence in your life, in everything you do, think, and say. Confess those things that have created distance from him.

Listen to God

Jesus finishes the work. Read Luke 23:26-49.

The curtain in the temple was a significant item. It separated the holy of holies—the place of God’s presence—from the rest of the temple. The curtain created a barrier between a most holy God and a most unholy people. An electric fence, if you will, only instead of getting a shock, you’d be struck dead if you tried to cross the barrier.

Once a year the high priest, and the high priest alone, entered the holy of holies, presented the blood of a sacrifice, and sought forgiveness for the sins of God’s people. This was something you definitely didn’t want the high priest forgetting to add to his day planner each year.

When Jesus finally died and committed his spirit to death, the curtain (which was pretty darn thick) tore in two, signifying a dramatic change in the way

things were going to work from now on. Jesus’ death for our sin provided open access to the presence of God. Free and clear. No priest needed, no animal sacrifice, no more curtain, no more Day of Atonement. Jesus had made the final sacrifice for sins and now God was approachable at any time, by anyone, anywhere through Jesus the Christ.

:: Why do you believe some of Jesus’ closest followers were standing at a distance?

:: What thoughts enter your mind as you consider the freedom we have in approaching God because of Christ?

:: In your prayer life, how do you exercise the freedom to approach God with anything? How much are you experiencing the freedom that Jesus provided for you on the cross?

:: What areas of your life are difficult to daily crucify with Christ?

:: How do you identify with Jesus and his suffering on the way to the cross?

:: The cross is the finished work of Christ. What areas in your life do you need to believe God when he says, “It is finished”?

:: What do we learn here about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God that you have complete and total access to him and that you can approach him at any time and in any place. Then come boldly and confidently before his throne and make your requests.

Resurrection day.

Talk to God

66 Take time to praise God for being God, incomparable to anything or anyone in any way. Confess your sins to him and humble yourself before him.

Listen to God

Jesus rises from the dead. Read Luke 24:1-12.

The empty tomb is the crux of Christianity. Although the work was done on the cross, the proof is in the empty tomb.

Everyone dies; no one comes back to life. And so when Mary goes to visit Jesus, she fully expects to see his lifeless body lying in the tomb. But the tomb is empty and the angel is there to verify it. Never mind the angels, earthquakes, and massive stones rolled away. Jesus is alive!

Mary runs back to tell others what she knows. Her response is something we should imitate, running to tell everyone the news that Jesus has risen from the dead. Dwelling on the death of Jesus brings us to a place of humility and gratitude. The tomb is where we rejoice, where we hope, where we run to tell others!

:: Jesus conquered sin and death. How do you experience this truth in your life? Where has he conquered sin and death in you?

:: Like Mary, do you have a heart to run and tell others? Why or why not?

:: How does Peter's reaction demonstrate his love for Jesus?

:: In what area of your life has Jesus made you most alive? What dead places need to be taken to the Lord and made alive?

:: How does the empty tomb change your view of eternity? Of death and dying?

:: What hope does it bring to you that Jesus really is alive?

:: Through the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ lives in and through us. How have you experienced this reality?

:: What do we learn from the empty tomb about Jesus' power and authority?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God that his Spirit lives within you, and thank him for all the ways you've experienced and are experiencing new life. As you pray, ask God, through his Spirit, to live his life in and through you, being specific about all the different aspects of your life.

Talk to God

On this final day, praise God for some aspect of who he is that has become clearer through this study in Luke. Confess any sin or hindrance that is keeping the Spirit from maximally empowering you.

Listen to God

Jesus walks through walls. Read Luke 24:13-53

68

After all is said and done, the icing on the cake is when Jesus appears out of nowhere. If the miracles, the fulfillment of Scripture, or rising from the dead didn't clear it up, perhaps Jesus walking through a wall would. And then he swallows a fish to prove he's real—no ghost, no hallucination. I think he might have done that just for fun. Either way, he's the man. Or rather, God. Or rather, both.

His last encounter with the disciples is meant to encourage, confirm, and empower his friends for the ministry that's ahead. Jesus' ministry on earth was complete, and now the disciples would be charged with taking the Good News to the rest of the world. But not this day. This was a moment of victory, and every precious drop of joy, relief, and just plain happiness would be wrung from it, for tomorrow would start a new workweek in the ministry of the disciples. Jesus blessed them, gave them a few more instructions, and left the task of spreading the Good News to his disciples, who include you and me. But he didn't leave us alone; his Spirit empowers us and guides us in fulfilling what Jesus our Lord started.

And that is quite an adventure.

:: Sometimes we struggle with seeing God's hand in our life. What "sign" would you ask God to do in your life to show he is active and cares about your relationship with him?

:: Jesus said he was hungry. How does the humanity of Jesus draw you closer to him? In what ways do you struggle to believe that Jesus truly does understand your humanity?

:: How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's influence and empowerment?

:: Why do you think Jesus needed to recount with the disciples all the reasons he needed to suffer and die?

:: God is the one who needs to open our minds to understand. How does that truth affect what you ask for in prayer?

:: What do you need to praise, rejoice, and thank God for?

:: Who do you need to pray for or tell about this wonderful news?

:: What do we learn here about Jesus in this passage?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

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Talk to God

Thank God for some of the specific things he has shown you and taught you over this last month of meeting with him. And as you present your requests to God, ask him to help you keep this daily habit tomorrow, next month, next year.

And in Conclusion

It's quite appropriate that at the end of Luke's Gospel, he recounts the interaction Jesus had with a couple of his disciples walking along the road to Emmaus. Jesus—the messiah—has been crucified and the disciples are stupefied, unable to piece it all together. But along comes Jesus disguised as he has been throughout the Scripture and he opens their eyes to see that the whole of Scripture is really about him:

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

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Luke recounts that their "hearts burned within them" as their minds were opened.

Luke reveals to us an important fact: that knowing God's plan and gift of salvation is deeply rooted in knowing the entire story. The good news doesn't just reside in part two of the Bible, the New Testament. The entire story of the Bible is about one person, one plan, one goal. That person is Jesus, that plan is redemption, the goal is the glory of God. It's really a pretty simple story line.

We read the Scripture looking to see how the text, wherever it is, relates or points forward to Christ. In the book *The Ancient Love Song*, Charles Drew (P&R Publishing) notes some of the ways Scripture points us to Christ

The Law (especially portions of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) anticipates Christ by exposing our hearts and persuading us of our need for a Savior.

At a broader level, the failures of specific Old Testament characters (for example, the repeated failures of God's people to trust him and follow his law) also point indirectly to our need for a Savior.

The promises scattered throughout the Old Testament (especially prophetic books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) anticipate Christ by kindling a longing at several levels that only Jesus can ultimately fulfill. For example, God's repeated promise to dwell with his people (Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 37:26-28) comes most clearly to fruition in the incarnation of God's Son ("The Word become flesh and dwelt among us," John 1:14) and the future kingdom of Christ (Revelation 21:3).

Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and so on) compels us to look to Christ for meaning and for the ability to live wisely (see Colossians 2:3).

The psalmists and prophets sometimes spoke with the voice of Christ, anticipating his suffering (the Cross) and exaltation (the Resurrection).

Particular Old Testament offices (prophet, priest, and king) foreshadow Christ's redemptive work. They invite us to look for a prophet who is greater than Moses, a priest who is greater than Aaron, and a king who is greater than David.

Certain Old Testament rituals, such as the Passover (Exodus 12), foreshadow God's redemption of his people through the Cross.

In the New Testament we encounter explicit proclamation of Jesus:

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) introduce us to Jesus Christ and his

ministry on earth, culminating in his death, burial, and resurrection.

The Epistles (Romans, I Corinthians, and so forth) offer sustained theological reflection on the significance of the person and work of Christ for the church.

Revelation gives us a window into the future glory of Christ as he brings in his heavenly kingdom.

The Bible is an eclectic book. It's filled with books about history, poems, wisdom, songs, prophecy, and in depth narratives. Read any in part, and you miss out on much that God wants to teach you. Camp out in just your favorite parts and again, you'll miss the fullness of the story. The point, I believe, of such a vast array of perspectives and genres is to engage with a God who is not normal. Nor is he routine. Nor is he interested in simply passing on a list of rules and regulations for us to follow without passion or desire.

He desires to engage with you, to relate with you, to walk with you. And so, we approach the Bible eager to see what God is like. And knowing that God is exactly like Jesus perhaps you can begin to look at the Bible with fresh eyes. When you understand that God has been pointing to Jesus from the very beginning, your study of the Bible becomes a whole new adventure.

Studying the Bible, making it a daily routine and engaging God with his word can be the most life changing habit you'll ever develop. You've got a roadmap, you've got some foundations for a daily routine, now make it a lifestyle. Make it a 365-day experiment.

May the Lord bless you and keep you as you begin the journey to understanding Gods word, and may his face shine upon you as you seek his face.

