

God's Way

Daily Devotional

1-A-Day (365)

'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

(Isaiah 55:9)

Peter Walker

www.1peter1three.weebly.com

To Ruthie

Introduction

If we truly want to know God – who he is and how he lives – we need to learn from him directly. God has not hidden himself from us. Through the Bible – God’s Scriptures – we have insight not only into who God is, namely Jesus Christ, but also how he acts – ‘God’s Way’.

It is my hope and prayer that these short daily devotionals help you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, and your understanding of God’s ways, his walk with you.

Read one a day. Look up in a Bible the Scripture references at the end of each devotional. And then take a couple minutes to ponder and pray. Prayer is simply whispering to the Lord Jesus, your thoughts, worries and joys. And listening. Listening quietly for the whisper of his Holy Spirit.

Jan 1

Building Together

'Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain...' (Psalm 127:1)

The reason God's ways are 'higher' than our ways now, is because we fell from those heights. We fell from purity, and from childlike innocence. We sinned.

God's higher ways do not mean they are more complex, or more difficult to understand. God's ways are higher in that they are purer, holy, childlike. His ways are usually much simpler than our ways. In fact, Jesus said that we needed to become like children in order to enter his kingdom.

I find it interesting in today's verse (Psalm 127:1), that both God and mankind are building. We do need to 'act', to work, to build. The challenge to us is whether we ask God to be part, to lead, to bless. Do we include him in what we build? Unless God is building the house with you, it won't stand.

(Matthew 18:3; Proverbs 3:5-6)

Jan 2

Jesus – The Way

‘Jesus said, I am the way...’ (John 14:6)

The most important thing to know about God’s ‘Way’ in our lives, is Jesus Christ. You know the saying, ‘It’s not *what* you know, but *who* you know!’ The same is true of God.

One title or name for Jesus is ‘Immanuel’. This means, ‘*God with us.*’ God – who is Spirit – came to us in human form, so we could actually see him and know him and walk with him. We could touch him, and hear him, and hold him. Jesus is God with us. And this is the most important truth to know about ‘God’s Way’.

(John 3:16; Matthew 1:23)

Jan 3

Rightful Place

'He must become more, and I must become less.' (John 3:30)

One day Jesus was invited to a religious leader's house for dinner. A prostitute came into the house uninvited and began to worship Jesus, crying and bowing before him, and wiping his feet with her hair and tears. The religious leaders did not like this at all!

Jesus then challenged them. He pointed out that they did not honor him like she was honoring him. They were not washing his feet, or treating him as an honored guest.

Is Jesus in his rightful place in my life?

(Luke 7:36-50)

Jan 4

The Battle Is Won!

'The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'
(Habakkuk 2:14)

I have worked in places where there was a real hostility against my faith. I could feel it in the air. It was like a smog, a suffocating air, a heavy spirit. We will encounter these spaces on the battlefield.

It is crucial to always remember, my friend, that the battle of the Lord Jesus is already won! We will encounter strongholds of the enemy here and there, but Christ's light will ultimately penetrate, dispel darkness and gloom, and enthrone his Spirit there.

So don't be discouraged. Be at peace. Stand in his light, and watch it break in more and more.

(John 16:11; Revelation 21:5)

Jan 5

Prayer

'When you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans...' (Jesus, Matthew 6:7)

Prayer is deep and real connection with God. It is conversation. It is sincere. It is faith.

Jesus called us 'friends'. He said he was calling us 'friends' because he was communing with us, sharing God's presence with us.

Asking God day after day for something you need, you want, or someone you love – is *not* babbling. That is 'longing', persistence, trust. That is relationship. Babbling is when we think our words to God can be separate from our actual lives and relationship with God. Babbling is when we are merely 'talking the talk', but not walking the walk.

(Luke 18:1-8; Isaiah 29:13)

Jan 6

Free Will

'Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.' (Joshua 24:15)

Some people will support you in your faith in Jesus. Some won't. Some will question you. Sometimes your own heart will question you.

But here is an amazing truth. Everyone of us can, if and when we choose, stand up and 'believe' what we want to. No, we can't make stuff up; but when we truly have seen and 'believed' something to be true, we have the right – the ability in heart and soul – to lay claim to it.

There comes a time to shake off the perceptions of others, the niggling doubts (that often aren't actually doubts, but concerns about other people's doubts), and stand up and say, *'Yes, I am a believer in Jesus, and a follower of Jesus.'*

(2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 John 3:20)

Jan 7

Life So Unfair!

'Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving...' (1 Timothy 4:5)

Jesus was not a Socialist. He was definitely not a Capitalist, either. He was not beholden to any party or philosophy other than the kingdom of God, and how it expressed itself here on earth – starting in the individual heart.

So to one rich man, Jesus calls him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. (Mark 10) To another, he simply blesses, and even favors. (Acts 10)

If you are wealthy, that is OK. Receive with thanksgiving. *(But please do read today's Scriptures below)* If you are poor and struggle, know this: There is coming a day when you will not only be 'exalted', but every year and season of struggle will be re-written in your history, your heart, your legacy. Be at peace, you have lost nothing! This is why Jesus said that he was ***'good news to the poor.'*** (Luke 4:18)

Your day is coming. Your vindication is coming. And it will shine like the stars and last forever!

(1 Timothy 6:17-19; Joel 2:25-26)

Jan 8

Love Much

'... the disciples went back... Mary stood outside the tomb crying...'

(John 20:10-11)

To love deeply. To adore. When we see this in a child's eyes, or in a lover's devotion, we know it is truth. We know life is about love.

You are allowed to adore God. You are allowed to worship Jesus. To just let go and gaze on him. To lose yourself in song to him. To desire nothing else outside of him.

When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, he said, ***'To love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength...'*** (Matthew 22:37)

Let God's love pour over you, and allow yourself to love him completely.

(Psalm 73:25-26; Matthew 23:37)

Jan 9

Eternal Investment

'If anyone gives even a cold cup of water to one of these little ones... that person will certainly not lose their reward.'

(Matthew 10:42)

Jesus never forgets what you did for him. Maybe long ago you had a stronger faith, and served the Lord more actively? Maybe now you feel like that season is gone, in the past?

Well, Jesus never forgets your 'investments' of faith, and your generosity and sacrifices. Your reward is safe, and will come to you.

But, my friend, do not lose heart! It's not too late to rise again, lift your face, and walk in God's purposes for you! Ask Jesus today to refresh you, and open a new path with him.

(Galatians 6:9; Matthew 11:28-30)

Jan 10

So Significant!

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...'

(Jeremiah 1:5)

Jesus told us that the kingdom of heaven belonged to the childlike. Children just are. They don't strive to know themselves, and they don't wrestle with a sense of purpose. These troubles come later in life!

You are loved by God, and significant to him, like a baby is loved by her mother. In fact, even more! God says that even if a mother and father forsakes you, he does not!

You are loved by God not for what you do, what you achieve, or for your personality. You are completely loved because he made you, and you are his.

(Matthew 19:14; Psalm 27:10)

Jan 11

Purpose

'Without a vision, the people perish...' (Proverbs 29:18)

God has hardwired us for 'action', for mission.

Even Adam and Eve in the Paradise Garden had a job to do, to tend the garden, the animals, etc. Meaningful work – even in a perfect and eternal world – was meant to be part of living, meant to be a joyful experience.

Of course work became painful, toilsome, when we sinned against God, and became mortal. You can read about this in Genesis chapter 3.

Today, just mark this truth: Mission (work for God's kingdom) is part of our *fullest* life in Jesus Christ. We'll talk more about this in coming days. But do note this exciting truth: You are made for mission!

(Matthew 6:9-10)

Jan 12

Favor & Honor

'... favor and honor come from the Lord.' (Psalm 84:11)

God doesn't have favorites. He's made this clear in the Bible.¹ He's even warned us to not think a poor person is less 'favored' by him, and told us the poor will one day be the rich ones.

However, here on earth God is active in our lives. And sometimes you will be given a special gift from God, or an 'honor'. Receive these special experiences – of provision and honor – with gratefulness to God, and joy. Enjoy it! This is 'God's Way', and we see this 'reality' all through the Bible.

So be careful not to 'judge' people based on wealth or honorable status. But neither rule out God's gifts of 'favor and honor' here in your life, and in other people's lives.

Have humility. Discern, in Jesus' name.

(Job 42:12-17; Proverbs 19:17)

¹ 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 18:14; 1 Timothy 2:4

Jan 13

More Beauty

'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God... down the middle of the great street of the city...' (Revelation 22:1-2)

The most breathtaking beauty is in the wind of God's Spirit. In a flash, a split second, God can unveil to your soul, to your heart, a panorama of perfection.

Maybe you've struggled to walk away from an earthly 'beauty' that you know is not right? Maybe this has left you lonely, on a 'narrow path', aching?

My brother, my sister, the Lord Jesus will not let you down. You have here chosen God's way over the world's way, and the beauty that awaits you, that even now blows gently towards you and through you, will become a mighty wind and vista of glory. Hold steady. Beauty will overtake you, in Jesus' name.

(Psalm 42:7; Psalm 119:103)

Jan 14

So Human!

'... Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well.' (John 4:6)

Jesus is fully God.² He is worthy of worship.³ But if we are going to truly understand – and live in – God's 'way', we need to really see how human Jesus was.

Time and time again in Scripture, Jesus shows us his human and practical side – even when it came to spiritual things. He would sit down when tired. He would rejoice with people, cry with people, grieve the loss of friends. He would pray, and ask God for help, strength, and even to change the way things were.

Jesus was sensible in 'spiritual' things, like sending workers out in groups of two.

We have talked about how Jesus emphasized the importance of the childlike spirit. Well, my friend, very often what occurs to you in a childlike way, is probably the most pure spiritual approach.

(Matthew 7:7-11)

² Colossians 2:9

³ Matthew 14:33

Jan 15

Your Way

'... those who go toward the north country have given rest to My Spirit in the north country.'
(Zechariah 6:8)

Things you do, matter to God. I'm not talking about 'bad' things, I'm talking about 'efforts' you make to please the Lord. These efforts and actions in faith, make a difference to God!

In the rather mysterious verse above, talking about 'spirits' that went out into the world, we see that the obedience, direction and action of one spirit actually brought 'rest' to God's Spirit.

We all know and believe that God makes a difference to *our* lives. But here is a beautiful, deep, and powerful 'Way' of God that you need to believe, and receive. Are you ready for it?

Your life actually *impacts* God, makes a *difference* to God!

(John 8:12; Matthew 5:14)

Jan 16

Degrees

‘When Jesus saw that the man had answered wisely, he said to him, ‘*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*’

(Mark 12:34)

This was a ‘wise’ man, and probably a good man. He was listening to Jesus, speaking with him, learning from him. And yet Jesus said to him, ‘*you are close...*’

You can know everything about the Bible, and love church, and yet be only ‘close’ to Jesus. On the other hand, you can hear of Christ for the first time, know very little about him, and yet come to him completely. Not be ‘close’, but truly be *through* the door.

What’s the difference between ‘close’ and ‘arrived’? Well, honestly it comes down to the sincerity of our heart in repenting of our sin, and believing in Jesus.

(*Matthew 21:31-32; Mark 1:15*)

Jan 17

It's OK!

'I pray... that you may have power... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...'

(Ephesians 3:17-18)

God is alive and real. His Spirit moves throughout the whole world, and through your soul and life. Love is his 'way', and his power, and the very foundation of his gospel.

There will be times in your life when a situation or relationship or issue just is not clear or completely 'good' and you may be confused and not know what to do to get it 'right' before God.

Just know this. Sometimes, in individual moments of love and faith, God will pour out his grace and love on you and on the 'moment', and say, 'It's OK!' He will, in a sense, let you off the hook, and set you free.

These will not be moments on which to build new theologies, or 'religions'. They will be personal, loving moments of God's grace in your life and story. Walk free...

(Hebrews 11:31; Joshua 2; Joshua 6:22-23)

Jan 18

Flamethrower

'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.' (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

We live by faith in Christ. We are in a spiritual war all the time. We are fighters – flamethrowers – bringing light into darkness, God's kingdom into the world.

When you pray – in Jesus' name – against evil in this land, you are throwing holy fire into the mix. Yes, you are! My friend, your faith and prayers and witness are changing history. Don't doubt it. And don't stop! We need you as a faith warrior!

(James 5:16)

Jan 19

Boundless

'He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...' (Ephesians 2:14)

The truth of God – and his grace – is not just a 'big' space, or an expansive space. It is a 'boundless' reality.

There are no walls, no limits. It is a freedom that is beyond our experiences and reference points. He 'destroyed' the wall, did not just move its borders out...

God expressed that he was 'pleased' with Jesus. It was not a reference to 'good' or 'bad'. It was a reference to a boundless, unconditional love relationship.

Step off the 'ladder' of good and bad, up and down, and into God's field of grace, his Spirit of being 'well-pleased' with you.

(Galatians 5:1; Matthew 3:17)

Jan 20

Power!

'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' (Matthew 16:19)

When you pray for someone in Jesus' name, you can change their eternal destiny. Here is an example of a prayer like this:

'Dear Jesus, I pray for my neighbor [name]. I ask that you open his heart to your truth, to your Holy Spirit. I ask that you give him a deep sense of his need to know God, to be forgiven of his sins, and to live forever at peace. I ask for this power to be released in him, in the name of Jesus. Amen.'

In your faith in Jesus, my friend, you carry a very powerful set of 'keys' for people's lives. In Jesus' name, by faith, you can 'bind' evil in people's lives and homes and hearts and communities. In Jesus' name you can 'loose' the gospel into their minds and hearts and families.

(John 20:23; Revelation 12:11)

Jan 21

Mission

'... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10)

God has blessed us with 'mission'. He has given us very important work to do. It is not 'pressure work', it is 'purpose work'.

My friend, this world pivots on spiritual truth. Where evil gets a grip, a whole nation can become violent, immoral, abusive.

In Jesus Christ, we have the power to push back darkness. We answer to a higher authority than any employer, boss, bank or government. We have *'power to demolish strongholds...'* (2 Corinthians 10:4)

Every time you share the love of Jesus, and the gospel of Jesus, you are advancing his kingdom here on earth. You are literally pushing out the borders of his eternal, holy country.

(2 Corinthians 4:1; Matthew 13:31-32)

Jan 22

Never Lost

'A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.'
(Psalm 91:7)

When ten thousand fall 'at your right hand', that feels pretty 'near'!

But there is a truth here – a spirit truth – that is about your purpose, your importance, your significance in God, and to God.

You may feel lost in a crowd, but you are not! You may feel forgotten in a 'story', but you are not! You may feel left out... but you are not! This is what this Scripture means.

Yes, this verse is about 'danger', also. But even deeper than that, this Scripture speaks to the fact that even in the midst of many people, strong and dark winds, confusion and loneliness, you are seen, loved, known, and held safe in the arms of the Lord!

(Psalm 42:7; Psalm 139:7-12)

Jan 23

Go Lower

'The greatest among you will be your servant.'

(Matthew 23:11)

Jesus did not seek to grow in status and influence, in a worldly way. He avoided status symbols, saying, '*... those dressed in fine clothes are in king's palaces.*'

In fact, Jesus often told his disciples to not tell people that he was the Messiah (in other words, their Savior, the 'Anointed One'⁴). He was their Savior, but did not want to get 'distanced' from the people through titles and 'awe'. He didn't want admiration and adoration – he wanted relationship, to be close to people.

If Jesus, our King and Savior, would reach down and sit low, in order to serve people, this gives us a 'map', a 'Way of God' in our own lives. This gives us a way to act with whatever 'status' we gain in this life, whatever advantages or influence we are given. Use it not to garner admiration, but to give it.

(1 Corinthians 4:7; Matthew 19:14)

Jan 24

Back Roads

'Blessed are your eyes, because they see...'

(Matthew 13:16)

⁴ Matthew 16:15-20

I remember taking my family on a drive, showing them a part of town and country that I thought was magical. They didn't see it. In fact, two of the kids fell asleep while I was pointing to things out the window!

We don't all catch the same vision. Jesus will open your eyes to certain needs in this world, certain people and places, certain missions. These will stir you, excite you, motivate you. You will see something of God and through God that needs doing, that *you* can do.

Don't worry if not all people see what you see. Don't worry if there is no 'support' for your vision. All you really need to concern yourself with is the true voice of the Lord, his leading, his calling. If the Lord is for you, no one can come against you!

*(Romans 8:31; Matthew 13:44;
1 Corinthians 12:4)*

Jan 25

Trust Issues

'But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.' (John 2:24)

At one time when Jesus was sending his disciples out on a mission trip, he told them to be '*innocent as doves*', but also '*shrewd as serpents*.' At other times, also, Jesus spoke of the importance of 'shrewdness' in dealing with people. And honestly, if you look at how Jesus himself dealt with people time and time again, he was incredibly astute!

You can love people, and be loving towards people, without trusting them.

You may have good reason to not trust certain people. That is OK!

You can have a legitimate issue of trust with a certain person, and this does not mean that you have 'trust issues'.

(2 Timothy 4:14-15; Matthew 10:16)

Jan 26

Reinvest Profits

'A good name is better than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.' (Proverbs 22:1)

You can do one of two things with a 'good name'. You can become prideful, and seek praise and honor from people; or you can use your 'good name' and 'fame' to invest in people.

Jesus did not get distracted by people's 'praise' of him. He had earned a 'good name' (as maybe you have, as a 'person' or a 'Christian', or athlete, etc.), but he would use his good name – good reputation and influence – to pour back blessing and guidance and instruction on people.

So yes, a 'good name' is better than riches, and one deep reason for this is because a good name can open doors for us to speak love and truth into the lives of others.

Jesus said, ***'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...'*** (Matthew 6:19-20)

(1 Corinthians 4:7; Luke 17:7-10)

Jan 27

Reach = Responsibility

'David escaped to the cave... All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him...'

(1 Samuel 22:1-2)

David was at his lowest, poorest and most endangered. He needed some warriors and some patrons. But at this moment the Lord brought him people even weaker than he was, calling David to stand on his identity, his trust in God, and 'give' to these people.

Jesus was the same. People came to Jesus to receive from him. They saw his anointing, his faith, his power, his peace. They did not come to give, they came to get. They came in need.

Your influence as a Christian, your power, goes far beyond your personal circumstances. Your faith can move mountains. Believe this. Rest in this. Grow in this. Ask Jesus to increase your faith so you can stand in this.

Always use your influence to 'give' back to those who seek you out – encouragement, prayer, healing, money. All in Jesus' name, testifying to him.

(Luke 17:5; Mark 6:30-34)

'He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.' (Mark 6:5-6)

Even godly men in Scripture got sick, and were not healed.⁵ Sincere faith is sincere faith. That's all. Don't ever beat yourself up trying to 'have more faith'. Remember, the disciples asked Jesus for more faith. Faith is a gift, not something you conjure up inside yourself.

So when Jesus asks *us* for faith, what's going on? Well, as we've seen over and over, Jesus was all about the childlike spirit. He valued humility above all else. When you see truth in Christ, just believe what he reveals to you. Like a child, just believe. Here his love flows, his power flows, and you can trust – whatever happens – that you are safe in his arms, and honoring him with sincere, childlike faith.

(Matthew 18:3-4; John 6:37)

⁵ 2 Timothy 4:20

Jan 29

It's a Lie!

'The devil... when he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'
(John 8:44)

The devil's most powerful lies are not straight up 'words'. That's too obvious, and almost too innocent. Like God, the devil is 'spirit'. His most powerful lies are 'spirit'.

Winds of insecurity, condemnation, guilt, fear, these are the devil's most powerful lies. He tries to undermine your very identity, simply saying that you are not the person that God has said you are. He did this to Jesus, also, in Matthew chapter 4. He said to Jesus, *'If you are the Son of God...'* The devil tried to undermine the very essence of Christ, his identity in God.

My friend, when you feel this 'wind', this spirit – attaching some words, faces and places to it – just pray:

'In Jesus' name I reject this lie over my life. I reject this accusation, this fear, this discouragement. By the blood of Jesus, I say, 'No!'

(Revelation 12:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Jan 30

It's Who You Know!

'Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving...' (1 Timothy 4:4)

Things are neither good nor bad in themselves. It's all about the spirit, and about the giver. It's also about *our* 'spirits' and faith in 'receiving'. (*Look carefully at above verse*)

For example, if Jesus gives you 'honor', it is honor that you can receive and enjoy. Receive it from his Spirit, and hold it by his Spirit. This is good.

If the devil – or the 'world' - gives you 'honor', it is honor that you should not receive, not touch, not enjoy. Side-step it, and walk on. By all means smile, even say thank you, but don't touch! (John 2:24-25)

This goes for just about everything – material, as well as spiritual. It's who you know – who 'gives' it – not what it is.

A prayer: *Give me the faith to receive everything that Jesus gives me. Give me the faith to walk away from everything not of Christ.*

(Read the incredible story in 2 Kings 5, and note especially verse 16)

Jan 31

Discernment

'Therefore consider carefully how you listen.'

(Luke 8:18)

Jesus told us to be careful how we listen. Not just careful *what* we say, or *how* we say it, but actually careful how we *'hear'*.

This is not the same as being skeptical or cynical. You have the right – the God-given right – to be 'wary' or careful about what you are hearing, seeing, even in Christian circles and churches.

Discernment is the ability to pick up on the 'spirit' of something or someone, even if you can't put words on it. Discernment is the God-given ability to pick up on something that is spiritually 'off', even if the 'words' or the 'face' seem innocent.

Discernment can also be referred to as *'distinguishing between spirits'*.

'They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him...' (Titus 1:16)

(1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

Feb 1

Lowly

'He who touches you touches the apple of His eye.' (Zechariah 2:8)

You are special to God. He knows you personally, loves you uniquely, spends time with just you.

A man named Nathanael heard about Jesus. His brother had 'called' him to come see Jesus. When he approached Jesus, Jesus said to him, *'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree, before Philip called you.'* (John 1:48)

Something about this was so shocking to Nathanael that when he heard this, he said, 'Surely you are the Son of God!' The fact that Jesus knew of Nathanael 'under the tree' was something, somewhere, that no one could have known. But Jesus knew. Jesus saw. Jesus cared.

You are special to God. He sees and knows and stands with you.

(Psalm 139:13-18)

Feb 2

True Peace

'Therefore love truth and peace.'

(Zechariah 8:19)

It's OK to speak truth. We can speak it in a kind way, in a humble way, but speak it nonetheless.

This verse above is actually about dealing with our neighbors. It can be hard to get the balance between 'keeping peace', and 'speaking truth'. Sometimes we hide behind 'niceness' (what we think is 'peace'), and don't speak truth when we should. Other times we might speak 'truth', but there is no love in it, and it comes forth from us in a judgmental spirit. Truth without love, really isn't God's truth. (1 Corinthians 13)

So here we see that God values both 'truth' and 'peace'. This takes courage, faith and wisdom. Jesus walks with us on this path of integrity – and here there is true fruit for the kingdom of God.

Ask the Lord today to lead you on this path of both peace and truth in your relationships.

(Zechariah 8:16-19; 1 Peter 3:15)

Feb 3

Change of Direction

'Blessed is he who does not take offense on account of me.' (Matthew 11:6)

One of the hardest things about 'God's Ways' in our lives, are just how practical and 'human' they can be.

We might be tempted to 'take offense' on account of Jesus' ways in our lives, his humble – not supernatural – ways of moving in our lives, and actually directing our lives.

Joseph – the earthly father of Jesus – had such gritty 'guidance' from God. God directed him in dreams, but even changed the direction at one point. In other words, God said, *'go this way'*, but then later said, *'No, actually, go this way...'* (Matthew 2:19-23)

That's tough going! It's disputable, seemingly – like, are you sure that was God at first, if he is changing direction now...?

As we read through Scripture, we see how God moves, and we see how real the spiritual realm is. His ways are always 'questionable' to our broken, small hearts and minds. But through the Bible he has revealed to us how he works.

Lord, help us step into your ways, in Jesus' name!

Feb 4

Be Still

'Be still and know that I am God.'

(Psalm 46:10)

Alone in your room. End of a day, or a week. Maybe skies are gray. Maybe you're lonely?

When Jesus was born, one title of his, one name, was Immanuel, which means, '**God with us.**'

(Matthew 1:23)

The whole purpose of God creating people was to be with them. His purpose in creating you, was to be with you. Relationship. Presence. Intimacy. Peace. Eternal life.

When you are alone, and feeling alone, recall today's Scripture. Fill that space with the presence of God. Embrace the quietness, to be '*still and know*' that he is God, and he – Jesus – is with you.

(Acts 17:24-28)

Feb 5

Your Way

'Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.' (Psalm 37:4)

You have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You know him personally, and are known by him.

There is a desire in you – different to that of other people – to make Jesus known. You may not 'desire' to preach on the streets, or be part of this or that kind of outreach. That's OK. But rather than stress about what others are doing, or whether it is 'good' or 'bad' (for they will answer for their own ministries to the Lord), why not do this:

Why not sit quietly with the Lord, and ask him over the coming days, weeks, to help you 'tap' the inspiration he has given you, for sharing his name, his love, his Word, with others. *What work or ministry out there really grabs your attention as something you believe in?*

Even the apostle Paul – author of 15 books of the Bible – had a 'preference', had a 'desire of his heart' when it came to ministry. You'll find it in today's Scriptures below.

(Matthew 7:7; 1 Corinthians 12:4; Romans 15:20)

Feb 6

Karma

'Do not judge... the measure you use will be measured to you.' (Matthew 7:1-2)

'*Karma*' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'work' or 'fate'.

It is a Hindu concept, which we use generally to mean that you will reap what you sow, and what goes around comes around. This is not exactly a Christian principle, but there are a few examples in Christ's teaching – and throughout the whole Bible – where we are cautioned about this principle, also.

I knew a man who was wealthy, had loaned me money. I couldn't repay at the time, but he insisted. I found a way. It was tough. I heard recently that his circumstances have changed (20 years on), and he recently borrowed a large amount of money. He personally shared with me that he can't repay it as the economy has taken an unexpected turn. He is in a very difficult spot.

We do need to heed, and just make sure our spirits are listening to the Lord, and our hearts are not hard towards people.

(James 4:8; Matthew 18:21-35)

Feb 7

Walls of Jericho

'His arrow will go forth like lightening.'

(Zechariah 9:14)

God will give a victory, and then work it through the system in stages.

The best example of this is when Jesus himself was dying on the cross, and he cried out, 'It is finished!' (John 19:30) Jesus was declaring that his mission was accomplished, death defeated, the war won. He declared this victory – complete, 'finished' – while himself in the 'stage' of dying.

Since that time, the 'victory' that Jesus declared, has been working through the world, through history, through eternity. The victory given, then the process worked out.

This holds true, often, in many aspects of our lives. In our circumstances, in our insecurities and fears, in our 'understanding' of truth. This is why 'faith' is so important – to really grasp truths and victories in the moment, even while we await the full 'feeling' and experience to come.

(Job 22:21; Luke 18:1-8)

Feb 8

The Gospel Message

'Jesus said, 'If anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me... streams of living water will flow from within them.' (John 7:37)

Jesus came as God in the flesh, to forgive our sin and give us eternal life.

The way he did this was powerfully spiritual. Since the creation of the world, because of our 'sin' – that is, our wrongdoing and rebellion against God – mankind has lived a hard life and died. We are mortal. In a sense, it is our sin that kills us.

Jesus came to pay for our sin. He did this by living a holy life, and then taking our sin on himself. He died to pay for our sin – the penalty of our sin. Then he rose again from the grave, and offers us a new life in himself. We can walk free from our sin, from its 'penalty', and live forever with God, with Christ. How?

Jesus called us to repent of our sin, and believe in him. He called us to turn away from sin, and come to him.

When we take this step of faith, we pass from death to life. We are saved. We are forgiven. We are new, and alive forever!

(John 3:16)

Feb 9

The Money Pit

'The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.'

(1 Timothy 6:10)

I have been guilty of this. I have loved money, and wandered from the faith.

Money is not just 'money'. It is everything that money represents – ego, immorality, pride, greed, love of self, of attention... Jesus said that we cannot serve both God and money.

My friends, the problem with going our own way (the way of 'money'), is that we will be ensnared. It's not a neutral zone. It's not free. One thing will lead to another, like interest on debt, while the new purchase is decaying... In turn this financial pressure could lead to dishonesty, stealing, lying...

If you are in this place, there is hope in Jesus. He breaks chains. But truly, the start of this freedom is you alone with God, on your knees, saying you are sorry for your sin in going your own way. Repentance.

(1 John 1:9; Luke 4:18)

Feb 10

Living Hope

'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33)

This life is broken. There is beauty around, yes, but there is a sadness that courses through the veins of this world. It's OK to just grieve this for a moment.

You will lose loved ones. Loved ones will lose you. There are bad people around, and hurtful, evil things that happen. It is too much for us to bear!

My friends, let this truth of Jesus soak into your soul today. He has 'overcome' this world. He came, and quietly defeated death, warned the evil man that judgment is upon them, they won't escape it, and promised those who believe in him, who take his hand (you!), that you are safe in his arms. He is with you now, and you are every day coming closer to his eternal kingdom, heaven itself, perfect, holy, healed existence.

(Revelation 22:1-5; John 14:1-3)

Feb 11

Warrior

'When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:6)

I love sitting quietly in my room, with a closed door. Even now I sit by a window, and outside the rain comes down, the skies are gray, and I feel peace, safe, rested.

'God is spirit.' (John 4:24) We are told in this same verse – words of Jesus – that God also wants people to worship in spirit. In other words, God is about the heart, about faith, about spirit.

In your own room, with a closed door, with a heart of faith, you can pray to the Lord for people. You can pray against evil, and for justice and exposure. You can pray the Lord raises up holy, believing leaders in your town, your country. You can pray for yourself, for others. You can do serious battle to change this world, from the quietness of your room.

(James 5:16; John 16:24)

Feb 12

Human Touch

'They brought a blind man to Jesus... he spat on the eyes, and put his hands on him...' (Mark 8:22-23)

I see in so many stories in the Bible, that God's 'miracle' work in our lives, is often very gritty, very practical, very earthy – not heavenly.

There are times – more often than we are aware – that God acts in completely supernatural ways. But in our lives and our stories, God will often act in very 'human' ways. Angels will tell people to go here or there and speak to other people (instead of just delivering the message themselves), and Jesus will 'thirst' and ask for a drink, rather than just dispel his own thirst or create his own drink.

God's ways are often very involved with our ways, and our world.

(Acts 1:23-26; Matthew 10:23)

Feb 13

Impart

'I will not let you go unless you bless me!'

(Genesis 32:26)

Jesus honors our love for others. Many who came to Jesus came not for themselves, but on behalf of someone they loved. And Jesus commended this love, this faith.

For many of us, although we truly need and value God's blessing in our own life, we also want to be able to impart God's blessing to others – our loved ones, our neighbors, the hurting around us. This desire for God's power to come to us, and *through* us to others, honors God!

Value, receive and rest in the blessing that God gives you. But press in to God and ask that he blesses those you bless, favors those you share with, set apart those you minister to. In other words, ask God's blessing to come to you, and *through* you to others.

'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...' (Matthew 16:19)

(John 15:13)

‘Two other men, both criminals, were also led out to be executed with Jesus... While they hung there, one of the criminals said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered, ‘Today you will be with me in paradise.’ (Luke 23:32,39-43)

One man can have great fame, but very little influence on the world, on souls, on God’s history of the universe. Another man can be known by very few, indeed die unknown, and yet change the lives and hearts of millions of people, and the course and history of the universe.

The criminal who called on Jesus, died only hours later. And yet millions throughout history have read his story, his testimony, and found inspiration themselves to call on Jesus and be saved. He never lived to see this, or to even share his story with people. But God saw him, heard him, and used his faith to change the world.

Your impact on the world, my friends, is about the integrity of your relationship with Jesus – in the quiet, secret places. Be at peace. Rest in him.

(Matthew 6:6; Luke 21:1-4)

Feb 15

Mary & Martha

'Martha... you are worried about many things, but few things are needed – indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better...' (Luke 10:41-42)

Mary had chosen to sit and listen to the Lord. That's what she was doing. Martha, on the other hand, was very busy with all the 'preparations that had to be made.'

Now note: the preparations for Jesus and others in the house did have to be made, if Martha and Mary were going to host. But maybe Martha was just doing too much? Maybe not so much had to be done? Maybe less preparations for Jesus, and more time with Jesus?

I hope this actually frees you! It is OK if you can't (or don't feel like) cutting the grass, painting the walls, or *'wearing yourself out to get rich.'* (Proverbs 23:4) It's OK to rest. Enjoy what the Lord has already given you, and enjoy his presence.

(1 Timothy 6:6-10)

Feb 16

Freedom First

'Your sins are forgiven.' (Luke 5:20)

The man Jesus was speaking to here had not come to Jesus to talk about his sin – or get forgiveness for his sin. He had come for physical healing of his body.

Now, Jesus did go on to heal his body, but I wanted to just highlight two key things from this interaction.

1. Jesus wants to address the issue of sin in our lives. There are many things we want from him, but he does want us to be people who repent – turn away – from our sin.
2. Jesus offers forgiveness to you, to me, as the very first thing! Like in the case of this man, Jesus wanted to free his soul before he even freed his body.

Jesus offers to 'forgive' and set us free, right off the bat! Yes, we must believe, we must turn away from our wrongdoing, but the freedom, the identity, the complete new beginning, is there to take at the outset, not at the end!

He gives the victory before we even run!

(John 8:36; Romans 10:9)

Feb 17

Investment Strategy

'Whoever gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.' (Proverbs 19:17)

I was once told the best way to 'double' my money was to 'fold it over' and put it back in my pocket. A little play on words, but a good principle about just not spending.

Today's verse is actually amazing. It is a gentle word from the Lord, telling us that if we care for the poor, God will reward us. He will give back to us for this. We are 'loaning' to God.

Jesus also instructed us to 'seek first his kingdom', and that our needs would be looked after by God. We see to his kingdom, and he will see to our needs. (Matthew 6:33)

God calls us to 'follow' him with faith at the core of what we do, and with love. Deeds in themselves are not enough, because we can give grudgingly, or sacrifice unwillingly. So the heart has to be right in our actions. A heart of faith in Jesus, and love in the motive.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3; Hebrews 11:6)

Feb 18

\$\$ or God

'By their fruit you will recognize them.' (Matthew 7:20)

Some of the most 'spiritual' men and women of God in the Bible, were people of great wealth.

Remember, all good gifts come from God (James 1:17), provision is a blessing (1 Timothy 4:4-5), and wealthy people are not unspiritual or 'lesser' because they are wealthy. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

We're told in Scripture that the 'false' and 'true' can be determined by the 'fruit'. False prophets, for example, referred to in Matthew 7:15-20, will show themselves false by their 'fruit', their actions. It is the same with us as believers.

A man or woman prospered by God, and with the Holy Spirit flowing through them, will have fruit of the Spirit flowing *out* of them. Their wealth will not produce arrogance, judgmental attitudes, selfishness or lack of compassion. If this is the 'overflow of the heart', the fruit of their means, their means are most likely not from God, blessed by God.

(Galatians 5:22-26)

Feb 19

Humility

'This is what the Lord says... 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.'
(Isaiah 30:15)

Sometimes I crave a 'break', but then miss it when it comes.

The Lord has promised to give us rest. Even in the midst of a troubled world, he will *'lay a table before us.'* (Psalm 23:5) Jesus brought calm into storms, peace into grief, provision into *'scorched lands'*.
(Isaiah 58:11)

This Scripture challenges me. The 'rest' is paired with a repentant heart. The 'quietness' is paired with trust. The peace God gives is different. (John 14:27) And lastly, when offered, it can be missed:

'... but you would have none of it.'

Prayer for the day: *Lord, help us to see and receive the rest you give, in Jesus' name.*

(Psalm 46:10; Matthew 11:28-30)

Feb 20

Justice

'He has scattered those who are proud... He has brought down rulers, but has lifted up the humble... He has filled the hungry, but sent the rich away...'

(Luke 1:51-53)

These strong words, full of fire, are from Mary, the mother of Jesus.

God does not show favoritism. He loves all. Good things – provision, even prosperity – can come from his hand to yours. He is not against abundance, wealth and beauty. But God is against – even 'hates' – sin, wrongdoing, greed, pride. It is always a matter of the heart for Jesus.

The key point of 'salvation' is when we bow before Jesus, and acknowledge that he is the Lord. He is King. He is holy. And we give our lives to him.

With his Spirit in our hearts, and our names written in heaven, here we begin a new march, a new path, and his goodness and true justice and peace, can come to us, and through us.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I want more of your Spirit to flow through me like a river of peace.*

(Hebrews 1:8-9; Isaiah 61:8)

Feb 21

Spirit

'He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.' (Zechariah 9:10)

Abundance. A feast before you. (Psalm 23:5)
Expanses beyond measure. Waters that are 'crystal clear', and from sea to sea.

The battle is over. Death is defeated. Not just poverty, but the very spirit of poverty, the 'decree of decay' and spirit of loss, it is now passing away. Jesus has overcome, and unfathomable light and beauty now come to you, in Jesus Christ, to fill, define, lift your soul to paradise.

'The path of the righteous [you] is like the first gleam of dawn, ever-brighter until the full light of day.' (Proverbs 4:18)

(Revelation 22:1-5)

Feb 22

Who Do You Serve?

'You shall have no other gods besides me.'

(Exodus 20:3)

This is the very first of the ten commandments: no other gods.

A 'god' is something determined by the heart of someone. It is what you serve, what you love. It is not necessarily a material idol, or a deity that you say you believe in. Of course, these also are 'false gods', but they are more obvious.

'They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him...' (Titus 1:16)

The 'name' of Jesus, and of God, can be spoken by any 'lips'. But true worship of God is from the heart, and is of the spirit.

A great way to keep God in his rightful place in our lives, is to spend a little time in the Bible each day, and a little time in prayer. This we call a 'quiet time'. Even 10 minutes with just you and the Lord together powerfully protects your relationship with him. You are doing that right now, by reading this devotional, looking up the verses, and sitting quietly with the Lord.

(Isaiah 29:13; John 4:24)

Feb 23

Meek

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.' (Matthew 5:5)

Jesus was so purely meek. His heart was tender towards all. In Mark chapter 5, Jesus encounters a man with many demons in him. Jesus casts out the demons.

The demons ask Jesus a particular request – to not be sent to hell, but into the pigs nearby – and Jesus grants their wish.

The people in the village – who had just been freed of this dangerous, demon-possessed man – asked Jesus to leave their village, and he grants their wish.

The man who had been cleansed of the demons, asked Jesus if he could spend more time with him, and follow him. Here we see Jesus actually not grant his wish, but give him a life mission. He tasks the man to go back to his village and share with people what the Lord had done for him.

If Jesus will grant even the request of the demons, and gently bow out and leave people who don't want him near, we can certainly approach him. We can trust him with our heart. He is meek beyond anything or anyone we know.

(Matthew 12:15-21)

Feb 24

Morals

'... you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness.' (Matthew 23:23)

There are lawyers who use the 'law' to make innocent people guilty, and guilty people innocent. The law – or, rules and morals – do not, in themselves, make a person 'good', or an organization 'righteous'.

God has always been after the heart and spirit of the individual. Rules are to help the individual know and walk in ways that reflect God's heart, his holiness, his purposes for people.

Yes, we must live lives that are morally pure. However, our eyes must always be on the Lord, not on the law. The laws are really, truly, in order to lift our eyes to the Lord!

(Galatians 3:24)

Feb 25

Spiritual Gifts

'Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.' (1 Peter 4:10)

God has put his Holy Spirit in you. When you believed in Jesus, his own presence, his own Spirit, poured into you.⁶

A spiritual gifting in you, is from the Holy Spirit in you.

For example, you may be a particularly 'merciful' person, or someone who 'serves' others in a special, up-building way. You may see moments, and effectively speak words of 'encouragement' to people who need it. You may have a special depth of 'faith', that God has deposited deep within you...

As you walk with Jesus, these spiritual gifts can be used with people around you, to spread the love and name of Jesus.

Ask the Lord today to help you understand your gifts, and to open doors to use them.

(Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

⁶ Ephesians 1:14

Feb 26

Sexual Immorality

'God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment... life that is truly life.' (1 Timothy 6:17,19)

God has given us marriage, a committed, faithful relationship between a man and a woman, within which to enjoy intimate sexual relations. If you are not married and you struggle with desire in this area, hold steady, stay true and pure before God, and pray earnestly to the Lord to provide you with a spouse – no matter your age!

Premarital sexual activity is sinful. I'm not talking about *any* contact – like a romantic kiss or holding hands – but rather that line-crossing, intimate sexual activity. Homosexuality, also, according to Scripture, is sinful. If you struggle in this area, pray earnestly to the Lord, hold steady, stay true and holy, and ask God to break you free and open new paths to you. He is a chain-breaker, a powerful healer.

'Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.'

(1 Corinthians 6:18)

(1 Corinthians 7:36; Romans 1:18-27)

Feb 27

Unafraid

'A man with an impure spirit lived among the tombs and broke chains that bound him... he ran and fell at Jesus' feet and cried, 'Don't torture me...!''

(Mark 5:1-8)

Jesus feared the suffering he was personally going to face. We see this when he strains and prays before his crucifixion, asking God to *'take this cup of suffering from him.'* (Matthew 26:37-39)

But when it came to evil spirits, Jesus was never afraid. This man who lived among the tombs, cut himself, broke chains and was possessed by many demons, he actually feared Jesus.

Jesus is in you. We are told that his Spirit in us is more powerful than the spirit of the devil. He is in you. When you lie down at night, in the dark, you have nothing to fear!

(Psalm 4:8; 1 John 4:4)

Feb 28

Deeper

'You search the Scriptures... but you refuse to come to me and have life.'

(John 5:39-40)

Jesus said he was the 'door' to life, and we could – should – go through him.

Our relationship with Jesus is the same as our relationship with other people – close, distant, deep, shallow, false, true...

Going through the 'door' of Christ, is like going through any door – you can stop at the threshold, hover nearby, one foot in, one foot out...

Jesus once said to a man, ***'You are near to the kingdom...'*** (Mark 12:34)

Do you want more of Christ? You can have more of him, be closer to him, know him better. In the same way you can be closer to a friend, you can be closer to the Lord.

(Luke 10:38-42; Psalm 46:10)

Feb 29

Poor in Spirit

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 5:3)

Jesus was 'good news' to the poor – both the poor materially, and the poor in spirit. (Luke 2:10)

This world is broken, and hard. People suffer. Jesus – 'God with us' – brings healing, provision, forgiveness, salvation. Jesus brings heaven to earth, and those on earth to heaven.

The '*poor in spirit*' refers to a humble heart, a contrite heart. A person who is suffering in spirit, and comes to Christ, will inherit his kingdom over their soul. He will heal and provide, from the inside out.

'My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.'
(Psalm 51:17)

(Psalm 34:18; 1 Peter 5:6-7)

Mar 1

Persecuted

'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad... great is your reward in heaven...'

(Matthew 5:11-12)

I like to talk with people about Jesus. I feel (*I know!*) that when I am in this 'space' with people, we are in the presence of God himself.

'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am with them.' (Matthew 18:20)

But I never take for granted an 'open heart' or someone who welcomes the name and message of Jesus. This is never a 'given'.

At times our testimony about Jesus can indeed be an '*aroma of life*' to someone, but to others it may feel threatening, and be '*the stench of death*'. You may get push-back, or even experience a type of persecution for your faith in Jesus. At times like these, do not doubt yourself. Look again at today's verse. Don't let people's reactions to you – good or bad – determine your walk with the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 2:15-16; 2 Timothy 4:14)

Mar 2

You Are Light

'You are the light of the world.'

(Matthew 5:14)

This verse above is Jesus speaking to you, to me.

Yes, Jesus is the *'light of the world'* (John 8:12), the one and only God to follow. However, here we see that as followers of Christ, his light in us, he commissions us to shine forth.

We look to him, we point to him. In Jesus is salvation. But he gently puts his hand on us, fills us with his Holy Spirit, and sends us forth to shine in darkness, and dispel it.

'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.' (1 John 4:4)

Christ in you – which is God's 'mystery revealed' – is powerful purpose, powerful light, true destiny.

(Colossians 1:27; Isaiah 61:1-3)

Mar 3

Christ

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.' (Matthew 5:17)

Before Jesus came to earth, we already had God's 'rules'.

In fact, when Jesus was asked about 'rules', etc., he often quoted the Scriptures of old. So why did Jesus actually come? Well, not to bring us more rules. That was not his purpose.

Jesus came as God's expression of love. Jesus – who is God in the flesh – came to make all the 'rules' (the 'Law'), and all the teaching of God (the 'Prophets'), make sense!

Yes! Jesus said the Law and Prophets were aimed at his coming, and were written in order to *'lead us to Christ'*. (John 11:13; Galatians 3:24) Of course 'rules' for living are important, but the actual 'door' to God is not through rules – it is through faith in Jesus Christ.

(Galatians 2:19-21)

Mar 4

Fool!

'Jesus said... anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.' (Matthew 5:22)

Jesus did not come to condemn. Jesus came to save those who are condemned: Everyone. (John 3:17-18)

Jesus in many ways is like the 'messenger'. And you know the saying, 'Don't shoot the messenger!' Jesus taught us that deep within our hearts we have a problem, we have sin. He did not put it there. He came to take it away. But we often reject him, take offense at him, when he tells us that we have this problem, this need.

Murder is an outworking of sin and hate in the heart. In today's verse above, Jesus is actually speaking to murder, but saying that anyone who actually feels, thinks, speaks an angry word against another, has the workings, the spirit of murder in their heart.

Every one of us needs Jesus, and his forgiveness, his Spirit, poured into our hearts.

(1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

Mar 5

Adultery

'Jesus said... anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

(Matthew 5:28)

This verse stands every man on the same level before the throne of God. Not one person 'better' than another.

Yes, my friends, there is a very significant difference between temptation and action. Jesus himself validates this, and God will reward those who refrain to act on temptation. Absolutely!

But when it comes to judging each other, and the question not of 'reward', but of righteousness, we all stand on level ground.

Jesus came to make us 'righteous' before God. To save us. This is a separate reality to what rewards we may or may not receive in 'following' Jesus.

So when it comes to the soul, to being saved, to being a Christian, not one of us comes into this space except for the work of Jesus in our lives. His death, his blood, his resurrection, and his forgiveness of our sin.

(Matthew 25:31-46)

Mar 6

Divorce

'Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery...' (Matthew 5:32)

Jesus is not saying that there is no reason for divorce other than unfaithfulness. What he is saying, is that divorce cannot – must not – happen for a reason other than true destruction of the marriage.

As always, Jesus is not giving another simple ‘rule’ to work around. He is addressing the ‘*heart*’ issue, and not allowing us to use rules and excuses to do what we want.

He is saying that a man cannot simply grow weary and lustful, and cast his commitment to the side and go in search of love.

Here Jesus is assuming that all is well in the marriage, and a man just wants to change course, change spouse. And honestly that is the basis of most breakdowns - when a man commits adultery, and then leaves his wife as a ‘victim of adultery’. Jesus is saying, ‘No!’

You will see the ‘context’ of people’s question to Jesus on this, by reading this account of it: Matthew 19:7-8

Mar 7

Promises

'Do not swear an oath... All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from evil.'

(Matthew 5:34,37)

In the Old Testament, we were not told by God to not swear an oath. We were told by God to make sure to fulfill the oath we make. (Deuteronomy 23:21-23)

Here Jesus is telling us not to 'swear an oath' at all. So what does he mean? Well, he is not actually concerned about taking oaths. He is concerned about the heart. He is challenging a part of us that is dishonest, that basically takes oaths – or 'promises' – because our 'yes' and our 'no' have become so untrustworthy.

Jesus is simplifying our lives, and challenging our spirits. If we were honest in all we do, there would be no need for 'oaths'.

Also, as Jesus came primarily to forgive sin and save the soul, he is here giving us a glimpse of our need. Deep within us even our 'yes' and 'no' have been affected by sin. We need Jesus in our hearts.

(1 John 3:8; Galatians 1:3-4)

Mar 8

Turn The Cheek

'If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.' (Matthew 5:39)

Growing up in a Christian family, I was very familiar with this verse. It troubled me a little, because I also had seen and learnt about Christians being such strong fighters of justice, standing up to real enemies of love and peace. So this 'turn the cheek' thing confused me a little.

But Jesus was not simplistic about truth, nor was he giving us new 'laws', so to speak. What Jesus was doing here was challenging 'self' and 'ego' and 'pride'. Many things I have 'fought' in life were to do with my own pride. Here Jesus is calling us to put our pride aside, be truly humble, live for a higher cause, a higher kingdom, and let an insult just pass us by. Lose a battle (of 'self') to win the war for the Lord.

Please look up these 2 amazing verses below about Jesus and Paul – both of whom were slapped on the cheek. You will see that *'turning the cheek'* is a deeper, spirit truth, not a simple 'rule' for every situation.

(John 18:22-23; Acts 23:1-3)

Mar 9

Bless Your Enemy

'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' (Matthew 5:44)

Jesus was forgiving without borders. As he was crucified he said, ***'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'***

(Luke 23:34)

However, Jesus was also the one who said, when referring to the person who sins against a child, ***'It would be better for that person to have a millstone tied around their neck, and to be drowned in the sea.'*** (Matthew 18:6)

Have you been deeply hurt? Do you find it hard to 'forgive'? Let me defer this to you...

There is a time, my friend, when 'forgiveness' is simply stepping away from 'hate', or letting go of 'vengeance'. Not about feeling OK with a past hurt, or that someone should be let off the hook. No, there is a time when to 'forgive' is simply to leave justice and punishment to the Lord, rather than taking it on yourself.

This might be all God is calling you to do, regarding 'forgiveness'. Put it in his hands, and walk...

(Romans 12:19 and Matthew 26:24)

Mar 10

For God's Sake

'When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets... to be honored by others... They have received their reward.' (Matthew 6:2)

It is OK that your *'good deeds are seen by men...'* Jesus himself called us to *'let our lights shine before men...'* (Matthew 5:14-16)

So what is he saying in today's verse above? Well, Jesus is speaking to the heart. He is challenging the motive. Sometimes we will do a good work, not so that the Lord is seen and known, but so that we personally get a good name with people.

Jesus is calling us to set our hearts on making the Lord known, on giving him a good name.

When people praise us for this or that talent, or this or that relationship, business, project, 'goodness', kindness... do we use this opportunity to give glory to God? We might simply say, *'Well, honestly I thank the Lord for this blessing in my life, and for allowing me to...'*

(Colossians 3:23; 2 Corinthians 10:17-18)

Mar 11

The Lord's Prayer

'Jesus said, 'This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' (Matthew 6:9-13)

This is a prayer that Jesus 'taught' his disciples, and us, too. It is really nice and helpful to know this prayer by heart.

Sometimes I recite this verse as it is, and sometimes I find this prayer helpful to see the basic focus of prayer in general. So simple. So 'now'. No worry for tomorrow in this prayer. Content with today's provision. And most importantly, a reminder, a 'prayer', that God's kingdom in heaven will come and pour over our world here on earth.

Maybe write this prayer down and put it somewhere you can read often, and try to recite. Maybe beside your bed? And here's another great verse for you to have beside your bed: Psalm 4:8

Mar 12

Forgiveness

‘Jesus said, ‘...If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.’

(Matthew 6:15)

Jesus is talking to the prideful, the spiteful, the grudge-holder... Jesus is not talking to the abused, the victimized, the person who deserves justice.

If you have been wronged, the ‘forgiveness’ Jesus asks from you is this: to resist hate, to resist revenge, and to pass your case and your cause to the Lord. And to walk away from the court case, so to speak. He is not calling you to dismiss and diminish the issue in your heart, or on record. For this type of ‘forgiveness’, and to understand God’s heart in this, see these Scriptures: **Romans 12:19; Matthew 18:6; Matthew 26:24; 2 Timothy 4:14; Revelation 6:10.**

However, to the rest of us who hold grudges, who just won’t let an insult or injury go, who just refuse to ‘*overlook an offense*’ (Proverbs 19:11), who can see that a person regrets something, didn’t really want to hurt us, etc., it’s important that we ‘forgive’, let go, draw a line, ‘feel’ different, act different, in Jesus’ name.

Mar 13

In Secret

'... your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:18b)

I love to hide. I just love to be alone somewhere deep in the woods, or behind a sunny, dry rock on a forgotten part of a beach.

You know, when you're alone, you're not out of the race. You're not missing out on life or even the spiritual battle of history. Jesus, in this chapter 6 of Matthew, says three times that our Father in heaven focuses on the heart and 'secret' life of the individual. God cares about what's going on between you and him, not you and others.

This should put your mind and heart at ease. You have nothing to prove to people. You have only to walk with God in quietness, in integrity, and let life flow from here...

(1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 139:7-11)

Mar 14

Treasure in Heaven

‘Jesus said, ‘Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.’

(Matthew 6:20)

Recently I was walking around a church graveyard. The wind was blowing across this open space, middle of a bright, quiet day. The headstones told stories of very short lives and very long lives. All in the past, now.

When we stop and consider the dead, this call of Jesus to invest in heaven, makes complete sense. In fact, it is the only investment that makes *any* sense.

How do we store up treasures in heaven?

We believe sincerely in Jesus Christ, and we follow his teaching. We walk with him.

The very next verse Jesus tells us that our heart will be where our treasure is. (vs.21)

Let's be sincere and active in our *'faith life'*. Ask Jesus to help you live by faith today!

(Psalm 90:12; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Matthew 7:24-29)

Mar 15

Window to the Soul

'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.'

(Matthew 6:22)

Two people might look at Jesus, but each be 'seeing' Jesus differently.

In John chapter 11, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. People looked on. One group of people saw this miracle, and they saw Jesus as God in the flesh. They believed. They worshipped. Another group of people saw this same miracle, and saw Jesus as only a threat to their own religion and power structure, and went away and *'plotted his death'*.

Jesus is the light of the world – God's pure, true and holy light. For his light to flood our soul, we need to gaze on him with an open heart, with faith, with worship. When we look on Jesus we need to say 'Yes' in our hearts, in our lives.

With the light of Christ in your eyes – truly 'seeing' him for who he is – your eyes will be healthy, and your whole body full of light.

(Malachi 4:2; John 8:12)

Mar 16

Two Masters

'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other... You cannot serve both God and money.' (Matthew 6:24)

Money in itself is of no value. We all know this. People don't want money, they want things that money can buy - power, safety, comfort, status, health, beauty, friends, etc. A love of money, therefore, represents a love of the world – and everything the world values.

Jesus has nothing against money in itself. He himself provided money for Peter to pay taxes. Jesus is about the heart. But it is incredible how Jesus makes a distinction between God and money. He doesn't list thousands of other 'masters' or 'idols' that we might have in life. No, he can include all of them in simply referring to the master of money.

Is your money in its proper place in your heart? Or we might ask, are the *things* that money can buy – retirement security, house improvements, new cars, prestigious education, etc. – are these things in their proper place? Are they second to God in your life, in your relationships?

(Luke 12:13-21)

Mar 17

Worried?

‘Jesus said, ‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...’ (Matthew 6:25)

Life is work. Plans have to be made. Shrewd thinking is good. This is the broken and challenging life we live. However...

Jesus – God in the flesh (John 1:14) – brings us a different kind of peace, and a new kind of challenge.

Even as we face into the day, we are challenged by our faith in Jesus, and his promises, to side-step life’s worries and rest, trust. Yes, we have life to live, but we also know Jesus. And he holds life (and death) in his hands. He holds the keys. And he has told us to not worry.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, please quiet my soul. Please still my mind. Please give me a fresh measure of faith today to trust you for all I need.*

‘...in quietness and trust is your strength.’
(Isaiah 30:15)

(Revelation 1:18; Matthew 28:18)

'Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [provisions] will be added to you as well.' (Matthew 6:33)

In this Scripture – including the verses before and after – Jesus is telling us not to worry about the things we need (*food, clothing, etc.*). He then challenges us – or, in a sense, makes a deal with us – saying that if we concern ourselves primarily with *'his kingdom and his righteousness'*, he will concern himself with meeting our needs. So straight, so practical.

How can we concern ourselves primarily with the kingdom of God and his righteousness?

The key to this is our faith in Jesus. We decide to believe sincerely, to follow with our whole heart.

Personally, to help me with this I spend some *'quiet time'* with Jesus each day, reading the Bible, and praying. About 10 minutes. This is what you are doing right now!

(Matthew 6:25-34)

Mar 19

Do Not Judge

'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'

(Matthew 7:1-2)

Jesus is speaking here to a 'judgmental' spirit. He is not talking about every and any 'judgment call' on a situation or even person. In fact, we are called in Scripture to make 'good judgments' and to be discerning.

Jesus is referring to what most of us do mostly – 'judge' people out of our own pride and fear. Judging a neighbor for their parenting practice, a friend for the people he talks to, a church for their choice of music, a spouse for her creative inspiration, a family member for what they bought...

Today's verse is Jesus taking pressure off us. We can love people, let go, not know, and be kind. If the issue is not a clear-cut moral matter, or something the Spirit has truly given you discernment on, avoid a judgment call.

(Romans 12:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:16)

Mar 20

Ask, Seek, Knock

‘Jesus said, ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’

(Matthew 7:7)

This call of Jesus is so important for us to remember! It not only reminds us to ask Jesus in prayer (*rather than worry, think, plan, save, scheme*); it also teaches us about the caring heart of our Father in heaven.

I often forget to come to God, like a child to a parent, and simply ask. I often forget to pray about what is on my heart.

Now, as with a child to a parent, not everything I ask for will be given. But truly, when we lay not only our needs but the desires of our heart before the Lord in prayer, he is honored, moved, and loves to give good gifts to his children.

(Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7-12)

Mar 21

The Narrow Way

'... wide is the gate that leads to destruction. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.' (Matthew 7:13-14)

When I started following Jesus at 16 years old, I felt very lonely. It felt like no one in my circles actually 'got' this new faith of mine.

As time went by I came across people who did 'get' me – and what joy it brought me! People who had seen and believed on Jesus, and held him as their treasure. People who loved him more than the world, and delighted to fellowship in the spirit. It was like finding long lost relatives!

Don't be discouraged if you feel that people around you don't share the love of Jesus, the deep belief, the listening to his Spirit, the worship of your soul. Today's verse tells us clearly, the gate is small, the road is actually narrow (i.e. hard), and only a few find it. You are one of the few!

(Matthew 13:44; John 15:18-19)

Mar 22

Fruits

'Watch out for false prophets... by their fruits you will recognize them.'

(Matthew 7:15-16)

Jesus is referring here to the truly false – someone who is covering up a sinful lifestyle with a religious appearance. That priest or preacher or 'prophet', that is, in fact, living an immoral life, unfaithful to his/her spouse, lying, stealing... and yet standing and preaching on a Sunday morning.

Jesus is not referring to a Christian who falls into sin, is convicted by the Holy Spirit, repents before God, and turns their life around and walks on in humility and integrity... This is not a 'false' Christian, or false teacher.

If you discern – from 'fruits' or a check in your spirit – that there is a false spirit at work in a church or in pastoral leadership, leave. As simple as that. No explanation needed by you. With the Holy Spirit in you, you are allowed, even called by God, to heed his voice and go where he leads. You answer only to God for this.

(1 Timothy 5:17-21; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11⁷)

⁷ Note vs.10 – the gift of 'discerning spirits'

Mar 23

I Never Knew You

‘Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and drive out demons...?’ I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you...’

(Matthew 7:21-23)

There will be people in this life who profess the name of the Lord Jesus, and even do great things in his name – and yet do not know him.

Do not let this trouble you. It does not seem to ‘trouble’ Jesus, in that he says, ‘I will tell them plainly...’ No drama. No inquiry. Jesus sees the heart, and *‘he knows those who are his.’* (2 Timothy 2:19)

Paul writes in his letter to the church in Corinth, about ‘false believers.’⁸ This is only a few years after Jesus had left the earth, and already there were false believers. So fast-forward 2000 years, and it should not surprise us that in the mix of the genuine, are many counterfeits. It is OK, therefore, to have a ‘keen’ eye for sincere faith. Even the ‘youth’ are encouraged to unite with those who profess faith *‘with a pure heart’*. Not just anyone who talks the talk, but with those who walk the walk.

(2 Timothy 2:22; John 8:31-32)

⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:26

Mar 24

Build on the Rock

'Jesus said, 'Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came... the winds blew... yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.'
(Matthew 7:24-25)

Even when I was not 'following' the Lord, I had a belief in him. I would have told you that I believed in Jesus, but my life choices did not reflect this. Faith is belief in action.

In today's passage Jesus challenges us to 'follow', to 'act'. He's not looking for 'good deeds' and religious ceremony. No. Jesus is looking for sincere faith that gets in motion. What does this look like?

Well, for me, I had to stop some behaviors. I had to apologize to some people, and explain that I was now believing and trying to 'follow' Jesus in my life. This was hard to do. It cost me some friends, some 'face', a lot of pride. It was a type of dying to 'self'.

Is there any area of your life right now where your faith needs to become more real, more active?

(John 8:31-32; Titus 1:16)

Mar 25

Immanuel

'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel - which means, 'God with us.'

(Matthew 1:23)

Jesus is *'God with us'*. Jesus is the most intimate expression of God to mankind.

His birth was announced to shepherds in the field – the poor and lowly – and they could go and actually see him, touch him.

Jesus sought the individual, and ate with them. Jesus knelt down and explained things to people. Jesus reached out and touched people, and let them touch him. Jesus wept with people.

Before Christ came to earth, we already had a big and true God in heaven. He was, in a sense, distant from us. The deep purpose of Jesus was to come close to us personally. And by his Holy Spirit, he can actually be 'in' us.

'This is the mystery of God revealed – Christ in you, the hope of glory.' (Colossians 1:27)

(John 7:37-38; Ephesians 1:14)

'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.'

(Isaiah 42:3)

Jesus promises to heal every heart that believes in him. In the very moment of faith, we are told that we are saved, and that the Holy Spirit is poured into us. This is guaranteed every time!

Jesus also can and often does heal the body. I personally have experienced his healing touch a number of times, and I know many who have. However, my friends, physical healing is not guaranteed. Physical healing was not Jesus' primary purpose in coming to earth.⁹

This side of glory we live in a broken world, in broken bodies, that are mortal and will perish. Even those Jesus raised from the dead, died again.

By all means, cry out to Jesus for the physical healing you need, you want. Yes, in Jesus' name! But even if the physical healing does not come, know this: Your soul is healed in Jesus, and your eternal, new 'body' awaits you!

(1 Corinthians 15:50-54)

⁹ Luke 5:20-24

Mar 27

Regret

'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...' (Isaiah 1:18)

True repentance is a matter of the heart. God sees. God hears.

When we turn our hearts to Jesus for forgiveness, he forgives. This door is open to you.

Let this be your prayer, straight out of the Bible:

'My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.'
(Psalm 51:17)

When you step through the 'door' of Jesus Christ in repentance and faith, you step into a 'new you'. You step into a new eternity. Please do look up and ponder today's Scriptures.

'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

(2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:9; Ezekiel 36:26)

Mar 28

Tears Wiped Away

'The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' (Revelation 7:17)

Jesus longed for people. When he felt their rejection – of truth, of safety – he wept for them.¹⁰

When Martha and Mary cried to him, he cried with them. (John 11:35) When you cry alone to Jesus, he truly sits with you, truly feels your pain, truly 'bottles your tears.'

And his plan is to not only wipe away your tears, but wipe away the scars, the history, the experience. For your wearied spirit, he will give you a new spirit; for your broken heart, he will give you a new heart. (Ezekiel 36:26)

Your God, in Jesus Christ, cares deeply, sits with you, is in you. Know you are safe and your heart is in good hands.

(John 1:29; Psalm 56:8)

¹⁰ Matthew 23:37; Luke 19:41-42

Mar 29

Never Happened!

'Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born...'

(Isaiah 9:5-6)

We are born into brokenness. The darkness is not only around us, but within us. It is here that Jesus comes to us.

The story of Christ in your life, in your heart, is a story of death and resurrection. It is a story of all your brokenness being absorbed into Jesus, and you walking free, whole, saved, made new, made perfect. This is the stunning message and truth at work in your soul even now as you believe on Christ.

Jesus did not just destroy the evidence of pain in us, and pain by us. He actually *'became sin'* for us. He became our dark past, and paid for it. And you walk out as the *'righteousness of God.'*

'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Mar 30

Valley of Dry Bones

'The Spirit of the Lord set me in the middle of a valley... it was full of dry bones. The Lord asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' (Ezekiel 37:1-3)

This God – Jesus Christ – holds the keys of *'death and hell'*. (Revelation 1:18)

He can rattle together dry bones, and call them to life. (*Read this exhilarating story, Ezekiel 37:1-14*)

When is hope gone? In Jesus hope is never gone. Even life lost here (and experiences lost here), Jesus can and will restore, *'renewing all things'*. (Revelation 21:5)

This is too much to fathom. We cannot take it in. A Spirit that blows through the past, through the future, and repays for years lost.

'I will restore to you the years the locusts have eaten.' (Joel 2:25)

If it is the impossible you long for – lost years, lost loved ones, lost chances, words that never should have been spoken – you are hoping in the right God!

(*Colossians 1:15-20; Matthew 19:26*)

Mar 31

Receive Back Your Dead

'Women received back their dead, raised to life again...' (Hebrews 11:35)

The most powerful hope we have in Jesus is this: to rise from the dead, and see those we love again in paradise.

Paul, the apostle who wrote most of the books in the New Testament, said he considered all his learning and achievements in life as 'rubbish' compared to knowing Christ. And he goes on to say that he pressed on in his faith and service to the Lord with this hope: ***'... so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.'***¹¹

Even a man so full of faith, he wondered, could only dream of this reality of coming alive again after he died. (*'...so, somehow...'*)

Prophets raised people from the dead. Then Jesus raised people from the dead. He raised himself from the dead. And he gave loved ones back to each other. In Jesus, through faith, you will rise again after you die and live forever in perfection with those you love.

(Luke 7:11-17)

¹¹ Philippians 3:10-11

April 1

God's Vengeance

'He has sent me... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God...' (Isaiah 61:2)

When Jesus was born, there was truly a celebration for *'Peace on earth'*. This was what the angels proclaimed. (Luke 2:14)

However, the coming of Christ was not just about peace and healing, but about justice and *'vengeance'*. Jesus is a Savior coming to save – just like a hero in a movie shows up to save any victim. Jesus comes in *'fire'*.¹²

The *'good news'* about Jesus is also about his *'justice'*. He comes against evil. He comes to judge those who will not and have not repented of sin and turned fully away from wickedness. I hope this comforts you. The violent and cruel will all be judged by Christ!

'Jesus said... 'Then the king said, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 22:13)

(Luke 4:17-19; Matthew 3:11-12)

¹² Malachi 3:5

April 2

Made New!

'... creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay...' (Romans 8:21)

When sin broke into the world, through the choice and heart of mankind, everything became mortal. Even nature. Decay set in.

When Jesus was breathing his last, he said, 'It is finished!' (John 19:30) Sin was finished. Death was defeated. From this point on, Jesus himself is *'making all things new'* – even creation, nature, waters and skies.

First and foremost, Jesus comes for the souls of mankind. You and I have been made in God's image, have eternity in our hearts, and Jesus wants to rescue all souls. But in the wake of this salvation of people, is the salvation of creation, nature, rivers and rocks and animals and earth. Paradise is both people and creation. How glorious!

(Revelation 21:5; John 14:1-3)

April 3

New

'If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The gospel story – and message – is one of death and new life. Jesus did not *nearly* die, or suffer intensely and then escape. Jesus died and was buried. And then he rose again to new life.

When we believe in Jesus, repent of our sin, we pass through a 'door'. (John 10:9) We, too, die in this moment, and rise to new life in Christ.

'I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you...' (Ezekiel 36:26)

Yes, you will for now have the same body, the same physical scars, the same 'history' or relationships. But the truth is, in your moment of faith, you have cut ties with all of this! Your truest self has just been born. You are on route to a new body, no scars, a changed history, completely new and true relationships.

Ponder today's verses above, and please do look up the two below. Let the Spirit of God breathe these truths into you today.

(Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:20)

April 4

Faith Life

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:20)

A new day is a new start. Even the Scriptures teach us this.

It says in the Bible that *'God's mercies are new every morning!'* (Lamentations 3:23)

Jesus taught us to forgive one another – over and over and over.¹³ We are also called to live a life of 'repentance', a lifestyle of repentance.¹⁴ Ongoing forgiveness is in the context of ongoing repentance. This is a healthy and honest 'people'.

As a believer in Jesus, a 'follower', you truly are made new. Your old self is 'crucified with Christ'. It is gone.

Rise again, my friend, this day. Rise in Jesus, claim your identity in him. Turn from sin, receive his forgiveness, and walk on!

(1 John 1:9; Proverbs 24:16)

¹³ *Matthew 18:21-22*

¹⁴ *Matthew 3:8*

April 5

Abuse

'Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.' (Mark 7:15)

You have been made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27) You have eternity in your heart, your soul. (Ecclesiastes 3:11) The essence of you, the spirit you, is untouchable by man. Untouchable.

Here on earth we are bound up in one – at least it feels like that. You can hit my body and wound my heart, so to speak. But the truth is, the essential part of you is only in the reach of God. No man can touch it, take it, scar it.

When you lift your weary eyes to Jesus, and step through his 'door', his Spirit, in faith, your 'true', untouchable self, will be touched by God, built anew.

'I will put my Spirit in you and you will live...'
(Ezekiel 36:27)

(Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 21:4-5)

April 6

Judgment

'... woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.' (Matthew 26:24)

Here Jesus is speaking about Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

This is a striking word of Christ. It is 'judgment', and it is strong. Jesus is not here saying, *'I forgive and forget this...'* No, Jesus is saying this is a marked moment, and Judas will be judged for this.

Now, when Jesus was being led out to be crucified, he did speak forgiveness over people. He said, **'Forgive them Lord, for they know not what they do.'** (Luke 23:34)

It is important to note that the issue of forgiveness, and judgment, run deep. Jesus is not a one-size-fits-all on this issue. Where the 'facts of the matter' are evil and abuse, Jesus speaks judgment!

So you don't need to 'hate', to 'seethe', to scheme. No. Just take your case and give it to Christ. He will not let you down. Then walk free in wisdom, and in a deep confidence that God's judgment will get the job done!

'It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!' (Hebrews 10:31)

April 7

Forgive & Forget?

‘Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.’ (Romans 12:19)

God calls men and women of faith to not fear, and to stand against wickedness and the evildoer:

‘Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?’
(Psalm 94:16)

We are called to forgive, and so be forgiven.¹⁵ But this is not about excusing injustice, or letting evil slide. No! Jesus is not about that at all.

Sometimes the ‘mercy’ of Christ is this: he comes to the victim, pulls them out of the grip of evil, and then pursues hotly the aggressor, the sinner, and destroys them!

‘The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemies before you, saying, ‘Destroy them!’
(Deuteronomy 33:27)

(Psalm 82:4; Malachi 4:3; 2 Timothy 1:7)

¹⁵ Matthew 6:12-15

April 8

Triumph!

'If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him...' (2 Timothy 2:11-12)

When Jesus found us, and became real in our lives, a new timeline opened up before us.

Jesus often set our sights for 'reward' and for 'rest' and for 'paradise', out beyond the borders of this life. He called us here and now to invest in there and then!

'Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...' (Matthew 6:20)

Jesus encouraged those who suffer here, who are 'last' in the order of worldly rewards, that they will be 'first' in heaven. This is incredible! Yes, this calls for faith. But it is God's way, up ahead, coming soon.

I love the second part of today's verse – ***'if we endure, we will reign...'***

Be encouraged. Hold on to Jesus! You will cross that river one day, and be given the keys of your palace and gardens!

(Matthew 20:16; 2 Timothy 4:6-8)

April 9

With Christ In Suffering

'I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...'

(Philippians 3:10)

We all want to know the power of Christ's resurrection in our lives. Yes, and that is good!

However, you may have some suffering in your life, in your body, in your story. It may be beyond 'sharing' with people. Maybe your suffering touches you so deeply, that even to speak about it, does not bring it into a place of 'company'.

Jesus suffered alone. We're told that even his disciples could not stay awake with him in his sorrow, and actually fled from him in fear. He was alone. In today's Scripture Paul refers to sharing in Christ's suffering. Paul wants to bring his own suffering alongside Jesus, not only for his own comfort, but to support Christ. Paul wants to join his sufferings to Christ's suffering, and be company with him.

You can bring your own suffering into the presence of Jesus, and in so doing share in Christ's suffering. He will reward you for standing with him, sharing with him.

(Hebrews 13:13-14; Luke 12:8-9)

April 10

Hero! You!

'... *the world was not worthy of them.*' (Hebrews 11:38)

Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, is an amazing chapter about people of faith. When it speaks – towards the end – of people of faith who were poor, persecuted, had no housing... it simply says, *'the world was not worthy of them.'*

The harder one has had it, and yet held on to Jesus, the higher their reward, the higher their esteem. This is biblical truth start to finish.

All those things in your life that other people do not and cannot understand, all those hardships – they are not forgotten. Your silent tears are bottled by God, and the hurts you suffered are noted and will be vindicated.

Your name is in the book of life, and your story – every step – is precious to Jesus.

(Psalm 56:8; Luke 10:20; Joel 2:25)

April 11

Water Ways

'The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'
(Habakkuk 2:14)

The beauty and expanses of water are life to me. When I think of heaven, I see water ways everywhere. And in the last chapter of the Bible, speaking of heaven, it refers to '***...the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God...***' (Revelation 22:1)

Yes, water, like everything in life, has been 'subject to decay', and used for tragedy. But water – like people – will be redeemed, pure, holy, perfect and filled with the light of God. Honestly, I can't wait to see it!

'He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.' (Zechariah 9:10)

(Romans 8:21; John 4:10,14)

April 12

White Noise

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.' (Psalm 42:7)

This verse may have lots of meanings, I'm sure it does. But for me it is picture perfect just as it stands.

When I stand near waterfalls, or in strong winds, or under an expansive sky, or at the ocean's edge, the noise of creation sweeps over my soul and proclaims that God is. Peace floods my soul.

'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.' (Psalm 19:1-2)

Jesus can and does calm storms. But sometimes he will use a storm to drown out life's distractions, and calm your mind and heart with a rush of his own creation.

(Psalm 8)

April 13

Peace to You

'Today a Savior has been born... on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.' (Luke 2:11,14)

The peace that Jesus gives us is not just a feeling, or numbing the pain.

Jesus told us that the peace he gives is *'different'* to the world's peace. (John 14:27)

Jesus is *'God with us'*.¹⁶ His peace is life, is the Spirit of God in us. His peace is power. His peace is salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life.

The peace the world brings is only circumstantial. It is for the moment. But if circumstances or health or finances are struggling, there is no peace.

To those who repent of their sin, believe in Jesus, they pass into a *'reality'* of eternal peace, no matter what comes or goes here on little earth.

'My peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'
(John 14:27)

(Psalm 46; Mark 4:39)

¹⁶ Matthew 1:23

April 14

Special & Safe

'Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.'

(Psalm 17:8)

Let this verse be your prayer today. Whisper this to the Lord. When you are alone – maybe even now – just close your eyes and speak this to Jesus.

Say it over the next few days, weeks, months. Write it and put it up where you can see it – on the fridge? Say it until you believe it. Soak in it.

He has ***'carved your name in the palm of his hand.'*** (Isaiah 49:16)

'He who touches you, touches the apple of his eye.' (Zechariah 2:8)

You don't have to explain this, understand this, or fit it into a 'world view' or world system. You don't have to neutralize it, like God loves everyone... That's not what this verse speaks. It speaks about that unique, set-apart love God has for *you*.

The apple – not 'an' apple – of God's eye.

Cannot every parent say this honestly of every child they have? Unexplainable. But completely true.

April 15

Safe

'For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.' (Colossians 3:3)

A God who 'hides' you. Peace. Protection. Safe.

We are lost sheep. Jesus finds us, shelters us, and guides us home.

Here on earth he heals our wounds, mends our hearts, clears our history. He sets us on a path of redemption that is ever-brighter...

And then one day we will cross the river into complete, perfect safety. We will never again fear loss, fear danger, fear memories.

'The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, ever-brighter until the full light of day.'
(Proverbs 4:18)

(Psalm 40:1-2; Luke 19:10)

April 16

Sheltered

'... in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high on upon a rock.'

(Psalm 27:5)

David – who wrote this song, this prayer – was a warrior. He was a fighter, who had to wander the desert, live in caves, and duck and dive from fierce enemies.

David saw God as a shelter. He 'gazed' on God (vs.4), and in his spirit he rested in the '*courts of God*'.

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are saved.' (Proverbs 18:10)

Here on earth we must have faith in God. We must believe his promises. ***'We live by faith, not by sight.'*** (2 Corinthians 5:7) There will come a day when we can live by 'sight' again, when everything we believe is also what we see. But for now, through Jesus in us and with us, we claim the promises of God, his truths, that he is our shelter and will not let us down!

(Psalm 20:7; Nehemiah 8:10)

April 17

Willing?

'Jesus said, '... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.' (Matthew 23:37)

Here we see the heart, the reach of Jesus, to each one of us. It is an ache, a 'longing'.

Here we also see the real nature of our 'free will' when it comes to God. He reaches for us, and we must be 'willing'. He calls to us, and we must respond, say, 'Yes, Lord.'

It was pointed out to me recently that here Jesus is likening himself to a female animal, the heart of a mother towards its young. So tender is the heart of Jesus, so completely God the Father of all, that he can express himself, his heart, as that of a mother.

(Isaiah 30:15; Colossians 2:9; Isaiah 9:6)

April 18

Warm Glow

'As Jesus saw the city he wept over it, and said, 'If you had only known this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.' (Luke 19:42)

Life is cold and hard. When the clouds roll over a loneliness can set in. It is here that the light of Jesus, his comfort, means so much.

Jesus comes to you in your lonely space. He knocks lightly on the door. You open it, and he comes in, smiling, reassuring, strong, kind. He brings provisions, and lights a warm lamp. He sits and listens. He delights. He speaks of your significance to him, to the history of the world. He tells of your paradise to come. His Spirit stays with you, lights your way.

'I will be with you always, even till the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:30)

(Revelation 3:19-20; John 14:1-3)

April 19

With You

'When Jesus saw Mary weeping... he was deeply moved... Jesus wept.'

(John 11:33-35)

Have you been moved to tears by someone else's tears?

Jesus is moved by our hearts. We are told to *'weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice.'* (Romans 12:15)

God made you and loves you. Your joy brings him joy. Your pain brings him pain.

When Mary's heart broke for the loss of her brother, Jesus' heart broke for Mary.

If you care deeply about something or someone, or if your heart is stirred or shaken, Jesus cares. He cares about how you feel.

'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' (Jeremiah 33:3)

(Matthew 7:7-11; John 16:24)

April 20

Humble

'The chief priests were scheming to arrest and kill Jesus... Jesus was reclining at the home of Simon the Leper...' (Mark 14:1-3)

When the top dogs of society were buzzing around together, Jesus was in the homes of the lowly, the humble.

This flies in the face of our culture. When someone gets famous, they tend to get rich, and they tend to be inaccessible to humble people. They go up and up. Jesus was completely different!

Jesus, who demonstrated power and wisdom and gathered huge fame, did not get rich, did not settle down, did not look for approval or recognition from the powerful.

In fact, when crowds of people were trying to 'get behind' Jesus, we're told:

'But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.' (John 2:24)

See today's Scriptures below for more evidence of the 'counter-culture' ways of Jesus.

(Luke 13:31-33; Luke 23:8-12)

April 21

Known

'I saw you... before Philip called you.' (John 1:48)

When Philip came to Jesus for the first time, Jesus told him that he already knew him.

You were carefully, even miraculously formed by God. No matter how 'accidental' you might feel from your earthly situation – or parents or family – you are an astounding miracle of God, with purpose and destiny.

You have been made in the *'image of God'*.
(Genesis 1:27)

You have eternity in your heart, your soul.
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

You are *'fearfully and wonderfully made'*. (Psalm 139:14)

(Psalm 27:10; Psalm 139:13-18)

April 22

Rest

'Elijah came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die... An angel touched him... He looked, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and some water...'

(1 Kings 19:4-6)

Elijah was fearing for his life. He also felt that he had failed God (because of his fear and running). He prayed to die, but instead God embraced him, and lay a table before him.

So many mighty men of faith felt they had failed. Maybe they were cowardly in a moment of battle (Peter), or lost self-control before a congregation (Moses) or doubted and questioned everything (John the Baptist). Even after these 'failures', Jesus honored each of these men, and will honor you, too.

We are in a battle here. A spiritual battle. We face temptation, opposition, loneliness and confusion, as followers of Jesus. Jesus did, too! Don't let the enemy whisper in your ear that you may as well quit. He's a liar. Stand up, dust off, lift your weary eyes to Jesus, and start walking again into his light.

(Hebrews 12:1-3; Hebrews 4:15-16)

April 23

Arid Places

'I will... restore the land, and reassign its desolate inheritances.' (Isaiah 49:9)

It's not enough for us to just escape this world.

When I think of departing, yes, I drift into a sense of release, a sense of freedom from strife and fear and violence. But my heart yearns for those left here. In fact, in many respects, I don't want to die and leave, until I have ushered everyone else into safety...

Jesus taught us to pray that his kingdom would come, and his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. He also taught us that his kingdom is advancing relentlessly, and not even the *'gates of hell'* can stop it.

So we will never *'wave goodbye'* in despair. No! In Jesus Christ our journey is *'ever-brighter until the full light of day.'* (Proverbs 4:18)

Don't fear to go on to glory. Just let your last prayer be one more outpouring of blessing on those coming behind...

(Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 4:16)

April 24

Prodigal Son

'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him... he ran to him and threw his arms around him and kissed him...' (Luke 15:20)

I was a prodigal son – a wayward son. I had been brought up in the faith, but decided in my early teen years to live immorally.

I knew truth, but wandered from it. And much of my sinful life was really 'cashing in' on what God had given me – the security and provision of loving parents, trusting parents, good health, safety, etc. So in many ways, like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15, I was using an inheritance for my own sinful desires.¹⁷

But look at the father's heart when the prodigal son chose to come home! He was watching, waiting, and ran to meet him.

Our Father in heaven will let us 'cash in' and walk away. But when we repent, turn around, he is right there to receive us! This is the heart of Jesus.

(Luke 15:11-32)

¹⁷ For more on my personal testimony, see www.1peter1three.weebly.com

April 25

God Uses People!

'The angel told me to send to Joppa for Peter... now we are all hear to listen to what the Lord commanded you to tell us.' (Acts 10:30-33)

An angel appeared to Cornelius, and told him to send for Peter who would bring him a message. The angel appeared to Peter and told him to go to the house of Cornelius and deliver a message. You can read this incredible story in Acts chapter 10.

God uses people to spread the message of God. This is God's way. Angels don't spread the message directly – they send people to each other to speak, to minister.

Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would remind us of things Jesus taught (*bring Scriptures to mind*), and teach us 'all things' (*new, in-the-moment insights for people*).

So we read the Bible, and we listen to the Holy Spirit. And we ask the Lord to use us, to open doors, to call to our minds verses for people, to give us insight for people.

(John 15:26-27; John 14:26)

April 26

STATUS

'Jesus... made himself nothing...' (Philippians 2:7)

We're told in this same passage from Philippians that Jesus was 'in nature' God. He was equal. And he '*made himself nothing*' in order to reach us.

We also see in the life of Jesus that he always 'went low'. He would side-step popularity. (John 2:24-25) We're told in the prophecy about him in Isaiah 53, that Jesus was not a particularly handsome man, or a 'stand-out' personality. He went low. Why? Well, because we're low. And he wanted to come touch us, speak to us, be heard by us. He needed to be on our low level to do this.

'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself.'

(Philippians 2:3)

(John 6:37; 2 Corinthians 8:9)

April 27

Integrity

'However, when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8)

Jesus told us a parable to illustrate that we must persist in prayer, not give up, and we will see God come through. But then he ends with this question: *'However... will he [Jesus] find faith on the earth?'*

We do ask God for things we need, things we want. That is OK! But God is also asking something of us: true faith.

Jesus is concerned about the 'quiet places' of our soul. Integrity starts there. Sincere faith is not known or truly seen in the public profession. Jesus looks to us for the sincere, personal, quiet profession of faith – alone with him.

'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' (Matthew 16:15)

(Ecclesiastes 3:11; Matthew 6:4,6,18)

April 28

Hunger For Truth

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.' (Matthew 5:6)

Jesus rewards people who 'press in'. It's true. He rewards the true 'lover' of God, lover of his Word, lover of his Spirit.

In fact, I would go so far as to say Jesus can't resist these people. They win him over, they win 'over' him. (*Genesis 32:26-28*)

Possibly the most compelling example of this rewarded persistence is the story about the Canaanite woman and her daughter. Basically (and you can read it in a minute), Jesus says something would not be right to do, and she contradicts him, says it would be right to do it. And he does it. And he commends her for her faith.

Oh, Jesus, increase our faith and our understanding of your heart!

(Matthew 15:21-28; Jeremiah 29:13)

April 29

You and the Gospel

'... wherever the gospel is preached... what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.'

(Mark 14:9)

In memory of 'her'? Not in memory of Jesus?

Jesus honors people – and you – more than is fathomable. He is willing to mix his identity, his gospel, in with your tears, your repentance, your worship, your name.

Jesus carved your name on the palm of his hand (Isaiah 49:16), called you by name, and stands with you completely. He's not ashamed of you. He doesn't flinch, doesn't blink.

This woman who Jesus mixed in with the gospel message, had been a prostitute, and was here taking hold of Jesus in the presence of the 'church', the disciples. And Jesus took hold of her.

(Isaiah 43:1; Mark 14:1-9)

April 30

Eyes to See

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.' (Matthew 13:44)

'Hidden in a field': You see Jesus as a treasure. But to many others all they will see is a field. This treasure of Christ is not seen by all.

'Sold all he had': To believe in Jesus, and truly follow him in your life, it will cost you. It could cost you friendships, experiences, pleasures. There are things you sell – sacrifice – for this faith.

Remember, people who don't see and value the treasure that is Christ will not understand your sacrifices, your sincerity, and your seriousness on some moral matters. But do not let this deter you! You know what you have seen! And the Spirit of the living God floods your soul.

'God, who made light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in your heart to give you the light of the knowledge of... Christ.' (2 Corinthians 4:6)

(Psalm 63:3; Psalm 73:25-26)

May 1

Zeal

'Jesus said, 'It is not right to...' She answered, 'Yes it is, Lord...'

(Matthew 15:26-27)

We can have a 'zeal' for the Lord that is 'outward' – i.e. zealous to take the Lord to others. But there is a 'zeal' for the Lord, that is 'towards' the Lord – i.e. personally pressing in to the Lord.

This story of the Canaanite woman teaches us so much! She moved towards Jesus with zeal, with determination. She would not take 'no' for an answer. Jesus put up resistances, tests of faith. But she pressed in...

She was not deterred by her own failings. She was not apologetic or sheepish about her past, her sin, her laser-focus for her own want, need. No. She was fully focused on Jesus alone, not herself. She knew his love, his power, his heart, and she pressed in.

Jesus changed his own mind, moved by her faith. He gave her what she asked for.

'The Lord delights in those who fear him, and who trust in his unfailing love.' (Psalm 147:11)

(Matthew 15:21-28)

May 2

Waiting

'The disciples went back... Mary stood outside the tomb crying...'

(John 20:10-11)

A friend once said to me, *'The hardest thing in the world is to wait on the Lord.'*

Waiting on the Lord is a deep truth. It is not just waiting on the Lord for something we need from him, want from him. Waiting on the Lord is ultimately waiting for God himself to meet you in this place, in this waiting.

When Martha, for example, needed Jesus to raise her brother from the dead, Jesus said to Martha, ***'I am the resurrection and the life...'*** (John 11:25-26)

If you wait on God for what you need, what you want, he will not let you down. My friends, Jesus is the one who can and will call bones back into flesh, back into breath. (Ezekiel 37) His *'hope'* is a living one, and his timeline spans this life and the next. He gives back the dead to mothers. (Hebrews 11:35)

In today's verse above, Mary held out for the Lord when even the disciples had given up. They left. She stayed. And the Lord appeared to her alone.

(John 20:10-18)

May 3

Heart's Desire

'When Jesus saw him lying there... he asked, 'Do you want to get well?'

(John 5:6)

Many people came near to Jesus, were fascinated by him, impressed, stirred, but did not 'choose' him. They did not 'follow' him. They did not pass through the 'door' that is Jesus.

Jesus came to connect with the heart, to win the heart. He came to forgive sins, and create a *'new humanity'* in himself. (Ephesians 2:15) In today's Scripture he asks the sick man if he actually wants to get well. He challenges the man to lift his eyes to Jesus, and ask this of God. He does, and Jesus heals him.

But then Jesus asks something of him. He calls him to turn away from sin. (vs.14) In fact, he actually speaks to a 'cause and effect' of this life of repentance. He says, ***'Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you.'*** (John 5:14)

Jesus is serious about his call on our life. Following Christ – becoming one of his – is not a 'given', does not just happen by going to church or even praying. *Do you want Jesus to come into your heart?*

(Romans 10:9; Revelation 3:19-20)

May 4

Mercy & Purpose

'... then neither do I condemn you... now go and leave your life of sin.' (John 8:11)

This woman was caught in the act of adultery, and dragged by a group of men to Jesus – to trap him, to condemn her. And where was the gentleman that she was caught with, I wonder?

Anyway, it is this moment when Jesus speaks this famous line: ***'Let him who is without sin throw the first stone.'*** (vs.7)

Jesus did not focus on the evil men who were behind this. He simply exposed their motive, then forgave the woman, and set her free with a new purpose, a new map: to live a life free of sin. Evil will be judged, this is very clear in Scripture. But Jesus doesn't waste a lot of time this side of Judgment Day, on judgment. He is preoccupied with saving the hurting, forgiving and freeing the contrite.

Lord, help me to focus keenly on freeing captives, and to trust you for judgment, in Jesus' name!

'Leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.'
(Romans 12:18-19)

May 5

In Our Weakness

'Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me...'
(Matthew 26:39)

God never chastises a person for crying out for help! Start to finish in the Scriptures, God is the one who rescues.

In today's Scripture we see Jesus calling on God, expressing his 'desire', he wants this suffering to be taken off his plate. Yes, it is important to see this, to know this, Jesus did not want to suffer, and asked God to take it from him.

You are not weak in asking God to take suffering from you. You are not unspiritual, or lacking faith. No. You are not only 'child-like' and pure in this request, you are 'Christ-like' and faith-filled in this request.

Now just note this, however. Even in your place of weakness, of suffering, with your prayer and faith, you are moving mountains. You are changing history. The very fact that you hurt and you look to the Lord in this pain, you are powerful. There's no other way to say it. Your faith and call to Jesus is shaking the heavens, and pouring light into this dark world.

'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'
(Hebrews 11:6)

May 6

Power!

'... I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'
(2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

Paul had a *'thorn in his side'*, a type of suffering, torment. We don't know exactly what this was, but we can all relate to a 'weakness' we cannot shake.

There's so much we can focus on in this passage, but today I just want to focus on God's word to Paul, and Paul's response.

God tells Paul that he doesn't need to 'shake' the thorn in order to be powerful, effective, purposeful, fruitful. God tells Paul that his 'grace' is enough, sufficient, not only for Paul to see God's power come through his weakness, but to be 'made perfect' in Paul's weakness.

Now look what Paul takes away from this.
Incredible! Astounding!

'Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.' (vs.9)

(2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

May 7

Confidence

'Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.'

(Psalm 20:7)

God's name is precious, and powerful. This is why we are commanded to not use it in vain. (Exodus 20:7) The name of Jesus is not 'magical' or something to be superstitious of. But it is true and powerful, and the 'person' of God come to earth. (John 1:14) People can actually use the name of Jesus with a measure of 'faith', without even knowing him or following him. Jesus himself warns us about this in Matthew 7:21-23.

In fact, one group of Jews were using the name of Jesus to cast out demons, and then it went horribly wrong – because they did not have a true faith in their own hearts. They were just using/abusing the power. (Acts 19:13-16) However, you – a person of true faith in Jesus, a son, a daughter of God – can and must rely on the power of the name of Jesus. This honors him, and he will act!

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

(Proverbs 18:10; Acts 4:12)

May 8

Faith

'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.' (Zechariah 4:6)

The story of Jesus covers all aspects of life – blood, water, sin, forgiveness, death, life, eternal life, your spirit, God's Spirit...

When Jesus – God in the flesh, 'God with us' – came to earth, he asked us to believe, to have faith. He asked us to see with our hearts, and walk in this vision.

You see, before 'sin' was in our hearts, in the world, there was no need for 'faith'; God walked with us in the Garden of Eden. We didn't have to 'believe', we could 'see'.

But we abandoned that privilege, that holiness, that oneness with God. Until we walk through the gates of heaven again, to 'all things restored', we *'live by faith, not by sight'*. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

'Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.'
(1 Corinthians 13:12)

(1 John 3:2; Acts 3:19-21)

May 9

Hope

‘God’s pleasure is not in the strength of animals or humans... The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.’ (Psalm 147:10-11)

What really strikes me in this verse – and challenges me – is the last part: *‘... those who trust in his unfailing love.’*

I remember speaking to a young man who was struggling with drug addiction. This particular day he had just been kicked out of his home because of a fight with his dad, he had lost his job, he was out of money for his ‘medicine’, and so he was agitated, feeling sick. I asked him about Jesus: *‘Who is Jesus to you?’* His eyes welled up, he calmed down. He said, *‘Now Jesus, he has never let me down!’*

This always stayed with me. This man – broken by life, by his sin, by other’s sin – had a solid trust in God’s ‘unfailing love’. He saw God as only love, only good. He considered life and its pain as something completely apart from God. This challenged me. This touched me. I’ve met many people like that, and I can only take example, and continue to grow when I meet them.

(Matthew 11:6; 2 Timothy 2:11-12)

May 10

Warrior

'It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's...'

(1 Samuel 17:47)

There's really only one type of 'striving' that the Lord endorses:

'Let us, therefore, strive to enter God's rest...'

(Hebrews 4:11)

I tend to strive – to stress – about things God has promised to provide.

When I really think through provisions and projects in my life, God was always the provider. I often missed that, and would start to 'scramble', worry, strive... But God had provided in the first place, and he would see it through. But I would let my heart 'strive' after that which needed no striving.

'Jesus said, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be added to you as well.' (Matthew 6:33)

(Isaiah 30:15; Hebrews 11:6)

May 11

Jesus

'... if God is for us, who can be against us?'

(Romans 8:31)

When you believed in Jesus, you became part of God's family, of Jesus' own brothers and sisters.¹⁸

'Jesus pointed to his disciples and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister and mother.'

(Matthew 12:48-50)

We don't choose our earthly 'father' or 'mother'. That has nothing to do with you or me. You get what you get. But, my friends, we all have the same Creator Father in heaven. And we can *choose* if we truly want to bear his name, be part of his family.

When you choose Jesus, you pass through the 'door'¹⁹ and you are a son and daughter of God Almighty, now and forevermore.

'Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.'

(Psalm 27:10)

(Acts 4:12; Zechariah 14:9)

¹⁸ John 1:12

¹⁹ John 10:9

May 12

Not Alone

'When we do not know what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us... Christ Jesus is also interceding for us.' (Romans 8:26,34)

This Scripture teaches us so much! Let's just touch on one thing here...

Prayer matters. No, God has not just set the 'order' of things. You might think your prayers don't really 'move' God, but this is not true!

Jesus still prays. The Holy Spirit still prays. And Jesus called you and me to pray:

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

We also see in Scripture that people's prayers to God changed God's heart, and the outcome of situations. It is a mystery, but your cries to God matter. You matter. He loves you, and listens to you.

'Call to me and I will answer you...' (Jeremiah 33:3)

(James 5:17; Matthew 9:37-38)

May 13

Peace

'Jesus himself is our peace... and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity...'

(Ephesians 2:14-15)

Jesus himself is the treasure. Yes, we do things for God, and these are good and exciting. But the ultimate purpose, the ultimate prize, is being with Jesus, gazing on him.

Never look 'past' Christ to a Christian project. This unplugs the power, the peace, the point. Always move and work in the stillness, the presence of the Lord. In a sense, move without moving.

'One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.' (Psalm 27:4)

Be encouraged right where you are. Don't leave the presence of the Lord. Be still in his presence. He comes to you.

(Psalm 46:10; Matthew 17:1-3)

May 14

The Goal

'I pray that God may strengthen you with power... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.' (Ephesians 3:16-17)

Paul is here praying for power for the believers. What for? For faith.

But don't they already have faith? Is he not writing to Christians who believe? Do we not need 'power' in order to act, to build, to do things? Well, yes. But the source, the fountain, the wellspring of life, is *'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'* (Colossians 1:27)

Paul is here praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on you, on me, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts.

This is calming. This is encouraging. This is very much the Spirit of Jesus. He called us to be with him, even as he came to be 'with us'. His name – Immanuel – means, *'God with us'*.

Read this amazing account of Mary and Martha today. Look how in the hustle and bustle of life, Mary seemed to crack the code of the highest prize: Luke 10:38-42

May 15

The Law

'Through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.' (Galatians 2:19)

You walk free. Today, you are free.

You belong, my friend, to only one King. This holds true not only to those outside the kingdom, but to those *inside* the kingdom. You are unique. You are Christ's. You stand apart.

'Who are you to judge another man's servant? Before his master he will stand or fall. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand!' (Romans 14:4)

Disciples misjudged other disciples. One of the most striking examples of this is in Mark 14:1-9, which hopefully you will read in a minute.

And you, too, my friend, can be misunderstood by believers, even senior believers. Love them. But heed only your master. He alone determines the parameters of his kingdom.

(Mark 14:1-9; Galatians 2:6,11-14)

May 16

Free

'It is for freedom that God has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.' (Galatians 5:1)

I have struggled with needing people's approval. This has caused me problems!

If we need the approval of others, we're on a chain. We are constantly looking back for the smile, the nod, the thumbs-up. If we can't see it, we don't venture on... It will hold you back!

When it comes to God's voice, and God's will in your life, he may challenge you a little. He may test where your heart is. He may call you, lead you to something that others are not seeing, supporting, approving. What then?

Yes, there's a test here. But the test is not the main focus. The victory – the *passed test* – is the main focus!

When you pass the test of '*love for God*', you will find yourself in a borderless spirit space, and earthly possibilities that know no bounds.

(Luke 9:57-62; Genesis 22:1-12)

May 17

Spirit

'... I opposed him... when I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel...'
(Galatians 2:11,14)

The apostle Paul is here confronting the leaders – Peter, James (brother of Jesus), and others.

The issue in this matter was one where basically these leaders were mixing in 'deeds' with the gospel. They were making people feel like there was a group within the group. Ever been on the outside of one of these? Ever been on the inside?

Two key things here:

1. **The Gospel Message**: The gospel is faith alone in Christ alone. There's only one level here. If your heart turns away from sin, and believes on Christ, you're in.
2. **Integrity**: Paul was committed to Christ and his gospel. And Paul stood ready to challenge not only the Christian leaders of the day, but Jesus' own brother, if he felt there was a 'straying in spirit' from the gospel.

(Colossians 3:16; 1 Timothy 5:20)

May 18

Eternal

'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?' (Galatians 3:2)

Jesus admonished us to be like children, in order to enter the kingdom. We begin as children in life, as we do in the faith. But as with life, we grow older, get hurt, get cynical, lose some trust... This happens with 'new born' believers, too.

Interestingly in life, as we get older, we start to appreciate youth, and try to get younger again! It's not that straight-forward with the human body, or even with the human spirit. But in faith, Jesus *does* call us back to our '*first love*', because over time even our good deeds and discipline can start to overshadow our love of God.

'Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit are you now trying to obtain your goals through human effort?' (Galatians 3:3)

I strongly encourage you to read and ponder these next verses, where Jesus 'warns' a group of Christians, not regarding any particular sin, but because their hearts toward God had grown a little cold: *Revelation 2:1-5*

May 19

Good Deeds

'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.'

(Galatians 6:15)

As people we are 'addicted' to deeds. We do something, we notch our belt. We feel secure.

There is something good and natural about being active. Paul even admonishes Christians to be gainfully employed, if possible. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12) He refers to 'some value' towards even physical training, discipline. (1 Timothy 4:8) We're physical beings, and need to be active.

However, when it comes to 'righteousness', the gospel message, being fully saved by Jesus, there is nothing that can be done other than what Christ has done. He did it all. He paid for our sin. He calls us to lift our eyes, and believe in him.

Not baptism, not circumcision, no tradition, no deed, no good work, no lifestyle... nothing! Nothing makes you more secure in your salvation, than what you are completely when you believe in Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 1:17; Colossians 2:9-12)

May 20

See and Be

'I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and an acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.' (Hosea 6:6)

We need to see deep into the heart of God, what he truly cares about. We also need to look carefully for God's work in our own lives.

If we don't actually see God's provision in our lives, and 'note' it, we won't grow in our confidence that he is with us. We will miss his presence, his promises fulfilled, and our faith won't grow. Our faith 'builds' on things we've seen and 'noted'.

This is why it is very important to go back to the Lord and say, *'Thank you'*. When we thank God for something he's done, we 'note' it, and we will recall it.

And God's heart – we need to really see what he values. In today's Scripture above, we see past 'sacrifices' to the heart of God. What does he *truly* care about?

(Matthew 9:12-13; Luke 17:11-19)

May 21

True Fasting

'Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice... to set the oppressed free... to share food with the hungry... provide shelter for the poor...?' (Isaiah 58:6-7)

Behind all the 'do's and don'ts' in the Bible, is the heart of God. And every now and then – actually, often – in the Scriptures, God has to remind us of what it is all about.

In this chapter in Isaiah 58 we have the heart of God behind fasting. My friends, 'religious duty' is about loving God. And true love of God renders 'duty' obsolete. We're told in the New Testament that the whole purpose of the Law and the Prophets were to lead us to Christ. It's not what you do, it's who you turn to.

***'Jesus said to them, 'The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven ahead of you... For John the Baptist came to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him... but the prostitutes did... And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe.'* (Matthew 21:31-32)**

(Matthew 22:36-40; Galatians 3:24)

May 22

For All

'If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.' (Galatians 2:21)

We had the Law before Christ came. In fact, Jesus often quoted the Law when asked about truth. But if we had the Law and the Prophets, why did Jesus come? If we already had the rules about *'doing unto others'*, etc., why Jesus?

Jesus himself quoted the Law when asked about *'the most important command'*. Jesus quoted the Law when contending with the devil.²⁰ So why Jesus?

My friends, the Law and the Prophets, were all about rules for living, and spiritual direction. They never could save the soul, or wipe away sin. Never!

The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, is as different to the Law as a painting is to real life. Jesus is referred to as the *'Word made flesh'* (John 1:14), and not just God, but *'God with us.'* (Matthew 1:23)

There is nothing written in the Bible that can save you. It is the *'Word off the page'* that can save you, the *'Living Word'*.

May 23

Permission

'Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce... because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning...' (Matthew 19:8)

²⁰ Matthew 22:36-40; Matthew 4

God permitted people to do something, though it was not what God wanted for them. And actually God would punish it.

Just because we 'can' do something, does not mean God 'wills' that we do it. Just because we *did* something, does not mean God intended it.

This is why we (and not God) are accountable for what we do. This is why we (and not God) are accountable for giving into temptation.

'When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.' (James 1:13)

Today's verses below are really key in understanding God's heart and 'positioning' in our battle with life's temptations.

(James 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15-16)

May 24

Noah's Ark

'If anyone builds... using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.'

(1 Corinthians 3:12-13)

It took Noah more than 100 years to build the Ark, and then the flood came. (Genesis 5-7) I think of building the 'kingdom of God' here on earth in a similar way to Noah building the Ark. We chip away at it – living our faith and sharing our faith in Jesus with others. Bit by bit the Spirit of God and the name of Jesus take more ground.

The kingdom of God is a Spirit reality. Jesus said it is not something we will observe with our eyes, but rather, ***'The kingdom of heaven is within you.'*** (Luke 17:21)

As you live your faith, day by day, in 'spirit and truth', you build. You build the kingdom of God. And then on that 'Day', the final day, our work of faith will be *'revealed for what it is.'* At that time the kingdom of God will be 'seen', observed, tangible, real. And your work will be seen. There's one 'foundation' for this kingdom structure, for all your work and investment of faith: Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 3:11-13; 2 Timothy 1:8)

May 25

Fear of the Dark?

'... the darkness is as light to the Lord.' (Psalm 139:12)

There will be times of testing. God never brings evil against you, and it is important that we understand 'tests of our faith' in this light.

Jesus hates evil, and never collaborates with it. He does not need evil to 'test' us or discipline us.²¹ No, evil comes from the enemy, and here on earth we're in a very active battle. So we pray for protection, we trust the Lord, and when we do encounter hardships²², we have a choice to make: Do I hold to my faith and God's love for me, or do I not? This is the test of faith.

If you, like Jesus, stand your ground in the winds of trial, the light will break through and the darkness will flee. It will!

'Resist the devil and he will flee from you.'
(James 4:7)

(Matthew 4:10-11; James 1:13-15)

²¹ Hebrews 1:9; Mark 3:22-30; Matthew 24:20

²² Proverbs 3:11-12

May 26

Spirit Knowing

'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.' (John 9:25)

Jesus will assure you. He will whisper truth to you, deep in your soul. You will know.

Now, winds may blow close by. What you know may feel 'disputable', or even 'unknowable'. But you will know it. You will know truth about Jesus, and you will know his report about you. And you are unique.

Have humility, and have faith, to stand on his report to you. Even if it feels 'insecure', it isn't. And if you honor God by believing his report, even over that of others and your own heart at times, his light will break in under your feet!

'Though a thousand fall at my side, ten thousand at my right hand, it will not come near me.' (Psalm 91:7)

(Psalm 36:9; 1 John 3:20; 2 Corinthians 4:6)

May 27

Testimony

'Jesus replied, 'You are in error, because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.'

(Matthew 22:29)

Sharing your faith is a safeguard. Telling people that you are a Christian, you believe in Jesus, is a safeguard.

When you are invited somewhere you should not go, don't wait till you get there, and get deep in, to make your stand. Chances are you won't. And there's another chance that if you do – take your stand – people will be a little confused as to why you were there in the first place.

Ask the Lord for courage and for his Spirit, to give you opportunities to identify with him up front, at the outset, early on, beginning of the race, when you're 'new', when you first get there, when you're asked...

We don't need 'answers'. We need courage to stand with Christ, to identify with him.

(1 Peter 3:15; Mark 8:34-38)

May 28

Assurance

'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.'

(Romans 8:16)

I wrestled for a while in my faith, about 'how' I knew Jesus to be true. It was a deep struggle in my mind and soul that lasted a couple months. I just could not find that 'floor', that provable 'how'.

But then it dawned on me. I was asking 'how' I knew Jesus, not 'if' I knew Jesus. I did know him. I *knew* that I knew.

So like a child, I just decided to 'know what I know'. And to testify – not prove.

A short time after that – believe it or not – a friend in college, an atheist, asked me why I believed in Jesus. I told him this: *'Honestly, I just look at Jesus, I hear his words, and I believe him to be true.'* He said to me that this was the best answer he had ever heard. This was not because it was clever. On the contrary, it was a simple, child-like testimony. I look, I see, I believe, I know.

(Acts 4:29; John 9:25; 1 Peter 3:15)

May 29

Done Deal!

'When you believed, you were marked in Jesus with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...'

(Ephesians 1:13-14)

God's report is final. His report on salvation. His report on the Holy Spirit in you. It is not about your 'experience' or feelings. Your experience and feelings do matter deeply to God; but 'truth' is what he says. And God says that when you believed in Jesus, the Holy Spirit poured into you. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

As time goes on, the Holy Spirit will manifest through you in whatever gift God gives you:

'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them... Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given... wisdom... to another, knowledge... faith... healing... miraculous powers... prophecy... discernment... speaking in tongues... interpreting tongues... All these are the work of the one and same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.' (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

May 30

Living Hope

'And this hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by his Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.'

(Romans 5:5)

The devil himself tried to undermine the identity and authority of Jesus. He challenged his identity to his face (his *true* identity) by trying to get Jesus to *justify* it. This is really important for us to soak in!

People will challenge your faith in Jesus, your authority in Jesus. Usually this happens when you are actually exerting authority – it is almost proof in itself! People will say you don't have the 'background' to speak to this or that. They will say you don't have the hardship to 'know'. They will say you have too much to relate, too little to understand... It's not what you have or what you know; it's who you know, and what he has spoken over you.

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself... It is the Lord who judges me.' (1

Corinthians 4:3-4)

(Matthew 4:1-11; 2 Corinthians 4:1)

May 31

Strong Words

'Jesus said, 'Do not fear those who can kill the body and after that can do no more... Fear him who after the killing of the body, has the power to throw you into hell.' (Luke 12:4-5)

The words of Christ always flow from a pure heart, a pure motive, complete holiness. This is what makes his words so strong.

If just any person were to speak today's verse to you, to me, it might be hard to hear. These words shared by just anyone could come forth (not always) with a measure of judgmentalism, a measure of anger or spite, cynicism or arrogance. They might be 'strong', but for the wrong reasons.

When Jesus speaks, his words flow from the throne of God. There is no spite in them, no hate, no vindictiveness, no condemnation. There is nothing but holiness and truth. Their strength, therefore, is completely different. Their weight is 'other'.

'When Jesus finished teaching... the crowds were amazed... because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.'

(Matthew 7:28-29)

June 1

Absurdity

'What does it benefit a person, to gain the whole world and yet lose their soul?' (Mark 8:36)

Challenging verse. Liberating. Don't get down on yourself, just loosen your grip on stuff. One thing to actually focus on here is not what we can't take with us, but what we can take with us!

Jesus told us we could and should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. There is truly 'reward' for you, for me, in heaven.

So as we let go of life, and take hold of Christ, walk in faith, we invest in heaven. It is not so much about 'dumping' what you have, or having a type of 'guilt complex' about good things you have or want or get. No! This is not of the Lord! (*James 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:17*) It is about 'receiving' and enjoying from the Lord, rather than gripping and stressing about provision.

'We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.'

(1 Timothy 6:7)

(*Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 6:19-21*)

June 2

Redemption

'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...' (Ezekiel 36:26)

Have you sinned in a deep, dark way? Is your soul racked with guilt and regret?

Do you look at the sunrise or the sunset, and wish your soul could smile, your spirit soar in freedom, in complete release, forgiveness and redemption from your past?

My friend, this is entirely impossible for 'man', but it is possible with God! This very 'door' you so long to walk through, this transformation of your soul, your destiny, even your past, is the 'door' of Jesus Christ.

Look at these words of Christ today. Take a few minutes to go over them. Close your eyes, and ask Jesus to take your hand, and lead you through this door – his own self. Kneel, repent of your sin. Turn your back on it. Say 'sorry' to the Lord, and ask him to walk you through the door of Jesus Christ today.

'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved...' (John 10:9)

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

June 3

Blood Stain

'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...' (Isaiah 1:18)

Jesus wanted people to really get this. He even did miracles – healed people - in order to prove to people that he had power to *'forgive sins'*. (Luke 5:20-24)

You see, even if your body is healed in any given season of life, one day you will eventually die. Jesus came with the highest goal of saving the soul.

Our sin, our wrongdoing, is something that only God can 'right'. There is no self-help book that can justify you, or cleanse you, from your sin. Only the blood of Jesus – and your faith in him – can pour righteousness over your soul, and set you free.

But how incredible is his forgiveness! Look again at today's verse – Isaiah 1:18. God takes blood stains and makes them white as snow! In Christ you are set free from your past, and given life anew – now and forevermore!

(Malachi 4:2; Luke 10:20)

June 4

All I Can Do!

'... if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love... any tenderness and compassion...' (Philippians 2:1)

Paul, in above letter to the church of Philippi, is appealing to the Christians to be united with one another. But what I find interesting is that he is appealing to them on the basis of whether they have experienced *'any'* goodness in Jesus. He is reaching down low, asking if they have *any* loyalty to Christ, *anything* left to give.

Jesus told us that just a shred of true faith can move mountains. You may have been through some stuff! Maybe you feel like you have more questions than assurance in your faith. But, my brother, my sister, if you have *'any'* vision of Jesus and his truth (which I know you do!), this *'faith the size of a mustard seed'* is enough to bless others. We need you!

Yes, the Lord will one day wipe the tears from your eyes, vindicate you completely, obliterate your abusers. Yes, he will! But that shred of faith in your eyes now, in Jesus, it can move mountains. And we need you!

(Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 17:6)

June 5

Whisper

'... after the fire came a gentle whisper. Elijah... went out...' (1 Kings 19:11-13)

Elijah was a broken man at this point. He was fragmented in his soul. He was a powerful prophet of God who had just rallied a nation and killed nine hundred false prophets, but then he feared for his life and ran forty days into the desert, was inside a cave.

Have you ever felt both strong and weak at the same time? Or maybe overcome something big, but then crumbled at something small? I personally have had times of deep, powerful conviction, but then one small thought triggers deep insecurity. Two things to note here:

1. ***Elijah was not failing God. Nor are you.***
The key at these times is simply to keep our eyes on Jesus, say 'Yes' to his report – rather than to our feelings, our fears, and press on in faith. (See the favor on Elijah here: *Matthew 17:1-3*)
2. ***God came in the whisper*** – not the loud noise, the earthquake, the wind or fire. Listen for the whisper today.

(2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 1 Kings 19:11-13)

June 6

Eternal Life

'Jesus Christ destroyed death, and brought life and immortality to light.'

(2 Timothy 1:10)

Eternal life is impossible to comprehend. Its expanse and dimensions are unknown to us as mortals.

And yet, the most incredible message of Christ is the promise to rise again after we die – which he modeled – and live forever in heaven. An astounding message! An immeasurable hope! We can't 'get' it. We're not asked to. Jesus asks us, rather, to take his hand and believe in him, to put our hope in him, and he will raise us up, take us there.

We came to earth without asking. We found ourselves here, living, breathing. No choice in the matter. We didn't get here by believing anything. But we're here now, and God asks us to believe in him, to take his hand, if we love life and long to live on after we die.

'Anyone who hears my word and believes... has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has passed over from death to life.' (John 5:24)

(Colossians 1:3-5)

June 7

Breakfast!

'When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.'

(John 21:9)

God has set you apart. Jesus will bless you in a special way, even in the midst of a crowd of other believers. Jesus would include this or that disciple in certain events, and not others. (*Matthew 17:1-3*)

It takes faith to let Jesus love you – just you. It means you have to care more about the voice and lead of Jesus in your life each day, each moment, than the context or groups of people around you, even in church. Jesus in your primary focus, and people around in your peripheral vision, a little blurred!

'What is the greatest commandment?'... Jesus answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest command.'

(Matthew 22:36-38)

(*1 Corinthians 4:3-4; Psalm 25:15*)

‘Jesus said, ‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.’ (Revelation 3:20)

Everybody impacts everybody. If you, when you meet someone, are walking in the Spirit of God, you can impart Spirit and change to and through that person.

We all have a responsibility to bear the light of Jesus in our being, and bring that light everywhere we go. In the same way God’s Spirit witnesses to your spirit, your spirit can touch and ‘witness’ to someone else’s.²³

‘Jesus said, ‘The flesh counts for nothing. My words are spirit and they are life.’ (John 6:63)

Jesus is intimate with us. He draws near to the open heart, comes in and ‘dines’ with us – one on one. Such presence. Such power. Pray the Lord will use you as light in your meetings – however brief – with people. Your Spirit-led encounters will soften hearts, and change people forever.

(Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 6:18)

²³ Romans 8:16

June 9

Balm

'The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations.' (Revelation 22:2)

It's a magical picture. The trees that grow alongside the 'crystal clear' river in heaven – their leaves heal.

The core of our world, and our hearts, is broken. Broken by sin. And we are mortal as a result. Creation itself is in decay because of the darkness of the human heart.

Everything about the person and message and power of Jesus Christ, is about healing. The prophecy about him, six hundred years before he came, spoke of this:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners...'

(Isaiah 61:1-3)

When we lift our weary eyes to Jesus, such light – the eternal, powerful light of God – pours over us, drives out all darkness and scars, and heals, renews, restores.

(Luke 4:18; Revelation 22:1-5)

June 10

Healing

'I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me...' (Galatians 2:20)

In Jesus your past is gone. It's the only truth – the only power – that can and does speak to your past.

We grapple with guilt. There are things we did in the past that we regret to the core. Even with an apology and forgiveness, there can still linger deep remorse, and scars.

The most incredible truth about the healing from Jesus is not only his forgiveness of our sin, but that he rewrites history. He actually 'becomes' our sin, and stands in our place in the past. (*2 Corinthians 5:21*)

The most incredible truth about the touch of Jesus is not that he 'restores' or 'renews' our hearts and our spirits, but that he gives us a *'new heart, and a new spirit.'* (Ezekiel 36:26)

'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17)

June 11

Where Was God?

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'
(Matthew 27:46)

We are in a spiritual war here on earth. There exists good and holiness in the one and only true God. There exists evil and destruction under the reign of the devil.

God is nowhere in the mix of evil. He has nothing to do with it. He does not allow it, collaborate with it, or 'will' it. No! In fact, the one time Jesus actually drew a line, a border, of where there would be no forgiveness, is when the people said he was exerting power by some collaboration with the devil. (Mark 3:22-30)

God is all-powerful and will judge all sin. He did not – and does not – 'allow' or 'permit' harm to befall you. If there was ever a time you felt God had forsaken you, well, so did Jesus. Today's verse above are the words of Christ on the cross – shouted out in public, recorded in the Bible.

My friend, I cannot speak to your pain, or answer the question that even Jesus asked. But I do know this. God the Father is holy, hates sin, rescues you, weeps with you, and will judge those who sinned against you.

(Psalm 22:1; Hebrews 1:9)

June 12

Damaged Goods

‘Jesus said, ‘Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them.’ (Mark 7:15)

There is sin and suffering here. People can lay hands on people, and abuse them. They can scar the flesh, and hurt the heart and mind.

But listen, my friend! You are made in the image of God – and he is Spirit. (John 4:24) Your flesh was built on your eternal spirit, and a new body will be built on your spirit when you rise into heaven.²⁴

Look at today’s verse above! Man can hurt you here in your ‘earthly tent’, your body. But nothing that touches the body or enters the body has any bearing on the true you, the eternal you, the perfect, spiritual you! Jesus has said it!

As you lift your eyes and your hurt heart to Jesus, he pours his Holy Spirit into you, and very soon you will put aside this ‘*earthly tent*’, and rise to a new, perfect, fresh start, heavenly body. Lift your eyes, you are redeemed!

(Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5)

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; Ecclesiastes 3:11

June 13

All Things New

'Jesus said, 'I am making all things new.'

(Revelation 21:5)

Things done to you. Things done by you. If you're listening, there is hope for you.

Jesus, God of the universe, speaks and creates. Past people rise to be with him (Matthew 17:1-3), bones of the dead rattle back upright and new flesh appears on them, breath in them. (Ezekiel 37) This is the power of the person of Christ.

If you are in need of a new start, you must come to Christ! There is no other message, religion, history, story, Spirit, that speaks to renewal like the gospel of Jesus.

Your heart cries out for the Creator to re-create you. And then Jesus speaks these perfect words: *'You must be born again.'* (John 3:7) We knew it. We craved it. But it was not possible till God stepped into the flesh, and offered it.

Do you want healing? Do you want your past erased? All of this is possible in Jesus!

(2 Corinthians 5:17; John 7:37-38)

June 14

Born Again

‘Jesus said, ‘You should not be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ (John 3:7)

Of late I've been reading the daily newspaper. I peruse the headlines on the front page that run down the side, about 20 of them. If there is something worth reading in more depth, I'll turn to the page...

Any given day, news reports, my own thoughts and temptations, actions and reactions I see in others, historical atrocities, current atrocities... When Jesus called us to be '*born again*', it is the only term, expression, truth, that can honestly address our need – from the inside out. We need a completely new start! And this should not surprise us!

‘Jesus said, ‘Is anyone thirsty? Let him come to me and drink. If you believe in me... streams of living water will flow from within you.’ (John 7:37-38)

(Ezekiel 18:25)

June 15

Good News

'We live by faith, not by sight.'

(2 Corinthians 5:7)

No one can take Christ from you. People can jeer, argue, debate, forbid... But they cannot deny you 'faith' in your heart. You can hold to Christ – now and forevermore.

There is very little in this life that is a pillar of support. Health, money, friends, family... nothing is secure. Enjoy it, receive with thanksgiving from the Lord, but hold tightly to your treasure of treasures – Jesus Christ in your heart of hearts.

There will come a moment in history – in the Bible it says, *'in the twinkling of an eye'* – when the curtain will go up and the 'real world' we're living in will be revealed. The great unveiling. And your faith – and everything built on your faith in Jesus – will be 'seen'. (1 Corinthians 3:13) So don't let the world pry faith from your heart!

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors...'

(Romans 8:35-37)

(Acts 4:12-13; Joshua 24:15)

June 16

Lose life to save it

'Jesus said, 'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.' (Mark 8:35)

This verse makes no 'earthly' sense! You let go in order to catch. You lose to save.

Christ's truth is 'higher' than reason. We must remember, he created reason and the mind. He did not create them so that God would fit into them. *'God sustains all things by his powerful word'* – including the mind. (Hebrews 1:3)

The mind fits into God, and his revelation. God's revelation does not fit into the mind.

It's really important to distinguish between reason and revelation. Some things make sense to us – according to reason and wisdom. Other things about God we just 'see' in his light. We see and know. It pours over us as revelation. It is beautiful, but humbling, because we are left only with testimony, not persuasive argument.

'... One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see.' (John 9:25)

(Psalm 36:9; 2 Corinthians 4:6)

June 17

No More

'The Lord will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.' (Zephaniah 3:17)

Jesus is real in your life. He is a 'friend' and a brother, but he is also Lord. He deals with you as a Father, personally, and leads you and refines you.

We are disciplined by God. This is for our good. This is not vindictive or harsh. It is pure and powerful. It is about purifying, strengthening, beautifying.

'The Lord disciplines those he loves.' (Proverbs 3:12)

But no discipline lasts forever. Discipline might address a particular character trait, or even action, but discipline has purpose, and a start and stop on a timeline.

Today's verse above is amazing, and reassuring. Maybe God has been disciplining you in an area of your life. And maybe God has finished disciplining you in this area, and wants you to walk free?

(Luke 22:31-32; Psalm 145:8-9)

June 18

Condemnation?

'It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one.'

(Romans 8:33-34)

You might say, 'Well, it is my own actions that condemn me. I have condemned myself!'

Yes. We have condemned ourselves by our sin. This is true. There is only one way out of this condemnation: the 'door' of Jesus Christ.

'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved...'' (John 10:9)

God has provided only one 'door', one escape, from our own sin: Jesus Christ.

It's a door with blood on the post, and it's a path that was cut for us through painful sacrifice. It is a 'narrow' path, it is a true way out. But it is the only one, and it takes a sincere faith and walk.

'Jesus said, 'No one who puts their hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'''

(Luke 9:62)

(1 Peter 1:18-19; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

June 19

Identity

'If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.' (John 8:24)

Jesus is God in the flesh. Impossible to understand. It is the full truth of God, clear throughout the whole Bible.

This is the *'pivot point'* of the gospel message. Jesus is the Lord. He is *'God with us'*. (Matthew 1:23) He is the Savior, who was prophesied to come, and came. God stepped down in our form, reached out and touched us.

This is why he referred to himself as Lord – which only God can do! (John 13:13) This is why he allowed people to worship him, when it is only allowed to worship the one true God! (Matthew 14:33) And this is actually why Jesus was crucified – because he claimed to be the prophesied Savior to come, which was Immanuel – *'God with us'*. (Mark 14:61-62; Isaiah 7:14)

Jesus did everything humans do, including praying to his Father God. But this same Father God, gave all his glory and 'self' to Jesus. (Colossians 2:9) We cannot grasp, but by God's grace we can 'see'. And so we bow. And here we know Truth.

(Colossians 1:15-20; 2 Corinthians 5:16)

June 20

Judgment Day

'All the nations will be gathered before Jesus, and he will separate the people one from another...' (Matthew 25:31-32)

Every now and again Jesus referred openly to Judgment Day. He was never threatening in spirit, just straight down the line.

In this particular passage Jesus talks about separating people, all nations, into only two groups, which he refers to as 'sheep' and 'goats'. And he divides them based on their 'deeds', their heart towards the things of God – specifically mercy and kindness shown to others.

We are called to love God as a first priority, and our neighbors as a second priority. But one of the most practical ways to show our love for God and to God – is to our neighbor.

'The Lord has shown you, O mortal, what is good. Now what does the Lord require from you? To seek justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God.'

(Micah 6:8)

'Whoever does not love their brother, cannot love God.' (1 John 4:20)

June 21

One Way Street

'Man is appointed once to die, and then comes judgment.' (Hebrews 9:27)

I was speaking recently with a friend, and we discussed the one-way street that is life. We are born to die, to rise again and stand before God.

'God made all people... so that they would seek him, perhaps reach out to him and find him...'
(Acts 17:25-28)

In Christ we have nothing to fear about judgment day. Nothing!

'It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one.'
(Romans 8:33-34)

Let's face it, the transition point of passing from this life to the next one (death) is scary. It is an unknown for everyone.

However, the only person to have died and come back to life, will hold your hand through it. By his Spirit he will stand with you, be in you, and carry you through. And when you do pass through the thin curtain that is death, and stand in judgment, Christ will again take your hand and simply lead you through the gates of Paradise.

June 22

Hidden

'God will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.' (Psalm 27:5)

My most peaceful thoughts and dreams are about being hidden. Sitting quietly in a suntrap behind a rock on a sandy beach. Or sitting alone deep in a forest by a crystal clear swimming hole, light streaming through... We live in an unsafe world. Our sin – *hate, greed, violence, lust* – has made it unsafe. We blame others. But then when we do get behind walls, we realize the sin is within us, not just on the outside.

Hiding feels like safety to us. And our God hides us.

'Your life is hidden with Christ in God.'

(Colossians 3:3)

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe.' (Proverbs 18:10)

It is OK to enjoy the safety, the hiding, of God's Spirit over your life. Rest in it a while today. Sit and soak in his light, his shelter, his Spirit.

(Psalm 17:8; Deuteronomy 33:27)

June 23

Washed

'As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.' (Psalm 103:12)

The message of the Bible and of Jesus Christ, is a message of being forgiven.

God's forgiveness is not like people's forgiveness. When you and I do forgive someone, it is beautiful, but it is human. It is flawed. There are memories, scars, and even consequences we can't shake.

God does all things differently to us. Even his 'peace', we're told, is not like *'peace the world gives'*. (John 14:27) It is, of course, deeper, higher, beyond circumstances and beyond death. The same is true of God's forgiveness.

We're told that God replaces our heart and spirit (*Ezekiel 36:26*), that he actually 'became' our sin for us (*2 Corinthians 5:21*), that our old self is crucified (*Galatians 2:20*), and a 'new creation' is ours in Christ. (*2 Corinthians 5:17*) He takes stains that are red and makes them white as wool. He blots out transgressions fully, beyond memory.

(Isaiah 43:25; Isaiah 1:18)

June 24

Justice

‘Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,’ says the Lord Almighty. (Malachi 4:1)

Jesus had very strong words for the wrongdoer. That person that hurt you, that abused you – they will be judged and punished by God. It is as simple as that.

Yes, Jesus calls us to ‘forgive’ people, but this means something very specific. Jesus is not calling you to think or feel that he/she must be let off the hook, or to come to a place in your mind and heart that feels what happened to you somehow doesn’t matter. No! Never! What God means is this: let him deal with it. Don’t harbor bitterness. Don’t ‘judge’ or condemn in your heart – just give him the case to deal with.

Will he deal with it? *Oh, yes!*

‘Jesus said, ‘Anyone who sins against this little one, it would be better if they had been tied to a millstone and drowned in the depths of the sea!’ (Matthew 18:6)

(Matthew 12:36; 26:24; Revelation 6:10)

June 25

To Have Lived!

'... take hold of the life that is truly life.'

(1 Timothy 6:19)

Jesus is all about true life! But it takes not only faith to get there, it takes a crucifixion and a resurrection. I'm not just talking about Jesus' crucifixion, but ours.

'Jesus said, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.' (Luke 9:23)

When I was sixteen I chose to follow Jesus. I often say that he had been following me for some time, but it was then I chose to follow him. He first led me to the tomb. That's the only way I can put it. As I put the cross before me, and walked in repentance of my sin, in testimony to my friends, I lost before I gained. I lost friends – all of them. I lost my self-confidence, because it was all built on vanity. I lost company and felt very lonely. I would come home every day and just sit with the Lord in my room, read the Bible, pray. A couple months later, God walked me out of the tomb. That's the only way I can put it. New friends, with Christ as my foundation. New confidence building in the Lord. New peace – true, of the Spirit of God. *'Life that was truly life.'*

(*Psalm 27:4; Psalm 119:103*)

June 26

What's Good?

'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.'

(Matthew 22:32)

Every single life matters to God. Every one! This is clear throughout the Bible.

We can miss the 'life' and 'relationship' of what is right before us, distracted by all the woes around us. God offers us a higher truth.

Jesus does not want us to fret about what we do not know, or problems and even tragedies that we cannot explain. He wants us to focus primarily on what is before us: Jesus.

He often left the 'many', to find and reassure the 'one'. And today you are that one. Don't worry about all your unanswered questions, or about everyone who is not here with you. Allow Jesus to be with you. Allow yourself in this moment to be found, safe, held.

'Jesus said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there with them.'

(Matthew 18:20)

(John 6:37)

June 27

Needs

'Agree with God and be at peace.'

(Job 22:21)

Needs versus wants. The struggle is real!

I've believed lies in my life, about things I 'need'. We actually need very little. Look at the life of Jesus – he did not have 'love' in his life (a wife), he did not have financial security or a pension plan, he did not have a home. But he was at peace. His needs were met. And he instructed us to trust him for our needs.

'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...' (Matthew 6:25)

If I begin believing I really need something, I can stop trusting God for it and start worrying and scrambling for it. It's tiring, and can lead to conflict. If I truly do have what I need, but there is some 'stuff' I would sure enjoy (i.e. 'want'), I can simply ask God for it. I can whisper to him, and ask that he would provide this or that, which I feel I could use, I would enjoy. And I can then rest. Because he has promised.

'... godliness with contentment is great gain.' (1 Timothy 6:6)

(Matthew 6:25-34)

June 28

You Are Clean!

'Do not call unclean what God has called clean.'

(Acts 10:15)

God's report is everything! His Word is what made the world, sustains the world, and when he speaks, truth is. In Acts chapter 10 we see an incredible exchange between God and Peter. God is testing Peter's commitment to God's Word here and now, even over God's Word there and then. God is redefining 'clean' foods – and people, so to speak – because of the breakthrough gospel message:

'Christ himself is our peace... and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity...'

(Ephesians 2:14-15)

This 'defining' Word of God, and the defining power of Jesus' blood, also calls you 'clean'. It is true. And he has given you a new name, a new heart, and a new spirit. Do not call 'unclean' what God has called 'clean'.

'I have carved your name in the palm of my hand.' (Isaiah 49:16)

(Revelation 2:17; Revelation 2:10-11)

June 29

Spirit Willing

‘Jesus said, ‘The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ (Matthew 26:40)

We ‘emote’ a lot nowadays. *‘I love you, man!’ or ‘I’m there for you, brother!’*

Truth is – and I’m not trying to rain on our parade – we can ‘talk’ things that we can’t ‘walk’. Jesus even credited the disciples with ‘wanting’ to stay awake to support him, but not being able in their own strength. (above verse)

Great men of God in the Bible, betrayed their closest, most loyal friends.²⁵ This does not mean we should not trust people (because love does ‘trust’, 1 Corinthians 13); but it does mean we should spend more time soaking in the Lord’s pure love and Spirit, than claiming that we have that pure love and Spirit. It’s just dangerous, because we’re human. Also, instead of professing our undying brotherhood to each other, and talking endlessly about how ‘good’ people are, we could point more to the Lord, and his goodness, his loyalty, his trustworthiness. Just safer!

(John 2:24-25; Jeremiah 9:24)

²⁵ 2 Samuel 11; Matthew 26:24

‘Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven...’

(Matthew 6:20)

OK, let’s be practical for a minute. ‘Life is real!’ as my grandma used to say. You need a job, you gotta hustle. You want your kids to be wise, so you push them a little, haul them out of bed, give them chores, train them in this and that. This is OK. This is wisdom and proverbial. The *‘ground is cursed’* and God himself told us we would need to *‘sweat’* to eat. Also, the apostle Paul admonishes us to be hard workers.²⁶

OK... but, we need to also heed the teaching of Jesus. He is not nullifying all of the above. But Jesus – *‘God with us’* – is pointing higher. He is saying we need to *‘store up for ourselves treasure in heaven.’*

This is a competing ‘investment’. We will need to sacrifice some earthly investment, to invest in heaven. Now we do have a challenge!

So as we raise our children in all things disciplined and wholesome, let us prioritize the teaching and the *currency* of Christ – which is ‘faith’. (Hebrews 11:6)

²⁶ Genesis 3:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

July 1

Your Standard

'All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law... when they do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves... They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness...' (Romans 2:12-16)

I have many friends who are atheists, and yet are faithful spouses, good parents, good neighbors.

There is no *'earthly'* reason to live a good life, a moral life. Everything in our nature tends towards temptation, and immorality, and if the only life we truly have is this one, there is no reason to do anything other than what you want.

But people have a conscience. God put it there. They can't shake it. Despite all the evil we do see in the world, people are deeply restrained in their actions. In secret, where no one would ever discover otherwise, people still grapple with right, wrong, honesty, integrity, guilt, shame.

We are told in Scripture that the Law of God, his Spirit, is upon all people. And even if we refuse to recognize his voice, his 'standards', we will stand before him and account for how we did with our own standards.

July 2

Identity

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe!' (Proverbs 18:10)

You can choose what your 'primary' identity will be.

This does not have to be a loud, public statement. In fact, it is better – truer – if it is primarily a sincere, 'secret' commitment. Jesus said that our Father in heaven sees what is done in 'secret' and rewards that. (Matthew 6:4)

Quietly, sincerely, deeply, situate yourself in the strong tower of the Lord's name. Let that be your primary residence. And situate your identity in Jesus. Claim this identity, and walk in it. Little by little this 'true you' will become your real name, your real purpose, your real legacy in this life.

(Galatians 2:20; Joshua 24:15)

July 3

Victory

'On the seventh day... they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around... when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed.'

(Joshua 6:15-16, 20)

God will give the victory, but then work us through a process.

This is different to working for a victory. The deepest things of God, are the ones he gives up front, and then we walk in.

When I was sixteen years old, the Lord called me to repentance and faith in Jesus. I remember very clearly a sense of complete identity, complete forgiveness, complete renewal. But I also remember a new path of 'redemption' opening up before me. A road of 'recovery'. As I began building my relationship with Jesus, Jesus also had me restoring my relationships with others. I had to say sorry to people, go different places, think different thoughts, choose different paths...

Victory up front. Then a process, a path, as we walk in it...

(Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:8-10)

July 4

True Treasure

'Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.'

(Habakkuk 2:17-18)

Sometimes life can be falling apart around us, cracking at the seams, crumbling. Have you ever experienced this, or felt this?

Today I was looking at the walls and floors of our home, and the cracks and decay caught my eye. I found myself staring at a piece of material that were new six months ago, but had mold on it today.

One day Jesus saw a poor lady putting the last of her money into the offering box in the Lord's temple. Jesus – God – saw this and said, *'She has given more than these other people, because she gave not out of what she could spare, but gave to God all she had to live on.'* (Luke 21:1-4) This lady was poor. I'm not sure how poor, but I do know this. The only 'legacy' she has left in history, is what came from her faith, her love for God, despite her circumstances. She loved God, she was seen by God, and that sacrifice and joy she expressed in her poverty, still speaks to hundreds and thousands of people 2000 years later.

(Psalm 90:12; Matthew 6:19-21)

'Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.' (Acts 16:18)

I'm not talking here about people that just don't jive naturally with your personality, or are a bit this or that. I'm talking about that discouraging person. They have an air about them, that brings a type of oppression to the atmosphere. Here we're dealing with 'spirit'. Two points on this:

1. ***'Let no one look down you because you are young...'*** (1 Timothy 4:12) My friend, you are made in the image of God. If you 'discern' this spirit at work, be confident in this discernment. Don't give in to it. Don't bother arguing it, but don't cower before it. You be you! Be strong. Be at peace.
2. Pray – in faith – that the Lord drives this 'spirit' out. Pray that the Lord blows his wind, his Holy Spirit, against this 'heavy air', and that he drives it out of the person, but also out of your presence.

(2 Timothy 4:14-15; Isaiah 61:3)

July 6

Yes, You!

'Then the righteous will answer the Lord and say, 'When did we see you hungry and feed you...?' (Matthew 25:37)

As a follower of Jesus, there is a lot you actually 'do' for the Lord without really thinking about it. But Jesus notes it, and is going to reward you for it.

Life might be falling down about your ears, and yet you say a kind word to your neighbor, or you still give some money to that poor person. Maybe you've had a bad day, and behaved badly, but you lie in your bed and consider your ways, regret them, and think about how to make good. These things you are doing, you are doing for Christ – even in the midst of challenging times.

I believe at judgment we will be rewarded for much that came from our faith, that we were not even very mindful of. And maybe, on the other hand, lots of our big 'glory moments' of goodness, may not even really feature. Please do look up today's Scriptures below, and take some time to ponder.

*(Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 7:21-23;
1 Corinthians 3:13)*

July 7

Faith First

'He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' (Ezekiel 37:3)

When is hope gone?

Jesus looked into the grieving eyes of Martha, his own eyes wet with tears, and he said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this, Martha?' (John 11:25-26)

Even Jesus grieved the sin and loss of life in this world. He wept. (John 11:35) But there is nothing that Christ cannot restore, rebuild, make new, and make go away forever, make to have never happened. The impossible – not the extremely difficult – is Jesus' specialty. (Matthew 19:26)

Hurt, sin, abuse, brokenness, loss, death, despair, regret, violence, curses, contracts. Jesus can bury pain and resurrect something new, other, stronger, truer, beautiful. God owns souls. All of them. (Ezekiel 18:4) And when he speaks, promises, even the dead – long dead bones – can revive.

'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ...'

(2 Corinthians 1:20)

(Isaiah 1:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

July 8

Faith, Not Sight

'Jesus said... 'It's like a man going away on a journey, he leaves the house and puts his

servants in charge... and tells the one at the door to keep watch...” (Mark 13:32-37)

We all ‘live by faith’ in many ways. When someone tells us they are going here or there, we are trusting, not ‘seeing’. When a loved one has to travel far and says that they will be true to you, will return, you are trusting, not ‘seeing’. Every single day, in many, many ways.

Jesus calls us to believe, to trust. We build on what we know to be true from the Scriptures, the prophecies, the life of Jesus, his power, his Word, his histories, his Spirit... and we decide to trust. We apply faith. We do not see with our eyes, but we do build on what the eyes of our hearts have seen.

‘For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.’

(1 Corinthians 13:12)

(1 John 3:2; 2 Corinthians 5:7)

July 9

Make the Most

'Walk while you have the light...'

(John 12:35)

When people around you are open to the things of Christ, this is a season of 'light'. It is not to be taken for granted.

Jesus himself told a man that he was '*close to the kingdom*'. (Mark 12:34) Some people are 'close', they are open. This is opportunity to share with people. *How can we share? What can we share?* Sometimes I may be speaking with a neighbor and they share a concern, a worry, or something they or a loved one are facing. The Lord might bring an encouraging verse to my mind, and I say, '*You know, there is a really peaceful verse that says...*' If I don't know it by heart, I might just text them the verse later. Or in another instance I might say I will pray for someone, or even ask can I pray with them.

Don't feel pressure in this! It is not about pressure – it is about opportunity. And the Lord himself partners with us, goes before us, opens doors to us. Pray today, and ask the Lord if there are opportunities near you, to bring them to you, and to open doors for you to share.

(Galatians 6:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

July 10

The Lost

'Jesus said, 'The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.' (Luke 19:10)

Jesus often referred to himself as the *'Son of Man'*. He was indeed the Son of God, but also 100% human, and he chose to identify with us at every turn.

We're told in Philippians chapter 2 that Jesus, being equal with God, set aside his glory and *'became nothing'* in order to reach us. He took pride in walking with us, in being a *'Son of Man'*.

Jesus came for the lost. In fact, if we do not consider ourselves lost in sin, we will not allow ourselves to be *'found'* by Christ.

The poor, the hurting, the lost, are the VIPs of Christ's ministry. He leaves the ninety-nine sheep, in search of the lost one.
(Luke 15)

God, through Christ, is in pursuit of the lost, the lowly. When we who believe in Jesus, *'seek'* the lost, and share with the lost, we are in the very wind and Spirit of the move of God.

(James 2:5; Matthew 21:28-32)

July 11

Broken Chain

'When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!' (John 8:36)

I don't see in Scripture all these long processes of breaking strongholds/identity. Essentially you are what God says you are, not what the enemy or your past or your thoughts or tendencies try to define you as.

We often think we are '*essentially*' this broken, struggling addict, or '*essentially*' have a dark heart or evil spirits in our soul, etc. But essentially, my friend, the *higher* truth, is the '***broken chain***', not the chain!

Also, let's talk about 'percentages'. You might feel that you think a lot about something you should not, or your mind leans in that direction. And the enemy might whisper that you are *essentially* (51%) 'stuck' there, that you *essentially are* that defeated person. But God speaks. He shatters the authority of the enemy – because it is about authority, not percentages of your time or thoughts or past. ***God speaks. Chains break.***

(Revelation 12:10-11; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

July 12

Beyond Country

'Our citizenship is in heaven.'

(Philippians 3:20)

When it comes to our faith, to being a Christian, we can get caught up in how we relate to our surrounding culture, community, family, people, nation.

It is OK to be mindful of our 'map' here on earth, traditions, etc. But the truth is, in Christ we have entered into a 'new humanity', and also a new expanse of reality. We are no longer just from this or that country, we are '*citizens of heaven*'.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, all nations, all ages. Our mission is the 'world', not just this or that neighborhood.

Rest in this. Be at peace. Christ has lifted you up and over the borders and bounds of your place here on earth. Your reach, your destiny, your anointing, your identity, is beyond the grasp of people.

(Hebrews 11:10; Colossians 1:13-14)

July 13

Living Hope

'My God will supply all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.'

(Philippians 4:19)

What we give in life, is about the only thing we actually 'get'. Jesus is going to reward us not for what we have, but for what we don't have, what we gave.

I think of the poor widow who gave the very last of her money to the temple offering. Jesus saw her. Jesus noted it. He noted '*her*'. This woman's giving is all we know her for, in some respects it is all she 'got'. And what an inheritance! The whole world has heard of her, been influenced by her, and honors her.

A poor girl, 5 years old, once gave me a small toy – one of the only possessions she had. With tears in her eyes she said goodbye to me, and said, '*See you again soon!*' I knew I would never see her again. Not this side of glory. But I prayed for her! And I know that the Lord who sees, who loves, who gives – he would reward this girl with provision, protection in Jesus' name, and with '*living hope*'.

(Romans 5:5)

(Luke 21:1-4; Matthew 10:40-42)

July 14

The Earth

'... the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.' (1 Peter 3:10)

Yes, we are called to care for the earth, for the animals, to honor God's creation.

And it is important to understand that Jesus is making all things new, including this earth. He is a Redeemer. He rescues. He heals, restores, resurrects. So the verse above that refers to fire consuming this earth, is about purification, a refiner's fire, a cleansing. It is not about God discarding the world.

Having said this, it is important to remember that in our fallen world, fallen state as humans, even the earth is subject to 'decay'. (Romans 8:21) We cannot – through recycling, planting, cleaning – make this world perfect, nor eradicate all waste and corrosion.

So we honor God and his earth. Yes, and we long for the 'renewal of all things'. We steward our world as best we can. But we *worship* only Jesus. Our hope is in *his* 'renewal' – through repentance and faith in the heart of each person.

(2 Chronicles 7:14; Romans 1:21-23)

July 15

Untruth

'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

(John 8:11)

Jesus spoke these words to the woman who had been caught in adultery.

Jesus did not dismiss her actions, or say they did not matter. In fact, he refers to her *'life of sin'*, which speaks to the issue. But there is no condemnation in the spirit of Jesus' words to her. He simply sets her free with forgiveness.

Jesus does not require a clear, articulated acknowledgment of her sin. Jesus does not ask for evidence of her contrite heart, through apologies or restitution. Jesus forgives, sets her free completely.

Do you struggle with some guilt, some accusation from the enemy? Whispers in your ear, heavy memories, regrets? The same Jesus that touched and released this woman, touches and releases you. He sees your heart. Rest in him.

Please do look up and meditate on these two key Scriptures:

(2 Corinthians 7:10; Revelation 12:10-11)

July 16

The Whole World

'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me...' (Matthew 28:18)

At times, as a follower of Jesus, it can feel very lonely in this world. It can feel like we are on 'foreign land', that we don't really belong here.

There is a measure of spiritual truth in this, and in a feeling of spiritual loneliness here. Jesus did tell us that the 'prince of this world' was indeed a 'prince of darkness'. So there are strong, dark forces here, and most people take his *'broad road of destruction'*.

However, the deeper truth is this: When Jesus – God in the flesh – defeated death, and brought *'life and immortality to light'*, he took hold of *'all authority in heaven and on earth.'* He is the King – even if there is a bad prince still roaming around. He is the King, the earth is his, and you are his. You are at home here! It is, in fact, darkness that trespasses here.

'You will rebuild the ancient ruins, and restore the places long devastated...' (Isaiah 61:4)

(2 Timothy 1:10; John 16:11)

July 17

The Real World

'What is truth?' said Pilate.' (John 18:38)

There's a way of seeing things. Lenses, filters, values, histories, meanings...

One deeply important reason for reading the Bible regularly, is that the 'way' God works, his values, perspectives, actions, reactions, comings, goings, speaking, remaining silent, all these things help us know and see 'true reality' more clearly.

We must see the world as God sees it – because he made it, saved it, judges it. God's 'real' is what is real.

So we meditate on the Scriptures, and sit in the presence of the Spirit of Jesus, to soak in God's true reality. To calibrate our heart, our eyes, our mind. Interestingly, the moment before Pilate had asked this question to Jesus – today's verse above – Jesus had already answered it. He had said,

'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' (vs. 37)

(John 14:6; Romans 12:1-2)

July 18

Hiding People

'Your life is now hidden with Christ in God.'

(Colossians 3:3)

Many powerful stories are about people hiding other people, to save them.

When I was fourteen years old I visited the concentration camps in Poland, where Hitler had killed many, many innocent people. During this harrowing period of history, there were some who 'hid' people in their homes, and saved them. *(Hitler, and all those who served him or played into his hands in this horrific abuse of people, will be judged by God. This is crystal clear throughout the whole Bible. John 19:11; Matthew 26:24; Hebrews 10:31; Revelation 6:10)* However, today I focus on the way of 'life', not suffering, the way of 'rescue', not judgment.

As a believer in Jesus, we are told that you are now 'hidden with Christ in God.' This is a stunning picture of safety, of comfort. And here is the 'double portion' of this truth: You can 'hide' others, and save them. Yes, introducing people to the gospel of Jesus Christ – his message of hope, love, repentance and forgiveness – you can walk people into God's eternal, safe tower!

(Proverbs 18:10; 2 Corinthians 5:20)

July 19

Set Apart

'But what about you? Who do you say I am?'

(Matthew 16:15)

We see the crowd. I know you do. Jesus did. He loved the whole world. He asked his disciples what the 'people' were saying about him, who they believed him to be.

But then he turned to Peter – to you, to me – and said, *'But what about you? Who do you say I am?'*

You are an eternal piece of God's universe and holy creation. It is not just that God gives you a special moment of attention. This special moment that we see in the verse, is a revelation of truth. You – all the time, not just moments here and there – are eternally unique and significant to God.

Yes, God cares about everyone, and the group, the masses, the 'people'. But he cares about just you. He silences the crowd, looks in your eyes, and asks, ***'But what about you?'***

(Luke 15:3-7)

July 20

World Changer

'Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of mockers...' (Psalm 1:1)

This is the very first verse of the first chapter of the longest book in the Bible. It tells us places, spaces and 'spirit' to avoid.

I have five kids. I've often admonished my children in different contexts, different scenarios, that if they are anywhere near the problem, they are part of it. They are responsible for it. For example, one son told me he wasn't in the fight, he was just watching it. Another time (many times!) one of my children told me he wasn't disrespecting the teacher, he was just sitting beside the guy who was... We are responsible for where we choose to sit, stand, and what we listen to – i.e. counsel we take.

You can change the world – truly – by deciding to *not* be present, not be associated with, not be part, of wickedness. If you stand aside, you are taking a 'brick' out of the structure of evil. Don't avoid the 'sinner', but do avoid the sin.

(John 17:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11)

July 21

Desolate

‘Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?’ (Proverbs 27:4)

Sin makes desolate places. Over time it marks a place with gloom, with a cold edge, with cruelty and violence. Despair sets in.

Here is the powerful, inspiring truth of Jesus Christ. By his Spirit we can change places. Yes, real, physical places here on earth.

‘They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated...’ (Isaiah 61:4)

God, through Jesus, wants his *‘will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.’* (Matthew 6:10)

Is there a project of restoration – in your own life and land, or in that of a friend or neighbor – where you can bring restoration? Where you can, by faith and action, replace a *‘spirit of despair’* with a *‘garment of praise’*?

(Isaiah 61:1-4; Revelation 21:1-5)

July 22

Downward Awe

'... the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor...' (1 Corinthians 12:23)

Jesus said his kingdom structure was not like that of the world – where the most important are up high, and the less important down below. Jesus went so far as to say, **'The greatest among you will be your servant.'** (Matthew 23:11)

We are called to show our leaders respect and honor – both those in the church, and those in secular roles. (*Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4*) But the truth is, my friend, that 'upward honor' is kinda the natural flow. Why? Because there is a power differential, and we all want the reciprocated respect from people of influence, of status, so we tend to look upward with awe.

Now, 'downward honor', where those of us with even a little influence, a little status, use this 'currency' to honor the weak, to esteem them publicly, to stand with them; this is different! This is not the world's natural way, it is the way of Christ, and the spirit of his kingdom.

(*Philippians 2:3; Matthew 5:47*)

July 23

Eternal

'... the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in – a river that no one could cross.'

(Ezekiel 47:5)

I can come to the same river every day, and yet the waters are never the same. Waters flow through this place. Same river, fresh and flowing waters.

The Scriptures are the same. I can come to the same verse year after year, and yet feel fresh winds of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are *'living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword.'*

(Hebrews 4:12)

The Scriptures are like stakes of truth, portals, doors, to the everlasting Spirit of Truth. God is One. His reach and expanse is eternal. His Word lives. Like the same spot on the side of the river – dependable, relaxing, but never the same droplets of water passing through.

Stay with Christ. He lives. He is God eternal. He will transfigure before your soul, day after day after day.

(Matthew 17:1-2; Revelation 1:12-18)

July 24

All You Need

'... Christ is all, and is in all.'

(Colossians 3:11)

Jesus is the '*cornerstone*' of your soul.

Jesus is the '*living stone*' in your destiny.

Jesus is your righteousness.

Jesus is your forgiveness.

Jesus is your healing.

Jesus is your friend.

Jesus is your advocate, your protector, your provider.

By all means, love people, join a church, share and care and love and be loved, and serve and be served... But know this, and never let this go: Christ is in you, and is all you actually need.

(1 Peter 2:4; Ephesians 2:20)

July 25

Encouragement

'We have different gifts... If your gift is to encourage, then give encouragement.' (Romans 12:6-7)

One of your spiritual gifts may be encouragement. Do you enjoy saying kind, up-building words to people? Now, whether or not we are 'gifted' in this area, we are all called to operate in this area. We all need to encourage one another!

An encouraging word can give a person a sense of meaning in their life. Truly, so many people feel lost or wandering, and need to know their work is worthy, their efforts are 'seen' and appreciated. A simple word can spur someone on in hope, such as:

'You have worked so hard on this, I can see that!'

Any Spirit-led word to lift spirits, can change a person's life course!

(1 Thessalonians 5:11; Proverbs 15:23)

July 26

Becoming Small

'Jesus Christ... made himself nothing...'

(Philippians 2:5-7)

We want to be important. We tend to look for ways to 'rise' in this world – career, social status, etc. Two points on this 'challenge' in life:

1. *You are important already!* You are made by God, in his image, with *'eternity in your heart.'* You can't make yourself more than you already are in Jesus.
2. *Jesus made himself 'small':* Jesus often covered up his importance, his power. He deliberately made himself smaller, so that he could reach people. Like when you sit with a child, and talk in a childish way, you are doing this – becoming smaller – to connect with the child.

The challenge in this life for all of us in God, is not to 'rise', but to 'rest', and connect with those around us. This, often, means 'shelving' our status, our means, our influence, and listening and encouraging the person before us.

(*Philippians 2:1-11*)

July 27

Dorothy

'God's foundation stands firm, with this inscription on it: 'The Lord knows those who are his.' (2 Timothy 2:19)

I met a godly lady once named Dorothy. A brief meeting in the parking lot of the supermarket. I had shared with her my 'verse card' (which I hand out a lot), and it turned out this woman had a living, strong faith, and she encouraged me.

She was an elderly lady. One thing she said to me was that she hoped as she aged, that she would not forget the Scriptures that she had learnt. I then encouraged her with today's verse, saying that our highest confidence is not so much in our remembering God, but that he *'knows those who are his.'*

You are known. Even your mind one day may fade, and you may forget everyone you know – possibly even Jesus. But he's not a word in your mind; he's a Living Word – Spirit – in your heart. And he knows you. He holds you. Be at peace.

(Ecclesiastes 1:17-18; John 5:39-40)

July 28

Fight!

***'Who will rise up for me against the wicked?
Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?'***
(Psalm 94:16)

Jesus offers peace in the battle. I'm talking about peace for his warriors, his soldiers.

When Jesus saw the multitudes – many people in need – and he was moved with compassion, he encouraged his disciples to pray to God for workers, for support. He did not stress or pile pressure on his followers. No, Jesus was *'kept in perfect peace'* because his mind was stayed on the Lord.

When you see the need of this world around you, do not be overwhelmed. However, do allow yourself to be moved with compassion. Do allow the Holy Spirit to whisper inspiration and even 'action' to your spirit.

We are flanked by 'warrior angels'²⁷, and have nothing to fear. And so we can venture out and fight the darkness, in Jesus' name.

(Isaiah 26:3; Matthew 9:36-38)

²⁷ Jeremiah 20:11

July 29

Rules

'... you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth...' (John 4:21, 24)

There used to be a specific 'temple' where we would worship the true God. But no more!

There used to be many, many rules that pointed us to God. We're told in the Bible that the primary purpose of all these rules and laws was to *'lead us to Christ.'* (Galatians 3:24)

The rules of Christ in Scripture, are a map for living. They truly are exciting. They are not chains, they are chain-breakers. They give us keys to living a safe life, a prosperous life, and one in which we can have peace with God and love for others.

Remember, ***'Christ is the fulfilment of the law...'*** (Romans 10:4) He's the grand prize. Rules should flow from his Holy Spirit and Scriptures in and through our lives, soaked in love and joy.

(Ephesians 2:14-15)

July 30

Salvation

'Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...' (1 Corinthians 1:17)

When it comes to the gospel message of Jesus Christ, it is only one thing – a sincere belief in Jesus.

This is almost too humble for our prideful hearts and minds to grasp. We feel insecure and want to 'add' to this message, thinking it will make us safer.

So we add things like 'baptism' or 'rules' or going to church. We add 'membership' and 'good deeds'. And yes, there are lots of Scriptures about all of these things. Good things are good, and God calls us to them!

But the 'gospel' message, the truth of God for our 'salvation' and forgiveness, is only one thing, and we must not, we cannot, add to it:

'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.' (John 3:16)

(John 5:24; John 6:28-29)

July 31

Not Our Wisdom

'Whether he [Jesus] is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I know. I was blind but now I see!' (John 9:25)

There is much about God and the Scriptures I do not understand, and will never understand. That's OK!

What is so amazing about the Bible, and about our Lord, is that the 'deepest' and most important things, he has made accessible to everyone! The whole point of the whole Bible, is Jesus in your heart, in my heart. You could know so much about the Scriptures academically, and yet never have believed in Jesus. He tells us this himself. (John 5:39-40)

'What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his soul?' (Mark 8:36)

Please take a minute today to ponder today's verse, John 9:25. This man could not even 'defend' that Jesus was a good man, or the Son of God. And yet his heart had been open to Jesus, and his body 'saved' by him. And Jesus used this man's faith and humility to '*shame the wise.*'

(1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

Aug 1

Love of God

'Jesus said, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.' (Mark 2:27-28)

God has written his law on our hearts, and we do have an active conscience. That's OK! However, like so many things that God has given us, when filtered through our broken lives, they can take a hold of us, enslave us. Rules is a big one of those things!

Sometimes we break rules we should value and hold to, and other times we hold to rules that we don't need to. It all comes down to the Spirit of God, and our love for God.

When people were getting too attached to the rule about the Sabbath Day, Jesus reminded them that he was, in fact, Lord of the Sabbath. This put God above the law, and is a very healthy focus to hold at all times. Jesus is the Law fulfilled, come to fruition, the whole point of the Law. And he said that love for God was more important than any rule.

(Galatians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 13)

Aug 2

We Bow

'... those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' (Matthew 14:33)

When we see Jesus for who he truly is, we bow down. Jesus is one with Father God, God in the flesh. (John 1:14)

At first we watch him, then listen to him. We draw nearer and walk alongside him. We receive from him. He listens to us, touches us. Our eyes open and we see his glory. We believe. We bow down. We soar in his Spirit – the full Spirit of the living God.

Paul says that we didn't really capture the vision of Christ, until he had lived and ascended back to heaven:

'We no longer regard anyone from a merely human perspective, as we once did Christ, but we do so no more.'

(2 Corinthians 5:16)

Step into the fullness of the experience available to you. Close your eyes and worship Jesus. Let his light – the full light of God – come over you.

(John 9:38; Romans 8:16; Colossians 1:27)

Aug 3

Spirit

'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6)

God is Spirit. His truth is Spirit. Jesus himself said this: ***'My words are spirit and they are life.'*** (John 6:63)

This is beautiful and liberating and powerful. But it is also humbling to us as humans. We find things hard that we cannot see, touch and control. The Spirit of God, of Jesus, is the ultimate Spirit truth that we cannot control. Humbling.

Now it is important to understand that the 'spirit' of a thing can be off. So in the context of our faith, of the gospel, there can be 'false teachers', people using words on the surface, but with the wrong spirit at work. Sometimes it is hard to put your finger on the fact, but you discern the spirit is off.

Go with what you discern, in Jesus' name!

(Galatians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4,14-15)

Aug 4

Mercy

'Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.'

(Matthew 9:12)

We have need of Jesus. All of us. We have sin in the core of our being.

When Jesus came to earth, some people 'felt' their need, and opened their hearts to him. Others were not so sure of their need, their own sin and struggle. Jesus did not come to 'condemn' or convince people of their need. He came because we were already condemned. He came to save.

'Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you see, your guilt remains.'

(John 9:41)

The '*contrite heart*' God will not despise. Where there is humility before Christ, he pours out mercy.

(Mt 9:12-13; Hosea 6:6)

Aug 5

Suffering

'If we endure, we will also reign with him.' (2 Timothy 2:12)

I meet true heroes every day. People who have been through some evil, still standing, and holding out for God to make good. Is this you?

In the book of Hebrews it refers beautifully to these people, saying simply: ***'The world is not worthy of them.'*** (Hebrews 11:38)

In today's Scripture above, we see that there is a special reward, special status, for those who 'endure'. Even as he reigns, you will reign with him.

And it is important to note this: Your vindication is certain. Jesus comes in fire, when he judges. Are you waiting for justice from Christ? He will honor you for this, and he will give you justice!

(Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 3:11-12)

Aug 6

All Souls

'All souls are mine.' (Ezekiel 18:4)

Your God is everyone's God.

My parents are missionaries, and I grew up all over the world – land and sea.²⁸ I saw many different people groups, cultures, religions, nations. The differences between people can be overwhelming at times, and make you feel like you cannot tell people about the one true God, the 'only way' that is Jesus Christ.

But, my friends, the gospel message of Christ is not specific to one nation, one language. His message is not ours, nor about us or any identity or nationality on earth. Jesus is '*God with us*', and everyone was made by him, for a relationship with him.

Paul puts it perfectly:

'We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants!' (2 Corinthians 4:5)

(Luke 24:46-47; Mark 16:15)

²⁸ For more on my personal story, visit:
www.1peter1three.weebly.com

Aug 7

The Spirit

'The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.' (1 Corinthians 2:10)

I lived on ships from the age of four to seven years old. I remember watching the waves out at sea, as far as the eye could see, chopping and swelling, and the howling of wind in my ears. It's a type of eternal experience. And did you know the deepest part of the ocean is seven miles down? This is hauntingly deep.

'God has put eternity in the hearts of man.'
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Your soul and spirit are eternal. Their 'expanse' is unfathomable. Our life here is real and meaningful, but the tip of an iceberg. Jesus touches you and redeems you and makes you new – now and forevermore. Nothing that has come against you will be remembered, scarred, stained, or anything to do with the eternal, redeemed you. Let this wind blow strong through your senses. Feel the freedom.

'Jesus said, 'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' (John 3:8)

Aug 8

Faith

'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'
(Hebrews 11:6)

God gives us truth to hold. We take hold of it by faith. Faith is our reach, our grip on God's truth. When darkness rolls in and you feel despair, the Lord speaks, and says that you are deeply valuable and meaningful, and the dark sky does not reflect you. So you choose at that moment to believe or not believe. It pleases God to believe him, to take him at his Word. And his light then pours in over your spirit, obliterating despair. Faith is the mechanism by which we access God's Word, his truths, his Spirit. It's his way!

We cry out to God for provision, for peace, for protection. What does he ask of us? Faith.

'Jesus said, 'When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith?' (Luke 18:8)

Treasure upon treasure of God's truth hovers over your spirit, your world, your paths, your relationships. You need to believe him, to receive them.

(Ezekiel 37:3,12; Malachi 4:2)

Aug 9

People's Approval

'The Lord says, 'See, I have carved your name on the palm of my hand.'

(Isaiah 49:16)

You are God's. You are unique. He formed you carefully, and paid a high price to purchase you back. Let this sink in.

I have insecurities in me that often have me looking left and right for people's approval. Look at this powerful word from Jesus to the religious leaders of the day:

'How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?' (John 5:44)

We're called to love people. Love – not give into people. There is a strong line between loving and trying to please people. We will grow strong as we spend more time looking to the Lord, rather than looking to people.

Spend time every day in the Scriptures (one chapter a day), and in quiet prayer – listening to the Lord, whispering to him. (Ten minutes total) The Scriptures and his Spirit will get your eyes off people and on Truth.

(John 2:23-25; Proverbs 29:25)

Aug 10

Everlasting

'Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.' (Matthew 24:35)

This verse is a call to action. Now, earth may not pass away in the sense of disappearing or even being ultimately destroyed (because we believe that Jesus is *'making all things new'*. Revelation 21:5) But life – i.e. heaven and earth – will pass away to you and me personally. We will at some point die and move off this plane to another world. We're told by Jesus himself that we can even now store up treasures for ourselves in the next life – the life that lasts forever. (Matthew 6:20)

Today, I don't know what you face into, or what responsibilities are on your plate. But I do know this: If you take a minute to pray, and ask God to help you actually build on his words today – his words which will not pass away – you will be 'banking' treasure for yourself in heaven.

'No one can lay any foundation other than the one which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ.' (1 Corinthians 3:11)

(Matthew 7:24-29)

Aug 11

What Do You See?

'What do you see, Jeremiah?'

(Jeremiah 1:11)

Some people know more than others about the Bible. No one knows much, to be honest: ***'He who thinks he knows, does not yet know like he ought to know.'***

(1 Corinthians 8:2)

Jesus levels us all. He is the 'Word off the page'. If you know Jesus, you know it all. There's really nothing else to know, in a sense. The whole point of all Scripture knowledge, is to believe in Jesus, to know him personally, the '*Living Word*'. (John 1:14)

'You search the Scriptures... but you refuse to come to me and have life.'

(John 5:39-40)

You know Jesus. He lives in you by his Spirit. So every little bit you do know about his Word, his love, his kindness, you can share and impart to others. Don't worry about all that you do not know. Just ask the Lord in prayer to use what you do know of him.

(Psalm 84:10; 1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Aug 12

Harmonize

'Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels... ten thousand times ten thousand... They were singing, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...'

(Revelation 5:11-12)

Have you ever felt left out of something, or like you're missing the party? Or have you ever arrived at a large event and just felt a little lost or lonely, not part of the group, the 'action'?

Jesus would be surrounded by a crowd of people, and yet turn and call out to someone on the fringes of the group, or turn and heal just one person 'lost in the crowd'.²⁹

In Christ not one believer is left out. The 'event', the 'action', is never complete without you. You are an integral part of it. It doesn't matter where you are, even in the quietness of your room across the city, miles away from the 'party' – you are part of the true, spiritual 'event' that is the kingdom of God. Be at peace. Be quietly assured all the days of your life.

(Matthew 6:5-6)

²⁹ Mark 5:24-34; Luke 19:1-10

Aug 13

Fear of the Lord

'The fear of the Lord is a treasure...' (Isaiah 33:6)

Fear of the Lord is a healthy thing! It is supposed to be understood in the context of a loving relationship with God. God cares most about love, and 'fear of the Lord' is meant to deepen that relationship.

Fear of the Lord is about awe, respect, obedience, and even delight and wonder.

When we fear the Lord, we 'heed' his lead. Even in things that are good for us. For example, when you fear the Lord – i.e. respect him most - if the Lord prompts you to avoid certain people, disregard certain criticism, etc., you will have confidence to do it. You will have strength and conviction to break free. Because you fear the Lord, and he directed you.

Fear of the Lord is to release you from fear of people.

(Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 29:25)

Aug 14

Complete

'Lord... you make my lot secure. You make the boundaries of my lot to fall in pleasant places.'

(Psalm 16:5-6)

There are so many disparities in this life. Some people are born into a 'functional' and loving home, some are not. Some are 'born into' educational opportunities, safe neighborhoods, stable countries. We don't pick our genes, and we don't pick our time in history.

Don't worry about what you *don't* have. I mean in terms of 'self-confidence', holding your head high. Don't worry about your 'lot' in life. This is 99% out of your hands. Don't be ashamed!

Here's what you *can* do! Use every advantage that God *has* given you – health, sense of humor, physical strength, friends, insights, wisdom, faith, kindness, a roof over your head, a little money to spare, a kind smile, etc. – to give to others. Give what you do have! Thank God for what you have. Hold your head high always, because God made you, loves you, and has a mighty inheritance for you in Jesus.

'The last shall be first.' (Matthew 20:16)

Aug 15

Where You Are

'Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.'

(Psalm 84:10)

Where has God stationed you?

You don't have to worry about where others are stationed, or even if they are 'keeping' their station. That is between them and God. If you can truly find your place, your 'lane', your door, you can rest.

And my brother, my sister, be quietly confident in your perceptions. If you are where God has led you, stationed you, your perceptions – your discernment – is pretty healthy. If you have a 'check' in your spirit about this or that person, allow this 'check' to register with your heart, your mind. That is not judgmental.

Paul the apostle rebuked Peter and even James, Jesus' own brother, because they veered off. And you, too, may see, feel, some things that are 'off'. That is OK. Be at peace. And go with the lead of the Spirit in your life!

(Luke 19:11-27; Galatians 2:11-15)

Aug 16

What You Can Say

'The Lord Rebuke You!' (Jude 1:9)

The words above are those of an angel to the devil during a dispute. The angel did not call down curses, but did not let the matter slide, either.

We are given authority by Jesus himself to '*bind*' evil on the earth, to '*loose*' righteousness on the earth. (Matthew 16:19) We are given authority even to '*forgive*' and '*not forgive*'. (John 20:23) We can do much! We can speak strongly against the works and attacks of evil. When it comes to the judgment of God against evil, words of Scripture are more than strong:

'Their flesh will dissolve while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues will dissolve in their mouths.' (Zechariah 14:12)

We don't channel our own anger and rage. No, of that we repent. But we do allow God's zeal to pour through us, and according to our measure of faith, we tear down evil.

(Romans 14:23b; Psalm 94:16)

Aug 17

Better than Life

'Your love, O Lord, is better than life...' (Psalm 63:3)

There is such powerful temptation in this life! It is on all sides, and calls out to us:

'Folly... sits at the door of her house, calling out to those who pass by... 'Stolen water is sweet...'

(Proverbs 9:13-18)

My friends, there's only one 'passion', one place of pleasure that has deeper wells than the flesh: the Spirit of God.

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me.' (Psalm 42:7)

God's wind will always blow stronger than the winds of temptation, but we have to call for them, seek them, chase them.

'No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out...' (1 Corinthians 10:13)

(Psalm 73:25-26; Psalm 119:103)

Aug 18

Word to You

'The Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said...'

(John 14:26)

Jesus often quoted the Scriptures. Not randomly, but according to what was on his heart and mind for the person. God the Father brought to the mind of Jesus what was 'true' in that moment, Spirit-filled.

(John 5:19)

The same is true for us. We study the Bible to learn of God's ways, his interactions with humans throughout the ages, his teachings and principles. But God speaks to the individual. Jesus did, and by his Holy Spirit he still does. You may be reading the Bible one day, and a particular verse jumps out at you personally – from God for you, for this day.

Again, you may just be thinking (or dreaming) and the Lord teaches you something 'new', not exactly a verse but maybe a way to go, a way not to go, a person who needs prayer or an encouraging word.

(John 10:27; Romans 8:16; Psalm 16:7)

Aug 19

Faith Gap

'We live by faith, not by sight.'

(2 Corinthians 5:7)

What we see and feel and touch and taste will one day be the same as 'truth'. But for now, there is a divide.

For example, God may press on your heart that you are forgiven. Truly, and forever. No more condemnation, not even 'regret'. You might believe this is true deep in your spirit, and yet not really 'feel' it.

Jesus called us to believe him and his Word, over our own feelings and doubts. It's a challenge. It's God's way. He will always give you enough faith and conviction to know he is true, but he then offers us faith to span the divide between feeling and truth. We must step into his report for now, by faith.

'Without faith it is impossible to please God.'

(Hebrews 11:6)

(2 Corinthians 7:10; Ephesians 6:16)

Aug 20

Authority

‘Jesus taught as one who had authority... not like their teachers...’ (Matthew 7:29)

A person’s influence matters. I remember a friend and mentor once giving me advice. I was excited to share it with my wife. When she heard it, she said, *‘I’ve been saying that for years!’*

A person in your community, your family, your circles, may have heard about Jesus Christ before. But they may not have heard it – the gospel message – from someone they could actually *‘hear’*.

As a believer in Jesus, and one of his followers, his Spirit lives in you. And if you share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone, led by the Holy Spirit, your message will land with power. It will be a different experience for the person.

This may not assure you a positive or powerful response in the moment. But you will be able to rest assured that what you planted was Spirit-filled, and will *‘not come back empty.’*

(Isaiah 55:11; Romans 8:9)

Aug 21

You

‘Jesus said, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them.’ (Matthew 18:20)

Jesus does not need a gathering of two or three thousand. No. Just two or three.

Truth is, Jesus is with just *you* all the time.

‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ (Hebrews 13:5)

But when it comes to groups and meetings and conferences... Jesus needs only to be invited, and he will be there. All of him. All of God. With just two or three.

‘Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ (Matthew 19:14)

(Psalm 139:7-11; Psalm 46:10)

Aug 22

Bear the Burden

‘God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth.’ (John 4:24)

Is it correct to go right or left? Well, it depends on where you’re going, whether you should be going... Following Christ is all about spirit, because God is spirit. Sometimes in Scripture we are given opposite directions – in the same verse! The point is, well, there is a *‘time for everything’*, and what is the Spirit saying this time.

‘Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him... Answer a fool according to his folly, so that he will not be wise in his own eyes.’

(Proverbs 26:4-5)

When it comes to people in our lives – believers and unbelievers – we are called to love, to serve. But even in this area Scripture gives us both sides of the equation to consider. We pray. We are willing. We obey.

‘Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ... each one should carry their own load...’ (Galatians 6:2,5)

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

Aug 23

The One

'What about you. Who do you say I am?'

(Matthew 16:15)

Jesus came for the individual. Crowds to God, are just a sum of the parts. Every part is a treasure to Jesus – including you.

'He who touches you, touches the apple of his eye.' (Zechariah 2:8)

Jesus 'aimed' for the lowly, the lost. We're told in Luke chapter 15 that Jesus, the '*shepherd*', leaves the ninety-nine 'found' sheep in pursuit of the one lost sheep.

I often think of the story about the Ethiopian Eunuch. It's told in Acts chapter 8. This man was the treasurer in charge of all the wealth of the queen of Ethiopia. This man is on a journey in this account, reading the Scriptures. He meets a disciple of Jesus, Philip, and decides to believe in Jesus. We know nothing more of this queen, and certainly her wealth is all gone. But we learn of this one man in her kingdom. His name abides, his legacy lives on. Why? Because he took the hand of the eternal God.

(*John 4:32-34; Acts 8:26-40*)

Aug 24

Cut it all off!

'As for the those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and cut it all off!' (Galatians 5:12)

OK, so we're talking about circumcision here. Quite a striking comment!

God, through Moses the prophet, gave the people the command to be circumcised. (Genesis 17:9-14)

However, in Jesus Christ these types of laws no longer have spiritual weight or significance. There is no other way to put it. Look at the zeal and even jarring comment Paul makes above. When it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, nothing – absolutely nothing – can be mixed in or deemed 'part' of the gospel. Circumcision was a big thing at the time. Some people were saying that people must 'still' be circumcised, even if they believe in Jesus. Not true! Paul writes,

'Circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing. What counts is a new creation.'
(Galatians 6:15)

What things do we 'add' to the gospel today?

(Galatians 1:6-10; John 3:16)

Aug 25

My Own Eyes

'I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.' (Job 19:25-26)

Some scholars believe 'Job' to be the oldest book of the Bible. Here this man is speaking of God 'standing' on the earth. He is speaking of 'seeing' God with his own eyes. This was unheard of. And this was hundreds of years before Jesus walked the earth. The prophecy of Isaiah, six hundred years before Jesus was born, said: ***'The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel.'*** (Isaiah 7:14)

Matthew, Jesus' own disciple who wrote the book of Matthew, refers to this prophecy of Isaiah when speaking about the birth of Jesus. He writes: ***'This took place to fulfill what the Lord said through Isaiah the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')'*** (Matthew 1:23)

When you see Jesus, you see God – with your eyes, or with the eyes of your heart.

(Isaiah 9:6-7; Colossians 1:15-20)

Aug 26

Rights!

'... and you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We have only done our duty...' (Luke 17:10)

Amazing men and women of faith in Scripture served God out of gratitude for wages already received; not out of an expectation for more glory or rewards from God. Their service was their prize.

Paul writes: ***'What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge...'***

(1 Corinthians 9:18)

It is OK to *'store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.'* (Matthew 6:20) It is OK to set sights on heaven and rewards from God. Jesus called us to do this! But Jesus is also the one who spoke the words of today's Scripture above. A sobering reminder that as God, our Creator, our Provider, we owe life itself to him.

He will reward us beyond belief! (Mark 10:29-31)
But Jesus himself is the treasure, and his presence with us now, in us, is actually the prize of prizes!

(Matthew 13:44; Psalm 73:25-26)

Aug 27

Power

'The kingdom of God is not one of mere words, but of power.' (1 Corinthians 4:20)

Jesus needed no introduction. Not because he was already known by people, but because he came in power – not just words. His actual impact spoke for itself. When he spoke, his words poured forth in authority, full of the Holy Spirit every time. (Matthew 7:28-29)

Jesus would often try to *avoid* introductions. He wanted to take things from the top every time. He wanted God to show up, not a reputation to precede him. He would tell his disciples to actually *not* tell people who he was. (Matthew 16:20) Paul the apostle walked in these footsteps of power, not just words. In his letter to the church in Corinth, he writes:

'I will not boast about myself... so that no one will think more of me than what is warranted by what I do or say...'

(2 Corinthians 12:5-6)

Paul was so confident in the Holy Spirit upon him, through him, that he did not want any boasting of the past to influence the present moment.

(Psalm 118:24; 2 Corinthians 6:2)

Aug 28

Lord of the Sabbath

'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.' (1 John 4:4)

God has called you. God has poured his Spirit into you. (Ephesians 1:14) You will see some other people at work in their faith, and some of it may encourage you, some may concern you. People may respond to you in either of these ways, also. Some may be encouraged by you, some may question you. Look at what Paul writes to the Christians from the church in Corinth:

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.' (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Paul was so focused on the Lord, and walking in his leading, that his vision of others – and even of himself – was somewhat blurred.

'Who are you to judge another man's servant? Before his master he will stand or fall. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand!' (Romans 14:4)

(Matthew 12:1-8)

Aug 29

The Name

'The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.'

(Zechariah 14:9)

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, it is emphasized that there is one God, one Lord, one name. The very first commandment from Moses was that we would have no other God but the one true God. (Exodus 20:3-6)

'I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.'

(Isaiah 45:5)

'I am the Lord, that is my name! I will not share my glory with another.' (Isaiah 42:8)

Jesus claimed this name – the only name of God:
'You call me Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.' (John 13:13)

The apostle Peter makes this proclamation about Jesus to the people:

'There is no other name under heaven given unto men by which we must be saved!' (Acts 4:12)

(*Philippians 2:9-10; Colossians 3:17*)

Aug 30

White as Snow

'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...' (Isaiah 1:18)

Sexual sin is a serious matter. In fact, it was 'promiscuity' and 'immorality' that brought on God's decision to flood the earth. (*Genesis 6-7, Noah and the Ark*)³⁰ Homosexuality was also a reality, a practice, that brought on God's wrath. (*Genesis 18-19, Sodom and Gomorrah*)³¹

Paul writes: ***'Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.'***

(1 Corinthians 6:18)

Have you sinned sexually? In Jesus, my friend, if you repent sincerely, he will make you *'white as snow'*. This day, through repentance (turning away from your sin, not just saying *'sorry'*), you can take the hand of Jesus and walk another way, free, clean, new...

(2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 1:9)

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 7:9

³¹ Romans 1:26-27; 1 Timothy 1:8-11

Aug 31

Decided!

'I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know.' (Psalm 40:9)

Jesus values our quiet conviction. In fact, three times in chapter 6 of Matthew, Jesus emphasizes the importance of what we do 'in secret'.

'In your hearts, set Christ apart as Lord...' (1 Peter 3:15)

God may or may not lead you to proclaim his name 'in the great assembly'. But he does call all mankind to proclaim his name in our heart of hearts. He claims to be Lord of life itself, and he calls us to enthrone him – and only him – in our hearts.

'God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...' (Philippians 2:9-10)

(Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:3)

Sept 1

Judging

‘One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.’ (Romans 14:5)

More faith can bring more freedom to your soul, your life.

This dynamic through the Spirit of God is a mystery. In some areas God is not giving a hard and fast instruction either way, but calling people to stay true to their faith. This is deep!

Now, one thing I do defer to you. If God allows for more freedom through faith, why would we not ask for more? The disciples did! (Luke 17:5)

Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. (Romans 10:4)
So where the Spirit of Christ is at work, something higher, truer and purer than ‘rules’ is at work.

‘Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’ (Matthew 12:8)

(Galatians 5:13-26)

'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.'
(Colossians 2:8)

There is 'human tradition' that makes sense and is nice. There are basic principles of this world that are just fine. But when it comes to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, his gospel, his unique message and person, we stand on revelation. Revelation is what God 'reveals' to be true. Not what people 'work out' in their minds, or feel makes sense in history... Revelation stands alone. God holds life in his hands. He reveals himself through life and creation, but he does not 'fit' into life and creation: ***'God, in his wisdom, made it so that man through his wisdom would not find God.'*** (1 Corinthians 1:21)

We are told that *'all the fullness of the deity lives in Jesus.'* (Colossians 2:9) All of God is in Christ. There is no math equation or wisdom of the mind that can prove this – nor disprove this. It is the truth of God that has been revealed – to be believed, or not believed.

(Psalm 36:9; 2 Corinthians 4:6)

Sept 3

Am I Crazy?

'They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.' (Jeremiah 6:14)

Sometimes – usually when life is going peacefully – I wonder at my faith. Does it really matter? Is there really a difference between people of faith, and those who don't have a faith, and don't know about Jesus? *(Side note: When tragedy falls, or anything falls, like a tree against my house, faith and God and God's Word seem to be more real than the 'real world' around me...)*

However, on a sunny day, faith – and an urgency to share Christ and know Christ – can seem a little irrelevant.

This is simply a clash of 'realities', a clash of 'reports'. The Scriptures teach us that even in the time of Noah, when the world-wide flood was about to take place, his 'Ark' seemed irrelevant, people were partying till the rain started falling...

Enjoy those sunny days! But quietly, confidently, hold to the 'true peace' that you have found in Jesus.

(Jeremiah 29:13; Acts 17:27)

Sept 4

Cut Loose

'The former things have passed away...'

(Revelation 21:4)

The story of Jesus is one of actually dying, and coming alive again. There is an end. Death. Then there is a new life.

This is why Jesus said to us, ***'You must be born again.'*** (John 3:7)

We could not live with ourselves, if we had to carry our past into eternity. Even if it was a 'forgiven' past, a 'forgotten' past. A forgiven and forgotten past is still on the records of history. No, it would eventually come back up.

Jesus became your sin, became the 'curse', and died. Gone. Dead. Your past is no longer your past. It has been put on another, and died. (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13)

'The Lord... will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.' (Zephaniah 3:17)

(2 Timothy 1:10)

‘I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.’

(1 John 5:13)

God loves people. He created us out of love. His highest command is ‘love’. He has placed love higher than faith and hope.³²

Jesus called people to be child-like. He even said it was a requirement for entering the kingdom of God. (Matthew 18:3) Jesus’ disciples – who went on to write the four Gospels – were *‘unschooled men’*. (Acts 4:13) The whole story of the Bible is about one true God, and his revelation and interaction with the human race. That’s it! All the other bits and pieces in the Bible – funny names, historical twists and turns, etc. – are not central to the plot. They are fascinating to study, you will learn a lot about God, but they are not central to the plot.

Jesus – knowing that he came to earth as God in the flesh, paid for our sin by his death, and gives you eternal life when you believe in him – this is everything the Bible is ultimately about! If you get this, you got it!

³² 1 Corinthians 13:13; Matthew 22:36-40

Sept 6

Repentance is a 'Way'

'Produce fruit in keeping with repentance!'

(Matthew 3:8)

Repentance – which is turning away from sin in our lives – is a freedom path. It is a direction, a lifestyle, a fruitful road.

It is not a simple 'sorry' when you're caught. It is not about what people see. It is about what God sees, and loves, and his Holy Spirit. When you are dealing with a dishonest person, it is exhausting. Because if you take your eyes off them, they will cheat you. Their words mean nothing, really, and their apologies mean nothing. True repentance in our lives before God is practical, dependable, and has integrity. We actually stop doing things, or start doing things. We delete things, and confess things. Repentance is an action road we walk.

'Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:18)

'If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.'

(1 John 1:9)

(James 5:16; Titus 1:16)

Sept 7

Love of \$\$

‘Jesus said, ‘You cannot serve both God and money.’ (Matthew 6:24)

Jesus indicated that behind a lot of motives is actually a love of money. Money is not just ‘money’ – it is power, ego, pride, envy, immorality. And ‘love of money’ is not an obvious ‘focus’ on money itself. It can be a subtle focus on anything something else – even something religious – but the ultimate goal is ‘self’. Look at what Peter said to Simon the Sorcerer, when he was supposedly excited about the Holy Spirit:

‘When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given at the laying on of hands, he offered them money... Peter answered, ‘May your money perish with you... your heart is not right before God... You are full of bitterness and captive to sin.’

(Acts 8:18-23)

Peter discerned much darkness in the heart of Simon – but it was not on the surface! Peter discerned, and with true authority called it out strongly. And you, too, my friend, have the authority of Jesus to resist and rebuke a person you believe is not right before God.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

Sept 8

Whole

***'The tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven... 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.'* Jesus said, 'I tell you, this man went home justified before God... Those who humble themselves will be exalted.'**

(Luke 18:9-14)

You are never truer, than when you believe on Christ for the first time.

You are pure like a newborn. You have no personal ambitions in this new-found faith. You are just delighting in 'being'. You are mesmerized by the view across this new land, new reality, new family.

As time goes on we learn, we 'grow', but we can also become a little ambitious, 'experienced', weary. We can lose our freshness, our wonder, our humility.

It doesn't matter how much you grow, study, or are even 'called' by God, Jesus calls us *back* to our 'First Love', and puts full emphasis on being child-like in our faith.

Your truest self is always that person who first believed.

(Revelation 2:1-5; Matthew 18:3)

Sept 9

Your Mission

‘When Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them... He said to his disciples, ‘Pray for workers...’

(Matthew 9:36-38)

You can be a soldier in this battle, a ‘worker’. *How?*

Simply believe Jesus, and whisper this prayer:

‘Lord, I want to be a ‘worker’. I want my eyes open to the real spiritual workings of people, and to be able to bring words and the Spirit of Jesus to people. I ask this, and I wait on you, in Jesus’ name.’

We all have particular, spiritual gifts, and we all have particular posts as ‘doorkeepers’. (1 Corinthians 12:4; Psalm 84:10) The Lord has placed you uniquely amongst certain people, in a particular culture, with certain opportunities and resources. Ask the Lord to lead you.

(Ephesians 6:10-18; John 15:26-27)

Sept 10

Understanding

'They read from the Scriptures, making it clear and giving the meaning...' (Nehemiah 8:8)

God is about people understanding – with their hearts, and their minds. Jesus does not want people wandering into big gatherings where they feel overwhelmed, and where they do not understand what's being said.

'If I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying... the speaker is a foreigner to me.... try to excel in those gifts that build up the church.'

(1 Corinthians 14:11-12)

Jesus told a parable about the lost sheep. He says the shepherd left the ninety-nine that were safe and sound, and went to find the one that was alone, lost. So comforting. Jesus, one-on-one, no background noise, no hype, no lost-in-a-crowd. And interestingly, Jesus says of this 'sheep', that there is more rejoicing in heaven over this connecting, communicating, winning of the 'one', than over the rest of the safe, sound and happy ones in the pen. You, alone with God, is where the heavenly party is actually at!

(Romans 10:14-15,17; Luke 15:1-7)

Sept 11

Free

'For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays...'

(Malachi 4:2)

You have been set free in Jesus. You left your old self behind, a shell that dissolves. You have walked out of darkness into light, into a new and eternal pasture.

'... the old has gone, the new has come.' (2

Corinthians 5:17)

There is much we can 'do' for Jesus. There is a Christian life we can 'build' and invest in. But the deepest and greatest truth in Jesus is this: You have been saved. You are safe. You are free.

There is no border on this eternal place of Spirit.

Today, take a few minutes to just sit and bask in the light of Christ. After you look up read the Scriptures below. Just sit quietly for a few minutes, close your eyes, and rest in the Spirit of God, in his 'kingdom of light'.

(Matthew 17:1-2; Colossians 1:12-14)

Sept 12

Your Influence

'The master of the banquet did not realize where the wine had come from... though the servants knew...' (John 3:9)

Jesus was not planning on doing this miracle – changing water to wine. His mother asked him to. He actually even contested it with her, said it was not the right time. But then he did it anyway. Why? Because she asked him to! You are a loved, set-apart child of God. More than you know! Jesus actually instructed us to leverage this love relationship with him, by asking him for what we need, what we want.

'The Lord delights in those who fear him, who trust in his unfailing love.'
(Psalm 147:11)

'Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.' (Psalm 37:4)

There may be people near you who need your faith and your 'connection' to the Lord. They may need you to go to your Father and ask something on their behalf – i.e. pray for them. When you come to the Father in prayer, in Jesus' name, much happens!

(John 16:24; Matthew 7:7-12; James 1:17)

Sept 13

Exalted

'An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shone around them...' (Luke 2:9)

Jesus was born, and God chose to announce this through angels to the shepherds in the field. There were kings and governors in the towns nearby. There were wealthy, influential business men all around. But God chose to break light in from heaven itself, and announce his arrival to the lowest, poorest workers in the area.

Jesus said numerous times that the *'last would be first.'* (Mark 10:31; Matthew 20:16) God came to earth, and went first to the poor to reveal himself. God shows no favoritism. This comes up again and again. (Acts 10:34; 2 Peter 3:9) If anything, there is a 'favor', a type of 'advantage' in faith when it comes to the poor. (James 2:5)

Have you missed out on some things? Do you feel life passed you by in some areas?

'Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and he will lift you up... Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you.' (1 Peter 5:6-7)

Sept 14

Zeal

'Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.' (Romans 12:11)

Spiritual 'zeal' is not the same as human intensity.

Zeal is about integrity. It is about calling. It is about faithfulness. Zeal is not about 'hype'.

Jesus focuses in on our 'private' lives, which we don't typically associate with 'zeal' or 'fervor'. (Matthew 6) But our spiritual lives are ultimately about relationship with God, who is Spirit. Our spiritual lives are not primarily for the benefit of others, or to empower ministries.

We're told in this verse today to maintain our drive, 'serving the Lord'. We remember that the Lord's most important command is to love God. And Jesus really wants us to live our lives in that space, that faith. In Revelation 2, he calls a whole church back to their *'First Love'*, even though they were 'hard working' and 'good' people. Spiritual zeal and fervor, serving the Lord, is about slowing things down and being with Jesus.

(Psalm 46:10; Matthew 1:23; Luke 10:38-42)

Sept 15

Action!

‘Some soldiers asked him, ‘What should we do?’ John the Baptist replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.’

(Luke 3:14)

Soldiers were the policemen of the day. John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to turn away from their sin, asked the policemen to not abuse their power.

I think we would all agree that corruption in law enforcement is heinous. When someone uses ‘force’ that is not actually their own, but given them by the people, to abuse people, it is horrible. But you know, each one of us has power. Power comes in so many forms. Some have beauty, some have money, influence, connections, education, support... Each one of us will answer to the Lord for our power.

‘Jesus said to Pilate, ‘You would not have this power except my Father in heaven gave it to you.’ (John 19:11)

What Jesus was really saying, is you will answer for the ‘power’ you have.

(Luke 19:11-27)

Sept 16

Take 2!

'The crowd asked, 'What shall we do?' John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with him who has none...' (Luke 3:10-11)

Life is short. That's all there is to it. Jesus told us not to worry about clothes, when we were in need of them. And here John tells us to share clothes, when we have some to share. (Matthew 6:25) It's challenging!

Now, Christ's ways are not 'equations'. He did not bring us political or economic '*Do's and Don't's*'. When people tried to get 'political', he shrewdly pointed them to give to politics (Caesar) what belongs to politics, and to God what is God's. In a sense Jesus was challenging us as to whether our accounts with God were settled, whatever about politics.

Jesus does give us, however, his Spirit to help us navigate life. He gives us faith to calibrate our actions and measures of actions. (Romans 14:5,22-23)

(Matthew 22:15-22; Proverbs 19:17)

Sept 17

Receive

'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35)

Yes, it is most definitely a more 'blessed' experience, that of giving. However, there is a deep truth in 'receiving'. In order to really enjoy what God gives us, we must have a true humility to receive, to enjoy.

I think one of the biggest obstacles to enjoying the moment, is our worry and awareness of things outside that moment – problems in our life, in the world, injustices and inequities. How can I enjoy this, when so many suffer?

But this is not God's way with us. In fact, even in the *'presence of enemies'*, or world woes, so to speak, the Lord will *'lay a table before you.'* (Psalm 23:5) It honors the Lord at these times for you to silence your heart, quiet your mind, and like a child receive what he gives you.

(1 Timothy 6:17; Matthew 24:6)

Sept 18

Meadows

'I am with you always, till the end of the age.'

(Matthew 28:20)

People will walk alone. Maybe not today or tomorrow, but one day in this life.

Have you ever loved someone, and worried about them walking alone, being alone?

Possibly one of the most comforting pictures of Jesus with us – *'God with us'*³³ – is when Jesus himself says, ***'I stand at your door and I knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and dine with you...'*** (Revelation 3:20)

There will be some loneliness and some darkness here, this side of glory. It is here Jesus will take our hand, be with us, until he leads us to the other side – where darkness is no more. When you cannot be with someone you love – or they cannot be with you – Jesus is with you. Jesus is with them. Trust him. Open the door of your heart to him. And ask God to allow you to share this news with the lonely.

(Colossians 3:3; Isaiah 41:10)

³³ Matthew 1:23

Sept 19

Protected

'Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, I will trust and not be afraid. What can man do to me?' (Psalm 56:3)

Do you fear? We all do! This life is overwhelming, and dangerous. People are dishonest, and can be cruel. I'm not being negative here, I'm actually being very generous. And when it comes down to it, what do we fear most? Natural disasters? Animals? No. People. We fear people most, because of sin.

God is on it! Don't worry, don't be discouraged! God, through Jesus, has broken into this sad life and defeated death, defeated sin, defeated the devil. It is astounding news! And little by little Jesus is taking back the whole world, the whole universe. Rise and walk with Christ. Share him. Rest in him.

'The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior.'
(Jeremiah 20:11)

'The prince of this world stands defeated.' (John 16:11)

(2 Timothy 1:10; Matthew 28:18)

Sept 20

Alone?

'Surely he took up our pain... yet we considered him stricken by God.'

(Isaiah 53:4)

We can get things wrong. We can get things wrong about others, ourselves, and even about how we are spiritually.

Today's verse is a prophecy about Jesus, spoken six hundred years before his time. It tells us that we would misinterpret his suffering as Jesus being out of favor with God. It was completely the opposite. Jesus was *fully* approved by God, and was out of favor with us.

Our own hearts can mislead us spiritually:

'And when our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.' (1 John 3:20)

You might feel alone sometime, and afraid. The truth is, my friend, you're never alone, and you have nothing to fear. Jesus himself is in you, and stands with you, and the world is his.

(*Psalm 24:1; Amos 4:13; Psalm 34:7*)

‘The Lord... compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... forgiving wickedness... yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.’ (Exodus 34:6-7)

God has put his Spirit in you. When you believed in Jesus with a sincere heart, turning to him, he ‘sealed’ you with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

In this life we are in a battle of truth and falsehood. Jesus warned us of deceivers – people who would be ‘naming’ Christ, but not true to him.³⁴ Jesus called us to be *‘shrewd as serpents’*. My friend, the Lord will judge and he will punish. You don’t have to judge, but you do have to ‘discern’, and be ‘shrewd’. If you feel something or someone is ‘off’, just leave in Jesus’ name, and entrust that person to the Lord. If you do encounter a ‘stand-off’, then with confidence speak out what you discern in Jesus’ name!

‘So I will be like a lion to them... Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open...’ (Hosea 13:7-8)

(1 John 4:6; Matthew 10:16)

³⁴ Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 14:26

Sept 22

Deeper

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed I do not even judge myself... It is the Lord who judges me.' (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

You are a follower of Jesus, not a follower of people. Sometimes people who know you to be a Christian, and a 'kind' person, will try to take advantage of that. And it can wear you down.

You are a follower of Christ. As a Christ-follower it is your desire and 'duty' to love people and serve people – but not on *your* terms, not on *their* terms, on *Christ's* terms, according to his Spirit's leading.

Jesus himself did not do what people wanted. He did what God wanted, and exactly as God led him. (John 5:19) Often this meant that he would refuse people their requests, and they didn't like it! But Jesus was not on a mission to be 'liked' by people, or to get them to 'like' Christians. And nor are we! There may be some people you need to draw a line with, gently decline this or that 'invitation', and gently, maybe, get more space between you.

(1 Peter 3:15-16; Matthew 16:1-4)

Sept 23

Oxygen

'Jesus said, 'I have food that you know nothing about... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.' (John 4:32,34)

Jesus will reward us for our faith, and our work in Jesus. He makes this very clear, over and over again.

However, there is a deeper truth when it comes to serving Jesus, loving God. When we 'give' Christ to others, we are, in fact, 'receiving' our reward. Our 'food' is not eating, but giving it away. When we 'give', we get.

'Man cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'
(Matthew 4:4)

Paul the apostle said that his reward in preaching the gospel to people, was that he could do it *'free of charge'*. (1 Corinthians 9:18) His reward was not only in giving Christ, but in refusing any recompense for this.

(Acts 20:24; 2 Kings 5:16)

Sept 24

Talents

'Jesus said, 'It is like a man going on a journey... He entrusts his wealth to his servants to invest... to one he gives five talents, to another two talents, to another one talent...'

(Matthew 25:14-30)

It is all the master's money, to be invested for the master. The one who received five talents is not richer than the one who received one talent – because it all belongs to the master.

In fact, the servant who received five talents only received a bigger responsibility. Jesus said, ***'To those who have been given much, much is expected.'*** (Luke 12:48)

Interestingly in this parable (*which hopefully you will read in full, in just a minute*), the man with only one talent was the one who failed to invest. And why was the master so angry? Well, because he had not been given a whole lot to do, and even this he had not done. Jesus calls the heart to repentance and faith. That is the very first thing – the first 'talent' – that Jesus gives us to invest. Is there an area in your life that you know is not right before God, but you are resisting to address?

(Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Samuel 16:7)

Sept 25

God Did Not Allow It!

'I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them... it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live...' (2 Peter 1:12-13)

Some things bear repeating. Peter is here talking about the gospel - but he is saying he needs to repeat it, even though his listeners 'know it'. One point I feel is so important to 'repeat', is that God hates evil, never allows it, never collaborates with it, and will, therefore, judge it. It was Christ who said, ***'A house divided against itself cannot stand.'*** (Mark 3:25) How could Jesus judge evil, if he himself had a hand in it? (Mark 3:22-31)

And yet some well-intentioned people might say to you that some of the evil you experienced, God 'knew' and God allowed, and ultimately for your good. This is untrue. That is not a biblical view. It is a view based on human philosophy – trying to 'wed' both God's love and bad experiences. (Colossians 2:4,8) We cannot and we must not do this! God loves you, is with you, hates evil and will judge it. We don't understand 'how' God works, but we know this: He never allows evil!

(Isaiah 61:8; Hebrews 1:9; Luke 17:1-3)

Sept 26

The Way

'The disciples said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' (Luke 17:5)

There's only one name. Jesus Christ is the name – and person and Spirit – that is God's 'door' to life.

As people we feel lost. We love to be 'known' by others, it makes us feel secure. But the truth is, there is only one name that we need to hold dear, and be part of.

As a follower of Jesus you only need to be concerned with glory being given to God. Not just in words and even actions, but in Spirit: ***"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord.***

(Zechariah 4:6)

Look only for the Spirit of the Lord, and that glory is going to him and coming freely from him. Don't worry about people knowing or esteeming you, and don't worry about 'knowing' or 'admiring' other people.

'You cannot believe because you accept glory from one another, but make no effort to obtain the glory that comes from the one and only God.' (John 5:44)

(Acts 4:12; Titus 1:16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Sept 27

The Unforgivable

'Jesus said, 'Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven...' (Mark 3:29)

The origin of the word, 'blaspheme', from Greek, is 'evil-speaking'. Jesus is about what we 'say' with our hearts. What does our heart speak?

When Jesus spoke this word about the unforgivable, '*blaspheming the Holy Spirit*', he was speaking directly to a group of people that were rejecting him, and basically telling others that Jesus was evil, a liar, to be rejected. If this is your heart's ultimate decision on Christ, well, you will not receive him, believe him, and you will be lost.

Jesus is not talking about rejecting people, but about people rejecting him – rejecting God, and his Spirit. Outside of God's forgiveness, there is no forgiveness.

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit cannot be done accidentally. It is nothing to be feared. It is a heart's deliberate decision to reject Christ forever. That is not you!

(Romans 8:31-29; 2 Timothy 2:19)

Sept 28

Tongues

'People said, 'Although John the Baptist never performed a miraculous sign, all that he said about Jesus was true.'

(John 10:41)

Many prophets before John – like Elijah – performed many miraculous signs. But John, who came in the 'spirit of Elijah' and was said by Jesus to be the greatest prophet, did not do any signs. (Matthew 11:9-11)

There is a mysterious spiritual gift called 'speaking in tongues'. That is when, in prayer, you begin to speak a heavenly language, not recognized by people. People who do have this gift, if ever speaking where people can hear them, are commanded by God to have an interpreter or not to do it.³⁵

'Tongues' is one of many gifts. The gift of 'tongues' has nothing to do with people who are or who are not 'baptized in the Holy Spirit.' You are baptized in the Holy Spirit when you believe in Jesus. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

'No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit.' (1 Corinthians 12:3)

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 14:1-28 (note vs.27-28)

Sept 29

Changing Landscape

'I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up...' (Isaiah 49:11)

The whole world is changing under the power of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus died and rose again, a whole new world was under construction. As he breathed his last on the cross, he said, *'It is finished.'* (John 19:30) Death was finished. Sin was finished. Sadness, abuse, wickedness, sorrow... Finished. And Jesus told us that the advance of his kingdom could not be stopped even by hell. (Matthew 16:18)

So as you pass through arid spaces and times in this life, wave them goodbye. Because the power that makes them arid is already draining out, and the Spirit of Christ is moving in – like the sun rising after a dark night.

'Jesus said, 'Behold, I am making all things new!' (Revelation 21:5)

(John 3:7; Psalm 126:5)

'Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the flames; to others show mercy mixed with fear - hating even their clothing stained by sin.' (Jude 1:22-23)

There are true doubters. They just don't know. They look, they question, the light has not broken in on their eyes. Be merciful and patient with these seekers, as you share Jesus, and pray for them. There are others that need to be 'snatched' back from the flames. They are dangerously close to 'loss', to suffering. I think of this person as knowing the truth, but wandering from it, and needing a Spirit-led straight talk.

There are others who need mercy but are quite deep in sin. I have to be careful who I talk to and when I talk to them about Jesus. Why? Not because they are bad, but because I am weak and their situation – maybe personally or circumstantially, has 'sin' on it and might catch my heel. I might linger too long, or make an unhealthy friendship or connection. Or I might be too far from accountability and someone sees, and wonders and talks. Show mercy, but be distant from the sin.

(John 8:24; Colossians 4:5; Matthew 10:16)

Oct 1

What's Real

'Elisha prayed, 'Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.' Then the servant looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around...'

(2 Kings 6:17)

You have been through some tough times. You have fought through some tough battles, and come through some dark valleys.

Every now and then you might think on these times past, or get a sick feeling in your stomach about those 'realities' in life, those places that still might exist somewhere...

Jesus is making all things new. (Revelation 21:5) He is changing the very landscape of reality. (Isaiah 49:11) That valley that you went through, and are now out of, does not exist anymore. Jesus has moved through it by his Spirit, laid bare the structures, tilled the field, and is planting holiness, truth, compassion, kindness.

Don't fear the past. Don't despair about places and spaces of darkness. Jesus, by his Spirit, is sweeping the land...

(Psalm 72:8; Matthew 12:20-21)

Oct 2

Direction

'Jesus answered, 'You would have no power... if it were not given to you from above...' (John 19:11)

As humans we are all equal. We struggle with sin, we struggle with temptation. Jesus makes our 'equality' pretty clear in the 'Sermon on the Mount', that is, chapters 5-7 in Matthew.

God is not in the business of condemning people. We are told that Jesus did not come to condemn, but rather to free us from condemnation that was already upon us. Jesus is practical about this! He doesn't just leave us to focus on our 'goodness' and 'badness' all day long. No! He picks us up, forgives us (daily!³⁶), and gives us things to do! This is a map forward, direction to hold and to prize. Thank the Lord for things to do!

'We urge you... to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands... so that your life may win respect... and so you will not be dependent on anybody.'
(1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)

(Galatians 1:4; 1 John 3:8)

³⁶ Lamentations 3:23

Oct 3

Eyes to See

'In the days of Noah... people were eating, drinking, marrying... until the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.'

(Luke 17:26-27)

Throughout the whole Bible, there are events and seasons where God is doing something, and people either see or don't see what's going on. And they respond or don't respond.

When Jesus was nearing the time of his death, he looked out over the city. He cried, and said, ***'If you only knew this day what would bring you peace. But now it is hidden from your eyes.'*** (Luke 19:42)

Jesus often taught, and would end by saying, ***'Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.'***

The biggest thing that God ever did was reveal himself through Jesus Christ. It can be hard to see what God is actually doing, sometimes, in history now. But if you see Christ, and acknowledge him as your Lord, you have received God's biggest offering of all time, and are going to heaven.

(Colossians 3:11; John 4:24)

Oct 4

Honored

'Everywhere the gospel is preached, this story will be told in memory of you.' (Mark 14:9)

When Jesus honors you, you are honored. You don't need to defend yourself, or even defend your honor. He's got it. It's real. And it is special. Receive his honor. (Psalm 84:11)

When God whispers direction or confirmation or courage to your soul, to your mind – you have a lead, you are confirmed, you are protected. No fear! None. Don't. Trust him. Honor him with faith. (Hebrews 11:6)

'Whenever I am afraid I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, I will trust and not be afraid. What can man do to me?' (Psalm 56:3-4)

Listen for the whisper of the Lord. When he speaks, ask him for the faith you need to really grasp his Word, to hold it fast, and see it come through. You will scale walls, go through walls, and have victory. Listen. Heed. Hold in faith.

(Psalm 18; Mark 14:1-9)

Oct 5

Last Word

'Jesus cried out, 'Father, into your hands I place my spirit.' Then he breathed his last.' (Luke 23:46)

We will all, at some moment or another, step out of this life into the next one. It is my hope and my prayer, that my 'spirit' (if not my words) are fixed on the Father at that time.

These words of Jesus – while still so conscious, so lucid – are amazing! With such faith, he calls to Father God and quotes Psalm 31:5 – *'Into your hands I place my spirit.'*

Now, it is important to remember that your safety, your security, is not in your own 'focus' at the time of your departure. You have believed on Jesus, and he holds you. Even if you doubt, you fear, that is OK! Many a great man of faith doubted, even after a long life of faith and conviction. The most notable for me is John the Baptist. And yet Jesus, even when John doubted, did not doubt John!

'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms...' (Deuteronomy 33:27)

(Matthew 11:1-15; Psalm 4:8)

Oct 6

Sons and Daughters

'Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.'

(Psalm 27:10)

Anyone who believes in Jesus, becomes part of God's family. It is the truest family that exists. All other families have nothing whatever to do with 'choice' – you get what you get!

It is very important that you understand this: God is a protector. He loves you, hears your prayers, and as your true Father, he acts on your behalf. Decide today that you will believe him, trust him, and allow him to fight for you!

'A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.'

(Psalm 91:7)

As a son and daughter of the Lord, God will stand with you as a 'dread warrior' (Jeremiah 20:11). God is about 'power', not just words! (1 Corinthians 4:20) You are loved, and you are in a strong family now!

'I will be quick to testify against... those who oppress the fatherless...'

(Malachi 3:5)

(Matthew 12:46-50; John 1:12-13)

Oct 7

Worship

'I urge you... offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... This is your act of worship.' (Romans 12:1)

Worship is not music and singing. Music and singing can be worship.

Worship is from the heart – a heart set on Jesus Christ. From this 'core' place of spirit, worship is.

Singing, however, is a gift from God. Even the prophet, Elisha, asked for a 'harpist' to be brought to him, to help him enter into the Spirit to receive prophecy. So, yes, sing and praise!

'God inhabits the praises of his people.' (Psalm 22:3)

Conflict or Breakthrough? My friends, as you 'live', worship, be bold, be strong. Don't fear 'conflict' with people when you are standing on truth. Don't fear it. Don't apologize for it. Let the Lord deal. He will use your faith, your 'act of worship', to bring breakthrough in truth.

(2 Kings 3:15; Psalm 144:9)

Oct 8

The Holy Spirit

'Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.' (Matthew 3:11)

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. He did this by calling people to turn away from their wrongdoing. (i.e. *'repent'*) John's baptism was one of *'repentance'*, with water. (Matthew 3:11a) It was *'preparation'* for people to come to Jesus. How do we then come to Jesus? By seeing him (hearing of him), and believing in him.

When we turn from our sin, and believe in Jesus Christ, we are *'baptized'* in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *'marks'* us, lives in us, from that moment and forevermore. (Ephesians 1:14)

Yes, you will have other experiences of the Holy Spirit in your life, and we need this power and *'flow'* through us. But there is no such thing as a *'baptism in the Holy Spirit'* that is separate to a sincere faith in Jesus Christ. There is no required *'manifestation'* of the Holy Spirit in your life, by *'this'* or *'that'* spiritual gift. This is not Biblical. Be at peace. You believe in Jesus? You are filled with the Holy Spirit!

(1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

Oct 9

What do you see?

'How can they believe on the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.' (Romans 10:14-15,17)

The message of Christ comes through testimony – through people sharing with people. Jesus practiced this himself, commissioned the disciples on 'short term' mission trips, instructing them to preach, and has commissioned all of us:

'The Spirit of truth will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me...'
(John 15:26-27)

We partner with God in sharing about Jesus Christ. The burden is not on us to 'open eyes' or convince people. We believe, we live it, we share it, and we ask God to open their eyes, the '*Spirit of truth*' to testify to their spirits.

So there is no pressure in the sense of results. There is, however, a 'mission' that we are called to be part of as a team, as a body.

(1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

Oct 10

Just Believe It

'If you speak with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' (Romans 10:9)

Jesus fulfilled the law in himself. (*Romans 10:4*)
God wants us to come to and through Jesus now, and not to get hung up on rules.

This verse is not trying to give us a 2-part action – speaking and believing. No. The point of this Scripture is to highlight the simplicity, the 'spirit-based' truth of coming to God. It's not about a rule or regulation. It is now about a heart that turns to God.

You've been rescued! Not just from sin and death, but also in many circumstances. God goes before you, now. If you really focus and consider some of the 'door openings' or 'door closings' that have steered your path, your eyes will begin to 'clear' and you will God in your story, in your steps.

Pray and ask God today to help you 'see' his work and interventions in your life. Maybe journal what he brings to your mind, so you can look back on it and remember.

(1 Corinthians 1:17; Revelation 3:8)

Oct 11

Just Believe

'He asked, 'What must I do to be saved?' Paul answered, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.'

(Acts 16:30-31)

Faith. God calls us to really take hold of his Word, his promises. If you don't really believe what he says, you won't access his peace and his breakthrough. Think about it. If you don't trust a person when they tell you they'll be there, they'll catch you, they'll cover you... well, you won't move, go, jump. It won't happen. Same with God. He calls us to believe in order to receive. But he helps us! Yes, we can ask God to increase our faith! (Luke 17:5)

God says he is in you. God says not to fear. God says he has forgiven you, and your sin is gone! God says you can 'lie down and sleep in peace', because he covers you. (Psalm 4:8)

Prayer: Dear Jesus, increase my faith! Jesus, give me a measure of increased confidence in all you say, and please pour out more peace and assurance and power on my path!

(Romans 10:17; Habakkuk 2:14)

Oct 12

Partnership

'We are co-workers in God's service...'

(1 Corinthians 3:9)

We come to Jesus and follow Jesus. We become 'co-workers' with God. But God is always before us. He doesn't send us out on our own to represent him. No. He goes 'before' us always, opening, closing doors, moving by his Spirit. This 'walk' with God is never alone, always together.

My friend, you may be in a tough place. Your heart may be broken. Maybe sorrow overwhelms you. My friend, Jesus is with you. He has not left you. Try this day to 'remember' when and where Jesus had gone before you, opened and closed doors, to care for you. Maybe journal it now. Even as he went before you then, he is with you now. His hand is on you. Power settles on you like a cloud. God's love is in you and all around you.

(Psalm 77:11; Psalm 139:7-11)

Oct 13

No End

‘One thing I ask of the Lord... that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.’ (Psalm 27:4)

David was a warrior and a man of deep faith. The story of his life is captivating, and you would not regret reading the two books in the Old Testament – 1 & 2 Samuel.

Despite David’s many ‘goals’ and ‘gifts’ and responsibilities, his treasure, his reward, was the presence of God. Today’s verse captures David’s heart in this. His deepest desire was to be ‘housed’ in spirit, in truth, in the presence of the Lord, to both ‘gaze’ on his Spirit, and to ‘seek’ his Spirit.

There is no end in Jesus, because he is the eternal God. This is why you have not ‘seen’ the bottom of your faith in him. There is no floor, there is no ceiling. His Spirit is eternal, and you can – and will – free fall in this expanse forever.

In Christ you have arrived. Because there is no end.

(Psalm 63:3; Psalm 73:25-26)

Oct 14

Pride & Joy

'What is our hope, our joy, the crown in which we will glory in the presence of Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed you are our glory and joy.'

(1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Even Jesus 'gloried' in people. One of the most moving things to me is when Jesus says to a woman that she will be remembered and spoken of, '*everywhere the gospel is preached.*' (Mark 14:9)

In today's verse Paul is releasing in us 'permission' to truly value people, and prize people's faith and coming to the Lord. He says that even in the presence of Christ, these people – you and me – are his '*crown*', his '*glory*'.

We are told that we cannot take anything with us when we die. But the truth is, we can bring people with us. The only thing we can pack and take with us from this life to the next, are souls.

Lord, help me to store up treasure in heaven, in Jesus' name!

(Mark 14:9; 1 Timothy 6:7)

Oct 15

Cleopas

'As they talked... Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.' (Luke 24:15)

The same morning that the disciples found the tomb empty, and Jesus had risen from the dead, Jesus goes to Cleopas and a friend, and spends a long time with just them, walking, talking, explaining, 'being'.

The first day of God's resurrection power on the earth, Jesus takes a lot of time to meet with Cleopas and a friend. Before reading this post today, did you know the name, 'Cleopas'? Was he a major figure in your knowledge about the Bible and the 'great' men and women of faith? And yet Cleopas and his friend – not even a name – had God's full time, concern, reach, priority.

My friend, you might feel that you don't even feature in the 'history' of God's powerful story here on earth. Not true! You may be Cleopas, or even the no-name 'friend'. But you also are that 'one' that Jesus comes to and speaks with and dines with. You are the one!

(Luke 24:13-35; Matthew 18:20)

Oct 16

Big Noise!

'Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind.' (1 Kings 19:11)

A 'big bang' does not truth make! Not in life, not in nature, and not in the church. Truth does not make its mark in the same way the world makes it mark.

In fact Jesus – '*God with us*' – the biggest spiritual news of God in all of history, came quietly. Jesus himself chose to not be an 'impressive' man. He did not raise his voice. He allowed himself to be dismissed, questioned, and ultimately abused and killed.

Don't think where there is most noise and fanfare, there is most truth or Spirit. Often the most powerful prophets in the Bible lived alone, at a distance, even disappeared off the grid for years. No noise. No company. And yet the full power of God present.

Be at peace right where you are today. Rest. The Lord comes to you. You don't need to go anywhere to find him.

(Isaiah 53; Luke 19:10; Matthew 24:23-27)

Oct 17

Where You Are

'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?'

(Psalm 139:7)

The highest truth about God is not that he can be found, but that he cannot be avoided. He does not hide from anyone who seeks him. At times we do feel alone. We question where God is, why he has forsaken us. Jesus himself did this, and allows this. (*Matthew 27:46; Psalm 10:1*) But even deeper than our doubt, is a truth of God's abiding Spirit. His presence runs deeper than our experiences and his 'interventions'. He hates sin and does not 'allow' any evil against you. But even when such suffering has broken through in your life by the enemy, God is with you and will redeem, restore, vindicate, fight, call to account.

'You will observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.'

(Psalm 91:8)

Your Father in heaven is going to destroy those who came against you. Know this. It is the truth of Scripture – Genesis to Revelation. God has not let you down. The enemy has trespassed his command. And the enemy will be judged and destroyed.

(*Psalm 130:6; Acts 17:27-28*)

Oct 18

Church

'Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...' (Hebrews 10:24-25)

A local 'church' is a group of Christians that gather together regularly. This group takes on structure, like any healthy group, with leaders and support people (elders, deacons), etc.

Jesus did not start a local 'church', which is deeply significant. This does not mean that local churches are not important, but it does mean there is something far *more* important – ***'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'*** (Colossians 1:27)

Have the humility to listen to the Lord's word to you personally. Jesus speaks to you directly. (John 10:27) Yes, he speaks through the Bible to all of us, and will use his Scriptures to speak to you, but he will also speak directly, and lead you, by his Holy Spirit. Heed humbly, and walk in peace.

(James 3:1; 1 Timothy 5:17-21)

Oct 19

Acts

‘Jesus was taken up before their eyes... They were looking up into the sky as he was going... Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem...’ (Acts 1:10-12)

After the Gospel books (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we have the book of *Acts*.

This book is very exciting to read! It basically picks up the story of the first Christians, after Jesus ascended to heaven. So Jesus is physically gone, but his Spirit is here with us. And here the story begins, the story of the message of Jesus being shared with people, and spreading across the world.

One thing we can really learn from this book of the Bible, is how those early Christians lived and how their faith affected their lives and behavior.

God has left us this ‘record’ of the early church, so that we can learn, and be encouraged. When we read about their struggles, their very human failings, doubts, fears and yes, victories, we get deep understanding on ‘spiritual’ living. It often doesn’t look or feel that spiritual!

Some day when you have some time, open up the book of Acts, and begin reading one of the most exciting books you’ll ever read.

Oct 20

False Teachers

‘The time will come when people... gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to say... But you, keep your head...’ (2 Timothy 4:3-5)

Don't fear the 'multitude' of false teachers and teaching. Jesus warned about it, Paul here warns about it... It's everywhere. And we need not stress or fear!

So what do we do? Well, we heed truth, and we walk in it. You might wonder how we make truth stand out from the counterfeit. Well, that's the responsibility of the Holy Spirit. We testify in truth, by his Spirit, and the Spirit brings the fire. *(Read today's Scriptures today on how Elijah showed the difference!)*

You are a '*living stone*' of God's real church – the one built with people. Jesus himself is the '*chief cornerstone*', the '*living stone*', and we, too, are living stones in this structure. The 'real' and the 'false' is the judgment call of Christ. Just continue to 'discern' – quietly and confidently. Don't just sign up to any 'word' or 'deed' done by Christians. Know the Word, and know the Spirit, and discern.

(1 Kings 18:22-40; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Oct 21

Armor

'Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' (Ephesians 6:17)

Our real protection in Christ, is Christ with us. He stands with us as a *'dread warrior'*. (Jeremiah 20:11)

But the Lord hands us *'armor'*. In this passage we're offered *'faith'* which *'extinguishes'* arrows of the enemy. We're offered the *'gospel of peace'*, to advance Light in this dark world. We're offered salvation as a *'helmet'*, a protection.

We are definitely in a spiritual battle, here in life. Everything in Scripture – start to finish – is a battle between God and the Devil. People are caught up in it, and must choose. We are offered Jesus as our *'door'* to the *'kingdom of light'*; and then we become soldiers.

My soccer coach as a kid used to tell us: *'The best defense is offense.'* This holds true in faith, also. We have been given a mission to advance. When we're on the advance, every part of our cause is stronger – our *'defenses'*, our mindset, our faith, our fruit, our reach, our reward.

(Philippians 3:12-14; Ephesians 6:10-18)

Oct 22

Weakness

'We were under great pressure, beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.' (1 Corinthians 1:8)

Paul, such a warrior of faith, here expresses profound weakness and fear. It was beyond him to endure.

Today I was struck by my struggle to simplify. In my faith, I often run into stresses and burdens because I'm taking on too much, I'm seeing too much, I'm concerned about too much... I was thinking about 'blinkers' on horses. Blinkers limit their vision, and they run faster, straighter, stronger, toward victory.

'With the increase of knowledge is the increase of sorrow.' (Ecclesiastes 1:18)

Weakness brings everything down to one thing or nothing. You just can't. All those 'important' things just don't get done – and the world goes on, interestingly.

I hope you're not weak or sick. But I do hope that you can listen to the Lord and put things down that are not important, and focus on just his voice to you – your true name, his love for you, his precious word to your ear.

(Jeremiah 29:13; Phil 1:20; John 14:26)

Oct 23

God's Will

'Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest... and schemed to arrest Jesus and kill him.' (Matthew 26:3)

God hates evil. (Isaiah 61:8) Jesus hates evil. (Hebrews 1:9) Jesus spoke his strongest words on record when people tried to say he somehow collaborated with evil. Jesus considered this 'blaspheming the Holy Spirit' and said that would never be forgiven. (Mark 3:22-31)

Only one power 'wills' harm against you: the devil. And he 'stands defeated', and his judgment – full, obliterating judgment – is racing towards him and all his demons. (Revelation 20:10)

God loves you. God is with you. If the enemy has hurt you, know this: God did not 'allow' it, and rages against this trespass of the enemy. Trust God again. He is with you and can heal, vindicate, protect. Yes, he can! Lift your eyes, and you will never regret this act of faith, this spiritual truth that is higher than any questioning or reasoning!

'And those who endure, will reign with Christ!' (2 Timothy 2:12)

(Isaiah 49:25-26; Philippians 4:6-8)

Oct 24

Out of this World!

'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal!' (2 Corinthians 4:18)

We set our sights out beyond this life. That's not 'super-spiritual' or unrealistic. That is God's call on our life, our heart. In fact, if we don't set our sights on the 'unseen', we'll be off course here in the 'seen'.

Jesus accomplished what he did, here on earth, by setting his focus on the *'joy set before him'*.

(Hebrews 12:1) Paul focused beyond the temporal, in order to steady his course here and now.

(Philippians 3:12-14) Abraham endured life here on earth because, we're told, *'he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.'* (Hebrews 11:10)

Do you want more of Christ? Do you hunger for more? Let me encourage you. If you hunger, you will be filled. To hunger, is to have arrived. Allow your desire for more of God to settle on your soul. Don't push it away. Let it settle like a mist. Cry. God will fill you up.

(Matthew 5:6; John 20:11-18; Isaiah 40:31)

Oct 25

Thorn

'To keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me...' (2 Corinthians 12:7)

Paul had such powerful revelations from God, that the only way for God to 'anchor' Paul back in humility and focus, was to give him a 'counter-weight' to the revelations.

This '*messenger from Satan*' is not Paul's focus in this passage. Not at all. We're not sure what Paul means, exactly, but whatever this was it was not comfortable for Paul, and meant that to go forward he would need to do so by the '*grace of God*', rather than by the adrenalin of his recent, powerful visions.

There are some things in our lives that we can and must pray against, and be freed from. Yes, Lord! But there are some other things that may seem like a true 'obstacle' or weight, and actually they are a type of 'counter-weight' to keep you on track. God's grace will be sufficient in this challenge to actually explode even higher and truer outcome.

(2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Oct 26

Safe

'The Lord said to Moses, 'When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand...' (Exodus 33:22)

God covers you. He wraps you around like the wind. He reaches deep into your soul with reassurance – ***'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls...'*** (Psalm 42:7)

Time and time again through the Scriptures we have this picture and promise of God to 'shelter' us, to 'hide' us.

There is a time, my friends, to 'add' to our love for God, some 'knowledge' and 'depth of insight'. Truth is, you are doing that by reading this devotional. You would add to your discipline (most profitably) if you would tackle the Scriptures at the end of each entry, and on a 'bonus' day even look up the ones quoted in/through the entry. You could write some of these Scriptures on cards and put them by your bed to re-read, or on the fridge. Maybe try to memorize one or two?

(Psalm 17:8; Philippians 1:9)

Oct 27

You Will Stand

'To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.' (Romans 14:4)

We do have to be careful about judging people. This is not the same as 'discernment'. Discernment is good. Be mature, free and discerning. Being judgmental, however, is different, and we do need to humbly hold back on judgment.

You need also to stand free from other people's judgment of you. You have only one 'master'. If you have peace with Jesus in his lead and call on your life, don't even look left or right for approval or disapproval. Eyes on the Lord, only.

Jesus spoke to us about 'living water'. This brings all his hope and truth up out of the ground, like a wellspring. Jesus also promised us – if we believe him – to have springs of this living water come up and out from within us. (John 7:37-38) This is power in your soul, from your soul, to others around you.

(Jude 1:24a; Isaiah 58:11; John 4:10,14)

Oct 28

New Doors

'What he opens, no one can shut... See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.' (Revelation 3:7-8)

You need only be faithful to Christ, and he will bring you other (lesser) support. ***'Christ is all...'*** (Colossians 3:11)

This is challenging, and exciting. Jesus is serious about the individual. God always was deep and strong about the call to the individual. He tested Abraham in his 'love' for God in such a deep and personal way. And this God, Jesus Christ, also challenges each of us to be sincere, personal, intimate, about our relationship with him.

When God knows for sure that we have him as number one in our life, he can do business with us directly. He can speak and lead and 'open doors' for just you. You won't need my approval, your parents' approval, the approval of your friends, pastor, community... He will open doors for you that all these people couldn't shut even if they wanted to. Even if *you* wanted to. And you can be part of his eternal reach, unstoppable river of redemption...

(Habakkuk 2:14; Genesis 22:1-12)

Oct 29

Jesus died for us

'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.' (Isaiah 53:5)

From the beginning of Scripture God makes clear that our sin – our soul's turn away from God – brought death into the world. And from that point on sin has to be paid for by sacrifice. Something has to die to pay for it. So – symbolically – animals were sacrificed throughout the ages to 'atone' for sin. But this was a 'stop-gap', a symbol, an act of obedience and faith until sin and death could be truly defeated.

Jesus – '*God with us*' – took the sin of mankind on himself, and died with it. Jesus paid for sin with his own blood. In doing this Jesus also '*defeated death*', because death itself is 'from sin', it belongs to sin. Where sin has been paid for, death is no more.

For this reason we speak of the '*blood of Jesus*' bringing life to our souls. When we believe in Jesus, take his hand, he frees us from both sin and death. When we shed this earthly body, we will pass into eternal life and perfection – heaven.

(2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; 2 Timothy 1:10)

Oct 30

Jesus face to face

'He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him...' (Isaiah 53:2)

In our world today with so many images and records, I sometimes think about the fact that we have no 'sketch' of what Christ looked like. No one painted him or described his features, eye color, hair, stature. The Scripture above was the prophecy about Jesus, 600 years before he lived. God chose to step into a body that would have no earthly 'appeal' to bolster his ministry, his influence, his call to people.

'Jesus set aside his glory... and took on the form of a servant.' (Philippians 2:7)

We're also told that he became poor so that we would become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

One day we will see Jesus face to face. (1 John 3:2) It will not disappoint. Unlike other humans, his glory transcends his human likeness – it breaks through. We see this when he *'transfigured'* in Matthew 17:1-3. One day you will pass through the gates of heaven. Quiet. Regal. Golden. Magical trees and crystal clear waters flowing... (Revelation 22:1-5) You will be met by Jesus himself, face to face. You do know him now. But you will see him soon.

Oct 31

Lovable

'A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out...' (Matthew 12:20)

Jesus was not 'lovable' like we usually respond to. He deliberately chose an earthly body that was not beautiful. So if we were going to love him, it would be a different type of response.

When Martha came to Jesus, crying about her brother's death, Jesus cried with her. The tenderness of seeing his eyes well up as they bear the pain of another, is deeply drawing.

I think of the woman who put everything on the line – her money, her dignity – and came to Jesus in the midst of his gathering with his disciples, men, and she broke her perfume over him in an adoring act of worship. The humility, the meekness of Jesus to accept this, to let it flow. And to those around who were on edge, even criticizing her, Jesus said this woman would be one with his own gospel message, that her name and her love would be preached where salvation was preached. Such tenderness, compassion, kindness, would move the heart to love this man.

(Mark 14:1-9)

Nov 1

One & Only God

'I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.' (Isaiah 42:8)

From the beginning of God's revelation to mankind, he insisted on his being the one and only God. None other. He was God, he was *the* Lord (not 'a' Lord): ***'I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God...'*** (Isaiah 45:5)

When God stepped into the person of Jesus Christ, the name of Jesus was exalted above every name:

'God gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.' (Philippians 2:9-11)

Now, obviously, there isn't 'magic' in the 'pronunciation' of the name. It is about the person, the God, that is Jesus Christ. People from different nations, different 'tongues', will say his name differently. (Acts 2:1-12) The gospel message of Jesus Christ, the person of Jesus Christ, is God's only truth for salvation. There is one 'door', which is Jesus. (John 10:9)

(Zechariah 14:9; Acts 4:12; Acts 10:34-35)

'God who made the world... gave everyone life and breath and everything else.' (Acts 17:24-25)

God has given us life for our enjoyment. God designed all those pleasures we enjoy.³⁷ He created life and its senses, even its sensual experiences. But God has called us to hold himself as God in our lives, to stand over and above our pursuits, our paths.

With our eyes on Jesus, his Spirit in us, he leads. He opens doors, closes doors, blesses, protects, provides. And what he gives we can truly enjoy – with peace, with blessing. We will know that ***'life that is truly life.'*** (1 Timothy 6:19)

When Jesus was offered water, he counter-offered *'living water'*. When people asked for bread, he offered *'bread from heaven'*.

It is a test of faith – to look to Jesus for the life he gives. He challenges us in a deep way, when he says: ***'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.'*** (Mark 8:35)

(John 6:32-35; John 4:10, 14)

³⁷ James 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:17

'The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.' (Psalm 19:7)

God shoots straight, to keep us safe. He calls some things out, even things that are hard to say. In one of the famous ten commandments, God does not just tell us to not be 'covetous' (*i.e. to not 'desire' things that are not ours*), but he tells us to not covet our '*neighbor's wife*'. (Exodus 20:17)

That is exposing. That is strong and straight. And quite frankly, the heart of mankind tends towards evil in whatever is near to it. It's not very imaginative. We're going to envy and 'want' what we can see out our window. That's what king David did. That's what we do.³⁸ Today's verse has impacted me over the years, because it tells of a type of 'transformation' that can happen in the mind, the soul, when we consider as a discipline the word of the Lord, his statutes. We need the Spirit of God, his word, to soak in to our minds.

'Blessed is the man... whose delight is in the word of the Lord, and who meditates on his word day and night...'

(Psalm 1:1-2)

(Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 4:8)

³⁸ 2 Samuel 11

Nov 4

Discipline

'The Lord disciplines those he loves...' (Hebrews 12:6)

God forgives wickedness, when a person repents from the heart. God is always listening to the heart, not the words.

'The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger... loving... forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...' (Exodus 34:6-7)

There's forgiveness where there is repentance. It's God's way. And Jesus instructed us to have this integrity with each other: ***'If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.'*** (Luke 17:3)

Repentance is not mere words. If a person says 'sorry' to you, it may or may not be sincere. It's not a 'magic' word that gets people off the hook. It's a heart issue. So be free to 'discern'. And just because someone does 'repent', does not mean things go back to what they were. Forgiveness means that you don't take revenge, you don't harbor bitterness, and you entrust the matter to God. It does *not* mean that you put yourself back into relationship on the terms of the other person.

Nov 5

Friend

'I no longer call you servants... I call you friends...' (John 15:15)

Jesus – *'God with us'*³⁹ – is your friend. He said it himself.

I have become more and more confident in this. I tell people – lightheartedly, but sincerely – that Jesus is my friend, my best friend. And then I share this verse with them. Most people I speak with are not aware that Jesus spoke these tender, intimate words.

One thing said about Moses was that he would speak to God *'as one speaks to a friend, face to face.'* (Exodus 33:11)

Speak to Jesus, as you would speak to the most trusting, caring friend:

'Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.' (1 Peter 5:7)

Sit alone with a cup of coffee, close your eyes, and just rest with the Lord. Let him move your thoughts. Whisper your concerns to him. Rest. Listen. Speak.

(Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 3:19-20)

³⁹ Matthew 1:23

‘Jesus said, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples he said, ‘... Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my mother, my brother, my sister.’ (Matthew 12:48-50)

This was such a bold, even shocking comment of the Lord. It could have sounded dismissive, even dishonoring of his parents – which goes against the commandment to *honor* your parents. (Exodus 20:12)

But hear these words, this call to every man, woman and child who longs for family! Jesus – God in the flesh⁴⁰ – spoke out and said that anyone who believed in him, was part of his family.⁴¹ Anyone. Everyone. The invitation is as wide as the world. One Father in heaven, and then all of us united as brothers, sisters, mothers.

‘Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.’

(Psalm 27:4)

(James 1:27; Psalm 82:4)

⁴⁰ John 1:14

⁴¹ John 6:28-29

Nov 7

Your Lawyer

'It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one.'

(Romans 8:33-34a)

Jesus *'advocates'* for you. Yes, we have *'history'*, and the devil *'accuses'*. In fact, we're told that the devil accuses us night and day before the throne of God. (Revelation 12:10) That's a lot of negativity, right there!

Anyway, we are not *'justified'* because we have no sin. We are justified because despite the *'facts'* of our sin, Jesus stands in the gap, he advocates for us, he pleads his own blood as having paid for our sin, and that we are now *'righteous'*. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

We, too, need to *'stand in the gap'* for people. We need to forgive. Even little things, like people driving badly, dropping things, being impatient, rude... We can stand in the gap for people, in a world of such stress and anxiety. (Proverbs 19:11)

'Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.' (vs.34b)

(1 Peter 1:3; Ezekiel 22:30)

Nov 8

In the Waiting

'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.' (Isaiah 40:31)

When I started following the Lord at age 16, I lost friends overnight. It was a dramatic turn around. It was lonely. It was a type of death. I was in 'waiting'. Waiting for a new life to appear. But you know, when I look back on those days – in the waiting – Jesus was everything to me. He was present, peace, kindness, a shepherd leading. He was close. He was a friend – in the waiting.

When Martha 'waited' for Jesus to resurrect her dead brother, Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Jesus is 'now'. As we wait for the Lord, we can be in the Lord. We can do our waiting in his presence.

'The Lord... renews your youth like the eagle's.'
(Psalm 103:5)

(John 11:21-27; Psalm 40:1-3)

Nov 9

Spiritual Realities

'...we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.'

(1 Corinthians 2:13)

When you pass through the 'door' of Jesus, you enter a new reality. Completely. We're told by Jesus that in doing this, in passing through him as a 'door', we would 'come in and go out and find pasture.'
(John 10:9)

Our vision of life, truth, wisdom, destiny, all changes. So when talking to a friend or neighbor about life generally, it can feel that you are in different worlds. They might talk of 'luck' or 'life' or experiences on a totally different plane. We can, by the Spirit of God, bring breezes of his wind, his revelation, to these encounters. It takes God's leading, his Spirit blowing. Pray and ask God today to blow through you, to use you, to bring winds of his truth into people's realities, that they might see more, see Jesus.

'The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness... because they are discerned only through the Spirit.' (vs.14)

(John 4:1-26; John 5:19)

Nov 10

True You

'...children of God. That is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.' (1 John 3:1)

There's a 'divide' at work once you come to know Jesus. His Spirit moves to dwell inside you. You become a 'temple', a dwelling place of his Spirit. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

You become a 'living stone' (1 Peter 2:5), a member of God's household, a citizen of heaven. (Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20)

You have changed. You know it to be true. There is a whole new dimension of God's Spirit and his reality that moves in you and around you.

Sometimes it will feel as if you are a stranger to the world, to people in the world who have not seen and believed in Jesus.

Today's verse explains this simply, reassuringly: They don't 'know' you (the *true* you), because they have not yet known Jesus.

Be at peace. You of Christ, of God. Just pray for others. Don't worry about them 'getting' you. Pray they see the Lord.

(Psalm 36:9; John 6:37; John 8:19,42)

'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me... Great is your reward in heaven! (Matthew 5:11-12)

I've had people insult me, persecute me, falsely say all kinds of evil against me – not because of my faith, but rather because of my folly, my pride, my ego. This counts for nothing, not on any level.

But when we are following Christ, and doing it his way (which also includes '*taking pains*' to love people)⁴², and on this path a resistance to your faith comes against you – here you are blessed. Hold your ground. It may feel messy. You may be called unreasonable, intolerant... It may look and feel like you are creating conflict, but you are not. And God will reward you. Jesus suffered just like this, so did all the true prophets. *Hold!*

'Jesus said, 'If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. But I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.' (John 15:18-19)

(2 Timothy 2:11-12; Luke 12:8-9)

⁴² 2 Corinthians 8:21

‘Jesus said, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God.’ (John 8:42)

There is one God. He is maker of heaven and earth. When people truly lift their eyes to heaven and hunger to know the one, true God, Jesus is revealed to them.⁴³

‘You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.’
(Jeremiah 29:13)

‘Jesus said, ‘... seek and you will find.’ (Matthew 7:7)

Jesus does not hide himself. A true lover of God, will see Jesus when Jesus is shared with them.

‘For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.’ (2 Corinthians 4:6)

‘Jesus said, ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... I am in the Father and the Father is in me.’ (John 14:9-10)

(Philippians 2:9-10; Acts 4:12)

⁴³ Acts chapter 10. And note verses 34-35.

Nov 13

All Invited

'Jesus said, 'All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.' (John 6:37)

Jesus opens his arms to everyone – not just in the present age, but in the past! Look at this mysterious verse:

'After Jesus was made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – to those who were disobedient long ago... the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead...'

(1 Peter 3:19; 4:6)

Jesus does warn us that the road is narrow, and *'few find it'*. Jesus cautioned us that his word of truth will fall on our hearts, but often will not take root. For people to truly 'see' Christ we need the power and Spirit of God the Father – not just our words and testimony. This is a battle!⁴⁴

Don't be distressed when you see and feel only a 'few' to find Christ. However, the key to really be certain of is that Jesus invites *everyone*. Jesus makes efforts to find the lost sheep. (Luke 19:10) His heart is for *all* creation, every man, woman and child!

(1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 18:14)

Nov 14

Seeing Eyes

'Jesus said, 'Blessed are your eyes because they see...' (Matthew 13:16)

⁴⁴ Matthew 7:14; 13:1-23; John 16:8

God does not force people to see and acknowledge him. He 'reveals', and *calls* people to see and acknowledge. It is God's will that people see and know him. It is his heart for people, and it is his call to people.

God will judge all people one day, and we are told that everyone, everywhere, throughout all ages, will have been given deep and true revelation of God. God will judge people based on their choice to acknowledge God, to receive his love and revelation, or their choice to turn away from God for all eternity. God is just. His love is deep. He turns no one away willingly.

'Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Lord... 'Rather am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?' (Ezekiel 18:23)

My friend, if you see Jesus and believe in him, 'blessed are your eyes.' Don't over-think it, but deeply, humbly, thank God for this vision of his truth that lights on your heart and soul and mind.

(Matthew 22:36-40; 1 Corinthians 4:7)

Nov 15

Every Tribe & Nation

'... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.' (Revelation 7:9)

Jesus broke barriers between people, and in himself made a new 'humanity'. What a stunning message!

'Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and destroyed the dividing barrier... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity... thus making peace.'
(Ephesians 2:14-15)

When you meet someone who loves the Lord, there is a 'connection', because you're related! (Matthew 12:48-50) Blood may be thicker than water, but spirit is more eternal than blood. Your true family, made up of people from all tribes and nations, and all times throughout history.

(Acts 2:1-13; Acts 10:34-35; Acts 17:25-27)

Nov 16

With Jesus

'Let us go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.'

(Hebrews 13:13)

Jesus is not of this world. So there are cross-winds blowing. This world has a 'prince' – a dark prince – and a culture and people with passions that are self-centered, sinful.

Jesus, when he was on trial for his life, said, *'My kingdom is not of this world.'* (John 18:36) His Spirit is holy, his ways are servant-hearted, his 'getting' is actually 'giving'. (John 4:32,34) And his name – the name of Jesus – actually embodies his Spirit and Kingdom. This is why you will experience a different response when sharing the name of Jesus, even different and more hostile than when talking about the 'Lord' or about 'God'.

The same way God came to earth in Christ, people's true emotions about God 'get real' when talking about Jesus.

But let us stand with Christ. Let us bear the disgrace he bore. Let's stand with him in disgrace, and so reign with him in heaven. (2 Timothy 2:11-12)

(Hebrews 13:13-14; Luke 12:4-5)

Nov 17

Good Fear

‘Jesus said, ‘Do not fear him who can kill the body and after that can do more... Fear him who after the killing of the body has the power to throw you into hell...’ (Luke 12:4-5)

Jesus spoke very strong words. People who don't have an issue with Jesus' teaching, in my experience, don't really know his teaching.

If you truly face into the teaching of Christ – read one of the four Gospels – you will either bow down and worship him, or you will reject him, and have a major issue with his teaching. There's no middle ground with Christ. It really does not exist, is not on offer.

‘Jesus said, ‘You are neither hot nor cold... because you are lukewarm... I am about to spit you out of my mouth.’ (Revelation 3:15-16)

Jesus does not want people to be 'afraid' of him. He wants the opposite. He wants people to 'fear' him – i.e. come to him for safety.

(John 14:21; Matthew 11:28-30)

Nov 18

In the World

'Jesus said, 'My prayer is not that you take believers out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.'

(John 17:15)

Jesus prays for his disciples, and for those of us who would come to believe in him (vs.20) Jesus wants us 'in' the world, just not 'of' the world. His plan to penetrate darkness and advance the 'gospel of peace' is through you, through me.

Jesus has put his *'light'* in us. (Matthew 5:14) He calls us to stand out, like a *'city on a hill'*. This is not a forced movement. This is not to be done alone. We grow in Jesus. We rest in Jesus. And we heed his lead in our every day, our way, our testimony.

Jesus doesn't send you out. He calls you to come out with him, to reach the lost. You are never alone in sharing Jesus.

(Thessalonians 4:11-12; John 5:19)

Nov 19

Life

'I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.'

(2 Timothy 4:20)

I don't know much about Trophimus (think he's mentioned in Acts, also). I know nothing at all about Miletus. But this verse impacted me for the following reason:

Paul – who had strong faith and anointing for healing – at a certain point had to leave a friend, sick, not healed.

We live in a broken world, in broken bodies, every one of us mortal. Jesus has called us to believe him for salvation, for forgiveness of sins, and for true protection and provision in this life. He does hear our cries for help. He does heal. He does answer.

But our relationship with Jesus is *'relational'*. It's not an equation. It's not simple and certain regarding 'requests'. It's as real as your other relationships, and yet deeper.

'Unless you become like a child you cannot enter the kingdom of God.' (Matthew 18:3)

(2 Tim 4:20; John 16:33)

Nov 20

Drawing Straws

***'They nominated two men... Then they prayed...
Then they cast lots...'***

(Acts 1:23-26)

The apostles drew straws – or cast lots – to know what God's will was in this matter. This is important to remember. Sometimes we receive a word from the Lord, a prompting from the Holy Spirit. Other times we might need to 'roll the dice' and ask God to lead us through this.

Our walk with Jesus is '*spirit and truth*'. (John 4:24) We might be deeply, spiritually 'seeking' the Lord's voice, when his Spirit is prompting us to 'draw straws'. So listen for his lead! We might be lining up the straws, when the Lord is prompting us to slow down, and seek him in '*spirit and truth*'.

There's no equation for figuring out God's will. He wants our hearts – whether things work out or don't. This space of love and relationship is where 'God's will' is most clearly perceived.

(*Psalm 46:10; Jeremiah 29:13; John 10:27*)

‘Peter said, ‘Not just my feet... but my head as well.’ Jesus answered, ‘People who are clean need only to wash their feet...’ (John 13:9-10)

Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. This was the lowly job of a servant. At first Peter resisted, then he over-shot, asking for his head as well as his feet. Jesus brought it back to what it meant – rather than what it was.

This holds true for everything about Christ – traditions, baptism, sacrifices, etc. Jesus is all about the heart – and what flows from the heart. For example, baptism, although a meaningful symbol, when considered anything more than that, it gets scratched altogether. Paul himself said,

‘Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.’ (1 Corinthians 1:17)

Circumcision – a command given to Moses, never withdrawn, but then Paul says, ‘Circumcision and uncircumcision is nothing.’ (Galatians 6:15)⁴⁵

(Galatians 5:1; Matthew 9:12-13)

⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 17:10

Nov 22

Numbered Days

'Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.'

(Psalm 90:12)

My mom used to quote this verse on occasion. I think as life goes on it makes more and more sense. As a kid when people used to talk about life being short, I just could not understand what they were talking about. But now I'm getting it. Life is short. Whether we think it is, or are young and free, it is short. It is fast. Look at this incredible word that Jesus spoke:

'What does it benefit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?' (Mark 8:36)

Jesus was not morbid. He was truly about the *'living'*. (Matthew 22:31-33) He was about bringing heaven to earth, not just waiting to go to heaven. (Matthew 6:9-13) He was about *'restoring'* and *'rebuilding'* here on earth. (Isaiah 61:4) But everything finds its source, its life, its power, in being right with God. And this life's number one purpose is to make life eternal, and *then* start living.

'Only one thing matters, and Mary has chosen what is better...' (Luke 10:42)

Nov 23

Suntrap

'Whoever dwells in the shelter of the most high, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.' (Psalm 91:1)

Safety and peace is the promise of God. We crave this 'salvation'. From the youngest of ages we know danger, and we hide for comfort.

The core of the 'danger' is spiritual, blows in the wind. That is why the message – the gospel message – of Jesus Christ, is so powerful. He comes to liberate, to secure, to save, from the inside out. Jesus promised to give the believer, the follower, 'living water', that would be a *'spring of water welling up to eternal life.'* (John 4:10,14) Again in John 7 Jesus promises this salvation, this 'rest', from the inside out:

'He who believes in me... streams of living water with flow from within him.' (John 7:37-38)

Jesus secures us, save us, by forgiving our sin and saving our soul. He puts our soul in a safe place, the tower that is the 'name of the Lord.' And from that wellspring on the inside, he overflows to our daily life.

(Proverbs 18:10; Psalm 17:8)

‘Peter said, ‘I now know how true it is that God does not show favoritism...’ (Acts 10:34)

Life is unfair. The extremes are shocking. Wealth and comfort for those born here or there, and extreme poverty for those born here or there... Life is disparate, but God’s love for each person is exactly the same. The brother of Jesus, named ‘James’, wrote: ***‘Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith?’*** (James 2:5) The poor here have an amazing, spiritual advantage: faith.

‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’
(Hebrews 11:6)

Jesus was also very clear about the ‘*last*’ here being the ‘*first*’ there – in heaven. It’s not just some sort of ‘economic fairness’; the ‘*last*’ here are often people of very deep faith, very close to the Lord. They will be great there, because they are great here. We mortals just don’t see what the Lord is seeing.

‘The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’ (1 Samuel 16:7)

Nov 25

Joy

'Give joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you.' (Psalm 86:4)

If you lack joy, don't beat yourself up! Ask God to give you joy for this day. Nothing is a 'given' in this broken life. Even knowing the true God, Jesus Christ, you may need his help to feel joy.

Sometimes as believers, followers of Jesus, we feel we should be the most joyful people around. But this is not a biblical principle. We are not called to put on a 'happy' type of face, as if we are free from the pressures and sorrows of life. We are told in Scripture to *'weep with those who weep.'* (Romans 12:15) We are not told to preach a life and lifestyle of perpetual fun and success.

The gospel stands alone. It is not a message about ourselves or our story. Paul says,

'We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.'

(2 Corinthians 4:5)

(John 16:33; Hebrews 11:36-38)

Nov 26

Mighty Warrior!

'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!' (Judges 6:12)

Gideon was called to rise up and fight an army tens of thousands of people – with three hundred people. God had a plan. And it would not be with sword or spear that Gideon triumphed. *(You can read the whole story in a few minutes – Scriptures noted below)*

Why did God even 'need' Gideon, or what was he doing? The fact is, my friend, God loves us, has come to rescue us with his own self, his own blood, and he values our 'faith', our relationship and response to him in our spirits.

Gideon was afraid, hiding, when the angel of the Lord called him – branded him – a 'mighty warrior', and then set him on a journey of faith in order to see a victory of God.

'Without faith it is impossible to please God'
(Hebrews 11:6)

God reveals himself to our hearts, and wants us to 'live by faith, not by sight.'
(2 Corinthians 5:7)

(Judges 6-7)

Nov 27

Voices

'You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God's possession...' (Ephesians 1:13-14)

You are God's possession. You heard about Jesus Christ, and you believed in him. In this moment of heart belief, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit, and became God's possession.

You are 'possessed' by God – owned by only him. No other spirit can compete or co-habit with the Holy Spirit. You are saved. You are safe. You are God's.

If you encounter fear, thoughts, 'voices', that is a struggle, a spiritual battle, but you need to know this: it is on the outside. Inside of you is only the Holy Spirit. So be at peace. You are owned. If you do encounter a battle, just whisper – in faith - that Jesus is your Lord, Jesus is your King, and the blood of Jesus has '*purchased you*'. (Revelation 5:9)

(Revelation 12:10-11; Romans 8:16; Psalm 4:8)

Nov 28

Fierce

'Jesus said, 'What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.' (Luke 20:15-16)

Give the Lord space to work. This takes faith. This is not easy. But there is such power in waiting on the Lord.

'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

God pours out power from heaven. He is not about *'mere words'*. (1 Corinthians 4:20) His kingdom is about power. The question is, will we trust him? Will we have faith, and let him work? (Luke 18:8) When the Egyptian army came after the Israelites, they panicked. Moses the prophet asked the Lord on behalf of the people, what was to be done. The Lord God spoke, and said:

'The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still.' (Exodus 14:14)

I have seen great interventions of the Lord in my life, in my friends' lives, when we trust him, and are 'still'. It is hard, but the Lord rewards faith. Be encouraged! Be strong! Wait on the Lord. He will act!

(Psalm 25:15; 2 Chronicles 20:12)

Nov 29

Enjoy!

'One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.' (Romans 14:5)

God has made life to be enjoyed. Everything he made, in fact, is 'good'. (1 Timothy 4:4-5) And all 'good gifts' are from him. (James 1:17) And all things were made to be 'enjoyed'. (1 Timothy 6:17) There is huge blessing and release from God to 'enjoy' life.

Now, we live in a challenging world, with much immorality on all sides. There is temptation to take hold of 'pleasures' that are outside the bounds of God's guidelines – like sex outside of marriage. God has made clear the parameters, the commitments, within which that experience of intimacy is to be 'enjoyed'. But it is to be 'enjoyed'.

So as you grow in your faith, try to grow in your faith to 'enjoy' things. Try to access more 'freedom' in God – it is allowed. If you read carefully through Romans 14 you will see that Paul calls us to be sensitive to each other in our different places of faith, but he does refer to the 'stronger' as being 'freer'. When I see this, I think: *'Well, I want more freedom, so, Lord, increase my faith!'* (Luke 17:5)

Nov 30

Faith

'But when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8)

Jesus actually welcomed us to not only ask him for things we need and want, but to ask him with persistence. But after telling us this through the story of the 'Widow and the Judge' (Scriptures noted below), he then lets us know what he values, what he asks of us: faith.

Faith is a true, spirit belief in Jesus Christ. Faith is a love of Jesus that actually becomes part of our lives. We don't force it, or become 'intense'; we just truly allow God's love to soak in, become part of us. Faith comes from letting God's love in. (Revelation 3:19-20)

Faith is taking hold of the unseen, spirit truth. The devil himself will 'masquerade as an angel of light'. Faith sees through this false 'angel of light', and discerns God's true and Holy Spirit. On the surface they look the same. To the person of faith, of God's Spirit, the difference is seen even though the appearance is the same. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

(1 Corinthians 2:13-14; Luke 18:1-8)

Dec 1

Heart

'Jesus said, '... the prostitutes are entering heaven ahead of you...'

(Matthew 21:31-32)

Jesus told the religious teachers that the prostitutes were ahead of them in the things of God. Jesus explained that the prostitutes, unlike these teachers, heard the message of repentance and actually believed, acted on it. They turned their faces to the Lord, their steps to his path.

'The kingdom of God is not a matter of mere words but of power.'

(1 Corinthians 4:20)

Jesus taught us to obey him, to hear his words and *'put them into practice'*. (Matthew 7:24) You see, just talking *about* God can quickly become a prideful thing:

'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.' (1

Corinthians 8:1)

Is there an area of your faith that needs some more 'action'? Ask God to stir your mind and heart to see this area, and to instruct your steps.

(1 John 3:18; James 1:22)

'Jesus said, 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.' (Revelation 3:20)

This invitation of Jesus to each of us feels 'heavenly' to me. It is a picture of perfect peace, safety, and joy. But it is not about heaven. It is about here and now in the heart and life of the individual. Jesus comes to us in this way here on earth!

When Jesus taught us to pray, he instructed *us* to ask for his kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus came to us here in person, and he comes to us here by his Spirit. God is not 'beaming' us out of here; he is pouring out his Spirit to and through us here on earth. (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

Do you want more of Jesus? As a believer we can ask for deeper relationship with the Lord, and more of his power in and through our lives. We're told that on the day of Judgment 'our work will be shown for what it is', and some will be saved, but have nothing more to show for it; others will be saved, and have much built on their faith.

(John 17:15; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

'Stephen said, 'Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man...' While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'
(Acts 7:56-59)

Heaven is just behind a thin veil. The people had not started stoning Stephen when he saw heaven open. Stephen could see Christ in glory, and an open sky between heaven and earth. It was right there. He could reach out and touch it. Paul the apostle was also caught up in such a powerful 'vision' that he could not say for certain if it was a vision, or it was an experience in body. He was caught up into heaven. *(2 Corinthians 12)*

When Jesus died a curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom. *(Matthew 27:51)* This curtain hung in the temple, separating people from a small room where the presence of God dwelt. The curtain tore. The way was now open to all people. The presence of God was now poured out on mankind. Heaven came to earth.

The winds of heaven blow even now by the Holy Spirit in your heart, mind and life. And heaven itself – where we go after we die – is behind a very thin veil, so close you could reach out and touch it.

(Revelation 21:1-5; Revelation 22:1-5)

'The souls of the slain... called out, 'How long, Sovereign Lord... until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' (Revelation 6:9-10)

Here we glimpse into heaven, through the vision of the apostle, John, and we see believers who have died speaking to the Lord about earthly matters.

In Romans chapter 8 we also see the Holy Spirit praying for us and with us, and we see Jesus himself interceding for us with God in heaven. (Romans 8:26,34)

I'm not sure how heaven could be heavenly if people there were still aware of matters on earth. But... this is not for me to understand, just to note and heed. It is also a type of comfort for people who are facing death, and questioning if they might be able to be praying for their loved ones when they pass on.

'The mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.' (1 Timothy 3:16)

Dec 5

Missing Out

'Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.'

(Psalm 84:10)

Where you are today, is where it's happening! You don't need to go anywhere or party with any people. Here and now in the quiet of your space, Jesus comes to you.

Sometimes we do need to just sit down and be with the Lord. Stop rushing to that next thing. It might not need to happen at all. Sometimes we need to just stop and let the Lord commune with us.

Let the Lord speak to you. Let the Lord fight for you. Be still.

'He who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep.' (Psalm 121:4)

'He who touches you, touches the apple of his eye.' (Zechariah 2:8)

(Luke 10:38-42; Psalm 46:10)

'Samuel asked, 'Are these all your sons?' Jesse answered, 'There is still the youngest. He is tending the sheep.' Samuel said, 'Send for him...'

(1 Samuel 16:11)

David did not put himself forward. David was not even put forward by others. God himself noted David's heart, and sent for him. Out in the field, a young man, praising the Lord in his heart, honoring God, and doing his work faithfully, courageously. God came to him, and anointed him as the next king.

God sees you. Don't worry. He has put eternity in your heart, and people are not going to understand the depths of your thoughts, feelings and destiny. That's OK. Love people, forgive them, and wait on God. He sees you and loves you. You're not out of his reach. And where there has been aggression and wrong done to you, ponder this prayer, these words of David, when he faced an oppressor:

'May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me.'

(1 Samuel 24:12)

(Proverbs 27:2; Isaiah 26:3)

Dec 7

Jesus With You

'Weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice.' (Romans 12:15)

Jesus rejoices with you in your salvation. We're told there is 'rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who repents.' (Luke 15:7)

In the same way we are called to rejoice with people when they are happy, when they are encouraged, when they receive and share good news. Own it! Rejoice with them. Celebrate goodness in this life!

Jesus has gone to seek and save the lost. That's where Christ is, and where the Holy Spirit moves, where God's river is flowing.

'He leaves the ninety-nine sheep... and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it.' (Luke 15:1-7)

(Romans 12:9-21; Luke 19:10)

Dec 8

Citizenship

'Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Philippians 3:20)

We're living life here on earth, and actually Jesus wants us to be here! (John 17:15) We have work to do here, his *'kingdom come, his will be done, here on earth...'* (Matthew 6:9-13)

However, it is essential to really grasp this fact: In Jesus Christ, your 'citizenship' is in heaven. You are here on the earth, working, but you are not 'of' the earth. So you will be different. You will think differently. (1 Corinthians 2:13-14) You will sacrifice. You will value things and morals differently. You're not from here.

'If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world...' (John 15:19)

(Hebrews 13:13-14; Hebrews 11:10)

Dec 9

Mission

'Jesus said, 'I have come to seek and save the lost.' (Luke 19:10)

Jesus came and found me. I was on the run, actually. In my teen years, although I have been instructed in the truth of Jesus and the Bible, I was not following Jesus. I was very much following my own desires, living immorally, deceitfully, selfishly.

But one day while on a trip with my dad, I was left alone in a conference hall. I was sitting there, and I felt the Lord speak this gentle word to my heart: *'You know I'm true, but you live like I'm not true.'* I broke down and cried. I knew I was living falsely. I had a revelation of Jesus Christ in my soul from a young age, but I was not following him. I had to be true to what God had revealed to me. This was my turning point.

God pressed in on me. He came and found me. When I was quite deep in sin, distant from other believers, sitting alone, he came to me and whispered to me.

(Ezekiel 22:30; Ephesians 2:14-15)

Dec 10

Pray

'In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.'
(Psalm 18:6)

Prayer is speaking with God. It is actually 'being heard' by God. We are in a battle here on earth - good vs. evil – but when we pray to God, he hears us from the battlefield.

I think of those 'mission' movies, when an agent is moving stealthily through the dark on a task. But he has the earpiece in, and has the voice of his team with him. He can whisper and be heard by them, and they can help guide him, steer him... God is much more present and powerful than a remote-based team and an earpiece. But it is important to know that he hears every whisper, every thought, every cry, and he is with you and he is working!

'And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Be alert and always keep on praying...' (Ephesians 6:18)

(Psalm 16:7; John 16:24)

'I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them...' (Ezekiel 37:12)

We need to use this life to encourage one another, and reassure one another, about the powerful truth of life after death.

Live life, in Jesus' name. Yes, enjoy the good things he gives you, and be happy for others, too. (Romans 12:15) Don't discount this life by any means, because God is restoring and rebuilding it, making even this beautiful earth 'new'.⁴⁶

But do allow yourself to consider – and even long for – your journey to heaven. We are told clearly that Jesus has been preparing a place for us in heaven, and will take us there. (John 14:1-6) We are told about heaven in clear and beautiful terms in the last 2 chapters of the Bible – Revelation 21 and 22. It is real. It is stunning. Jesus has opened the way for us to go there when we die.

'Therefore encourage one another with these words.' (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 13:14)

⁴⁶ Revelation 21:5; Isaiah 61:4

Dec 12

Build!

'They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generation.'

(Isaiah 61:4)

You can do amazing projects in and through Jesus! You can set up a fort, a bastion of light, in this battlefield, to advance his kingdom.

You can build a fire on a cold day, so to speak. When people are looking out over life and gloom is setting in, you can strike out in the cold and gather the wood and strike a match. Watch the warm and the glow come over their souls.

'There will be no more gloom for those who are in distress... The people walking darkness have seen a great light...' (Isaiah 9:1-2)

Jesus is hope. And his hope is alive in you. Use the power of Christ, his Spirit in you, to encourage people and cast a ray of hope at their feet.

(Romans 5:5; Hebrews 6:19-20)

Dec 13

Undermine!

'Our weapons have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.'

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

As followers of Jesus we have the Holy Spirit in us. We are commissioned by God to take the gospel message – and power – to the nations. (Mark 16:15; Matthew 16:19)

Through prayer and faith we can do damage to darkness. We can open and close doors to spirits and events in this world. We can block harm that the enemy intends, we can release good that the Lord can bring.

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

(John 20:23; Ephesians 6:10-18)

Dec 14

Your Offering

'Let your light shine before men...' (Matthew 5:14-16)

Jesus does not need much from you. He simply needs from you what he gave you to invest.

'To one the master gave five talents, to another two, and to another one...' (Matthew 25:14)

God has equipped you with 'talents' – that is, some resources and spiritual giftings, that you can invest in the kingdom of God. This is not about money, it is about following Jesus. And note in this parable, the 'talents' never belonged to the servants; they were 'resources' given with the purpose of investing, multiplying and returning to the master. Has God given you compassion? Has he given you a servant heart? Has he given you a special measure of mercy, faith, wisdom? Ask God today how you might advance the 'gospel of peace' – that is, 'invest' – the talents he has given you.

'What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?'

(1 Corinthians 4:7)

(Matthew 25:14-30; John 6:1-14)

Dec 15

Testimony

'When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had walked with Jesus.' (Acts 4:13)

No formal education in Bible or even general school, no high standing in society. Peter and John testified boldly to Jesus, because they had 'walked' with Jesus.

Our best preparation and equipping to share Jesus with people, is to spend time with Jesus himself. Sit in his presence, in prayer and song. Read the Bible, and meditate on it. As we know Christ more, we will better equipped and prepared to be used by the Lord to share him with others:

'We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.' (2 Corinthians 5:20)

It's not about 'training' or conferences. It's about love of God. Be at peace. Rest in him. It's 'who' you know.

(Psalm 40:9-10; 1 Peter 3:15)

'Without a vision the people perish.' (Proverbs 29:18)

As a follower of Jesus, you have a 'purpose' in life: To know God, and to help others know God.

We are so blessed to have this purpose! Many people 'perish' because they have no 'vision' – or mission, purpose – that carries them and lifts them.

This life is busy! Just to survive you will need to work, rest, and attend to lots of things. This is OK, and this is life! We are told in the Bible that it is good to work and live a quiet life.⁴⁷

However, the ultimate purpose of building the 'kingdom of God', is even a higher calling. We must remember the powerful message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that he offers all people a 'door' to salvation and eternal life. This life – here and now – is where people make the choice to enter through that door, or not. We are doorkeepers!

(John 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20)

⁴⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

Dec 17

Togetherness

'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' (Matthew 26:38)

Jesus asked his disciples for support. He was facing a hard road of brutal beating and crucifixion later that night, and had a few hours to pray, prepare. He needed their company.

We are encouraged to not 'give up meeting together' in Scripture. (Hebrews 10:25) Sometimes I go to church or meet with other believers, when I have very little to give, I really need their encouragement. Other times I don't feel I need the encouragement – but one of them might need encouragement from me.

So sometimes we meet to 'get', and sometimes to 'give'.

'Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.'
(Ephesians 5:18-19)

(1 Timothy 5:8; Galatians 6:10)

'... now it was a river I could not cross, because the water had risen and it was deep enough to swim in...' (Ezekiel 47:5)

Expanses of water give me such a sense of the eternal. One of my favorite memories is when I was about 6 years old. We lived on a ship at the time, and were docked somewhere in South America. At this particular port there was a swimming beach near by – not too common a thing near where ships dock. My mom would take me, my siblings and some friends from the ship, for an early morning swim (and breakfast!) at the beach. I remember it being crisp morning air, and a glassy, swelling ocean. The water was just a touch cool, and the whole beach was ours. We'd walk back to the ship, still early morning, sun coming up in the sky...⁴⁸

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he met the disciples on the beach – a surprise meeting. They had been out fishing. He prepared a fire and some breakfast over the coals, and they gathered together in the 'new dawn' era of the resurrection.

(John 21:1-14; Proverbs 4:18)

⁴⁸ More on my personal upbringing at www.1peter1three.weebly.com

'A gift opens the way, and ushers the giver into the presence of the great.' (Proverbs 18:16)

We are called to peace in Jesus. As people who have discovered an immense 'treasure' that can be shared, we live to share. The spirit of our 'mission' is always love, truth, rescue, joy, the name of Jesus. Jesus himself said something so shrewd. He said, 'Use worldly wealth to gain friends... so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.' (Luke 16:9) It sounds a little like 'buying' rights to share our faith, and share the gospel with people. Well, if the spirit is right, it *is* a bit like that. And that's OK! Jesus would sometimes do miracles, with an 'agenda'. He said to one man, '*I am healing you, so that you know I can forgive sins.*' (Luke 5:20-24)

I like to share a tract, a 'verse card', as the Spirit leads, throughout my comings and goings... Sometimes I might see someone who needs something – like a meal, a coffee, some cash, some help – I'll do that first, and then tag on, '*Hey, can I give you this to encourage you?*' I have used some 'worldly wealth' (money, energy, time) to buy the right to share something eternal.

(Mark 8:34-38; Matthew 13:44)

Dec 20

Heaven

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and they are saved.'

(Proverbs 18:10)

When you give Christ, you give safety. You are reaching into the power and treasure of God – Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit – and you breaking this into the life, the heart, the path of person here on earth, and forevermore.

'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd.' (Matthew 9:36-38)

When we give Jesus, we give a person a friend they take with them when we are gone. We give them a Provider to give to them, when we have no more, or have moved on.

'Jesus said to the woman, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. But he who drinks the water I give them, will never thirst again...'

(John 4:13-14)

Sharing Jesus here and now, is depositing heaven in the heart of a person. It is bringing heaven to earth.

(1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:1-5)

Dec 21

Your Daughter

'I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.'
(Ephesians 3:14-15)

It can be hard to 'feel' for people in a deep way. We have such small capacity to care, to focus, to stay in touch, to serve. I've always been amazed at how quickly one loses all connection in family trees. Like, after first cousins, maybe first cousins-once-removed... And it's gone! As humans we just don't have the reach.

But we are called by the Lord to consider all people, family. Not so much in the day-to-day practicalities (like, you can't send the whole world a birthday gift!), but in spirit. Men are admonished to see and treat women with purity, as if sisters or mothers only. One woman for intimacy in this life (a dear wife), and the rest sisters and mothers.

We are also told to *'weep with those who weep...'* (Romans 12:15) When a friend's son or daughter is struggling, that is your son or daughter. He or she has the same Father in heaven, and is yours to truly care for. 'Feel' with others, and pray as if your own. The Lord will lead you to some people for this type of 'kinship' and compassion.

(Matthew 12:48-50; 1 Timothy 5:1-2)

Dec 22

God is Everywhere!

'Does he who made the eye not see? Does he who made the ear not hear?' (Psalm 94:9)

Little toddlers will cover their own eyes, and think that you don't see them. Adults think if other people don't see, that God does not see. Same delusion, just a few years apart.

Today's Scripture above needs to be etched on the doorposts of every home in the world. People need to know that God does not condemn them, and he is not looking down harshly on them, but that he cares about our hearts and our 'secret' lives. The world would be a safer place!

On the flipside, it is important to know that God is present everywhere, also as a protector, a provider, a comforter. There is nowhere to 'flee from his Spirit.' The whole world is his, and all souls are his. You are safe in his hands.

(Ezekiel 18:4; Psalm 24:1; Psalm 139:7-11)

Dec 23

Be!

'God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' (Exodus 3:14)

God is the great '*I Am*'. He does not lean on people's worship or approval. He is. When you believe in Jesus, he puts his Holy Spirit in you. (Ephesians 1:14) And Jesus has also equipped you with every spiritual blessing you need, to be who he calls you to be.

'God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' (Ephesians 1:3)

We are insecure, and live in an uncertain world, with 'uncertain' people. This can have us constantly looking left and right for approval, for safety. But Jesus comes to you, to me, weary and worn from this pursuit. He gently tilts our faces to his, and asks that we look only to him. We will still see people out our peripheral vision, but need only a crystal clear focus on the Lord's face. As God is, so '*be*' – unfettered by mankind.

'Whether you turn to the right or to the left, you will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.' (Isaiah 30:21)

(John 21:20-22; Romans 14:4)

Dec 24

Hot Chocolate

'I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than the watchmen wait for the morning...'

(Psalm 130:5-6)

I lived on ships for a few years as a kid. One Christmas time, I was 8 years old, the ship was docked in the UK. I knew one of the 'watchmen' on the ship, a nice young guy. Watchmen would sit at the top of the gangway on the ship through the night, and make sure no strangers came aboard.⁴⁹

One night I had an adventure. I made hot chocolate in a flask, and after going to bed, I snuck out of our family block of cabins, and out onto the deck. There he was, my buddy. I sat with him and we shared some hot chocolate, and we just looked out over the lights of the city.

There's no gift at Christmas like the presence of God. Jesus is 'God with us', and if you take a few minutes of quiet and faith, you will feel his friendship, his closeness, his Spirit.

Happy Christmas Eve!

⁴⁹ More on my personal story at www.1peter1three.weebly.com

Dec 25

No More Gloom

'Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress... The people walking in darkness have seen a great light!' (Isaiah 9;1-2)

Merry Christmas!

I hope today is special! The Lord bless you this day, with a fresh measure of his presence, his promise, his provision.

Today's Scripture comes from a prophecy in Isaiah, 600 years before Jesus was born. I love the way it speaks of his coming, as light cutting through gloom, through despair.

'Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world, and whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12)

Today, if you can, try to enjoy the light of Christ. It is pure, it is safe, it is his Spirit, it is eternal. The light of Christ – unlike the light of the sun – will never fade. In fact, we're told in heaven that the light of God will be our light, and there will be no sun!

'They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.' (Revelation 22:5)

'Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.' (Psalm 73:25-26)

It can be easy to busy ourselves in life, and tag God and faith on at the end. But the truth is, God is our prize. God is everything that life is ultimately about. God made life and mankind to be in relationship with God:

'God made the world and everything in it... He gives everyone life and breath and everything else... God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him...'
(Acts 17:24-28)

The person who truly stops and waits on God, finds him. This is a Spirit-led thing, not an equation or a 'rule'. For example, when your heart hungers for more of God, sit a while with him. Sit quietly. Listen. Whisper. Read some Scripture. Martha did this when she went to find Jesus at the tomb. He was not there, and she just could not move on. He was her treasure, her prize. She needed to see even his body, his corpse. Because of her love, her lingering, Jesus – alive, not dead – showed himself to her. She was the first to see the risen Christ. (*John 20:11-18*)

Dec 27

Beyond

'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived... these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.'

(1 Cor 2:9-10)

Jesus was the fulfilment of the law, and the revelation of God's mystery that had been 'hidden'. When we gaze on Christ, we gaze on the full story, the full Spirit, the completion of God's salvation work. ***'God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth.'*** (John 4:24) When you gaze on Christ you will see God, and you see transfiguration. (*Matthew 17:1-3; Revelation 1:13-18*) God has poured all his 'deity' into Jesus, and exalted his name above every name. Never think you've seen enough of Christ. You can't. Don't look beyond him for deeper things. There are no deeper things. Jesus is *'God with us'*, and the deepest, highest level you can reach in Jesus, is just be with him.

'Unless you become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.' (Matthew 18:3)

'Blessed is he who does not take offense on account of me.' (Matthew 11:6)

(*Colossians 1:27; 2:9; Philippians 2:9-10*)

'God's takes no pleasure in the strength of animals or people... The Lord delights in those who fear him, and who trust in his unfailing love.' (Psalm 147:10-11)

God is love. He loves you. There may be experiences in this life where you feel that God has not been there for you, and does not love you. If he did, this or that would not have happened, or would not be so in your life.

It is here in your personal pain and suffering, that the only one who can really come to you, relate and share in your suffering, is Christ himself. He is real. He is true. He is with you now.

My friend, if you can dare to trust that Jesus has 'unfailing love' towards you, you will be beyond the bounds of mind, heart and history. Your faith in this, a childlike faith, will lift you to a spiritual place of reward, that only the 'elite' will reach. You will *'reign'* with Christ. (2 Timothy 2:11-12) This leap of faith – not reason, not questioning – will lead you to a place of truth that only faith can take you. But you will soar! You will smile! You will laugh. You will be exalted by Christ!

(1 John 4:8; Zechariah 2:8; Psalm 17:8)

Dec 29

The Name

'All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's...'

(1 Samuel 17:47)

Trusting in God for something is not easy. My mom used to say that we often pray for things that we think we can solve or get ourselves. In other words, we find it hard to really call on the Lord for something that we have no way of accomplishing otherwise.

'For man this impossible, but for God all things are possible.' (Matthew 19:26)

God is not a 'Genie' or a magician that we come to. He is our Father in heaven. He cares deeply, sincerely. We don't chant prayers to him, we share with him. But if there is something you truly need, truly desire, share with him sincerely. Share with him as a *'friend'*, and as your Father. (John 15:15)

'Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.'

(Psalm 20:7)

(Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 18:1-8)

Dec 30

New Song

'I will sing a new song to you, my God...' (Psalm 144:9)

You are unique. You are made in the image of God, and are eternal. (Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 3:11)

No one has your eyes, your heart, your spirit, or your God imprint – your 'image'.

As you gaze on Christ, and your spirit is stirred, and your thoughts move, and your heart hears... your words, your desires, your prayers, are a *'new song'* every time. Your voice matters to God. It matters little what your voice means to people. None may listen. Millions may listen. But you loved no less than any of God's creations from the beginning of time.

'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism...' (Acts 10:34-35)

You are the apple of God's eye. (Psalm 17:8) Be at peace this day. Spend some time just being in the Lord's presence. He seeks the 'one', always has. He actually leaves the 'crowd' to find the one. Be that one today. He comes to spend time with you.

(Luke 15; Revelation 3:20)

'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.' (Isaiah 43:19)

Jesus is God's 'door' to forgiveness and eternal life. (John 10:9) There is no life outside of Christ – not that *'life that is truly life.'* (1 Timothy 6:19)

When we turn our eyes, ears and heart Jesus – in faith, and in repentance – we die and rise again. That very moment, we pass through the 'door' to new life.

If you have not done this, please do this now! It is between you and God. It is a deep, sincere decision to believe in Christ, turn away from sin, and follow him.

His mercies are new every morning – today included, tomorrow included. So you can trust him. He doesn't cast you aside. Rise this moment, and give your life to Jesus.

(Lamentations 3:23; Ezekiel 36:26)

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