

DISCOVERJESUS



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This book is a compilation of works by members of Discovery Church. Credit has been given to each author at the end of each day's devotional. Our goal is to help you Discover Jesus and to find your place in His story.

Easter 2020



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THELIGHT



Matthew 1:1-6

I vividly remember sharing this passage with a group of men who had a mastery of the bible far beyond my capability. All expressed surprise at what God had tucked away in this genealogy. You may have the same reaction as theirs. There are four women in Jesus' family background that were mingled in with the others and don't stand out for who they were. God's perfect plan included Tamar who, passing herself off as a prostitute, "slept with" her father-in-law Judah. Next is Rahab the prostitute who was faithful and birthed Boaz. Then the Moabite woman Ruth, who, by the graciousness of God, married Boaz to come into the lineage of Jesus. The fourth was not listed by name, only as Uriah's wife. Bathsheba had an affair with King David and later was the mother to Solomon, the wisest man to ever live. Still, the Light of the World came to earth with these four in his background.

Without a doubt, others in the lineage of Jesus had similarly stained backgrounds, and God used them all to bring us His son, the perfect sacrifice, Jesus the Christ. Oh, how we all fall short of the glory of God.

What does the passage say to you about the love and acceptance Jesus has for you?

Pray that you'll come to know His love for you more deeply.

~Bill Dougherty

John 8:12

Jesus was speaking in the treasury, the part of the temple where offerings were put and where candles were burned that illuminated the whole temple court. It is in reference to this that Jesus declares himself the light of the world, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The candle flames represented God's presence, protection and guidance.

Have you ever woken up in a dark room? How important is it to have a light to help you find your way so that you aren't stumbling and fumbling around in the darkness alone? The same is true of our daily lives, but Jesus comes to us in a world of darkness to provide a light.

What a wonderful promise, Jesus will never leave us in darkness, fumbling, stumbling and falling into the darkness of sin. He lights the path ahead of us so we can see how to live. There's nothing that we need more in the world today than light on our path. Not only will he illuminate our path today, but his light will also lead us to life everlasting.

In what ways have you allowed the light of Christ to shine in your life? Are you allowing Jesus to be the light of *your* world?

Almighty God, shine the light of Jesus into my life and help me make my way through this world of darkness without stumbling.

~Dianna Mullins

Ephesians 5:20

I read a book recently about a holocaust survivor. She and her sister were in a concentration camp together. They were both believers, but the younger sister was perplexed when her older sister was thanking God for everything, including fleas that had swarmed their clothes and bedding to the point of sores all over their bodies. Several months later they noticed their captors were not coming around as often and the older sister remembered her prayer and realized the reason they were staying away was because of the fleas! They had been given some temporary relief from the torture they had endured because their captors didn't want to get near the fleas. She was able to pray and trust God for everything, including fleas.

Paul speaks in absolutes in Ephesians 5:20 Always giving thanks to God the Father for Everything, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Do you have faith enough to thank Him always for everything?

We must believe in our hearts that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Even if that means thanking Him for fleas.

"He uses our problems for His miracles. This was my first lesson in learning to trust Him completely..."

— Corrie Ten Boom

~Tammy Caulkins

Matthew 5:14-16

God has chosen to shine the light of His grace through us, his followers. Let that sink in.. You & I have been chosen as God's vessel, as His means of spreading His light into the world. As followers, our job is to "let our lights shine before others." As a kid, I can remember attending candlelight services at Christmas. At the end, the leader would light a candle and begin passing the flame to each person at the end of the isles. Those people would pass the flame to those next to them until finally each person's candle was lit. What once was a room filled with darkness was now illuminated with light. What started with only one person had multiplied and grown into something so much more. It wasn't until I was older that I began to realize what a beautiful representation this was of God's light penetrating the darkness through Jesus, and then being spread throughout mankind by his followers.

We let our lights shine by how we treat others and how we serve our Lord. Our good deeds illuminate dark places and shine glory upon God. So be a light that burns bright. Let your example and your attitude be your biggest witness to your faith. Be the kind of light that draws people to you.

In what ways are you letting your light shine for others to see?

How would your coworkers, your classmates, your family, your friends, the widow, the orphan, the homeless answer these same questions about you?

~Jeremy Holly

John 1:1-5

Have you ever been forced to stay up late? Pull an all-nighter? Or maybe you're like me, a night owl who enjoys staying up into the wee hours of the night but quickly regrets it once morning comes. Have you ever just wanted the sun to stay down just a little longer? Ever wished your blinds were just a little bit more powerful so as to keep the light out of your now unfortunately illuminated bedroom, desperate for the darkness? I can't help but to think this is what John was trying to capture when he wrote "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

When a force as powerful as the sun is in the sky you know it. Turn out the lights... it's still bright. Draw your curtains... still bright. Close your eyes... you get the point. Now imagine God, who in God's very nature is Light. There's no resisting God's light. No hiding from it. And this light, we're told, is Life. It's the overflow of being loved. Of sharing in the grace and mercy given to us through Jesus.

More than that, it's generative. It creates. When John begins his gospel "In the beginning..." he is doing more than harking back to Genesis 1, he is essentially shouting, "This Word, this Love, this Light is what birthed everything, and now it's the Life inside of you! Go and give life to others! It can not be overcome!"

Have you ever experienced the overwhelming love of God? Are you participating in the life giving, life generating life and light of Jesus?

Pray to experience God's love in such a way that you can't help but begin to participate in God's act of re-creation.

~Chris Skiera-Vaughn

THE RESTORER

Mark 5:24-34

The story of this woman's healing is in three of the Gospels. That is pretty significant. It must be a lesson we really need to learn. Jesus is being pressed by a crowd so big his disciples have a hard time believing there is anything special about one "touch". Oh, but Jesus knows when we seek him. When we finally reach out. And he stops everything to acknowledge it. He was headed to stop a little girl from dying. But the woman who was bleeding was important to Jesus, also. She had been this way for years, "suffering". He could have let her receive her healing from touching his cloak and never slowed down, except she was worth more than that. I am guessing her illness made her an outcast for most of her life. Jesus knew she needed physical healing, but she also needed some emotional healing.

Suffering for a long time can cause us to wonder if we are worthy. The woman needed to know her value despite her problem. Jesus doesn't stop with an acknowledgement. He gives her encouragement "take heart daughter". He could have called her "woman" and it would have been acceptable for the culture. He could have called her by her name. He knew it, he was Jesus. But he chose to call her "Daughter". A daughter is loved, accepted, treasured, valued, a part of the family. I believe the woman received more than one kind of healing that day. Because Jesus is just like that, oh so generous with His healing.

How do you perceive your worth in Christ?

Go to Jesus in prayer and ask Him to show you how worthy you already are.

~Wendy Bender

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

"Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own. Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons (begins to grow rapidly or flourish)! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God."

Take note of every time you see what God is doing in this passage. How are we to respond to what God is doing?

From this passage, what is one thing you need to believe, accept, or change in your life? In your relationship with God? With others? With yourself?

~Sarah Korell

Psalm 51:12

As a successful nightclub and small business owner in New Orleans, Mel Jones thought that he had all that a man could want. But the constant internal struggle to find what was missing in his life eventually led to drug and alcohol addiction and life on the streets of “The Big Easy”.

“They called me Crackhead Mel until I gave God control of my life.” Through a local street ministry Mel Jones surrendered to the Lord and began the road to recovery and restoration. After one major relapse, Mel graduated from The New Orleans Seminary, and is currently pastor of Gently Baptist Church. Pastor Mel is also Director of the Bethel Colony Transformation ministry leading other addicts to the Lord and helping to restore broken lives and broken families.

Do you have areas of your life that need restoration? Broken relationships, emptiness, or addiction?

God can take all of your brokenness and restore you if you will only ask and believe.

~Todd Caulkins

Proverbs 3:5-6

There was a time I found myself not liking myself. I desperately wanted to be someone else. I was caught up in not believing that I was good enough, so I was negative and walked to my own accord. Satan had set up a strong hold, and he was attacking me from within. While at a retreat, I began to share my struggles with a group of friends and realized who I had been trusting with all my fears, failures, and sins. That person was me. I didn't want to accept God's grace for me, but God led me to these verses in Proverbs as He worked to restore me to accept who I am meant to be: a daughter of Christ.

For so long, I was leaning in to my ways and not trusting Jesus. My own selfish desires for how I wanted things to be were leading me to a path of self-hate. Over the years, as I've learned to lean on Jesus and trust him, I'm more free in understanding how His path for me continually restores my soul. This verse from my favorite hymn, It Is Well, sums up the freedom I have in God's love for me:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

How can you lean more fully in trusting Jesus with your struggles?

Pray for the Lord to restore your path to live freely in God's love and mercy.

~Penny Reynolds

Mark 14:3-9

One day, I stopped at McDonald's to grab some lunch. As I pulled up to the drive-thru window to pick up my order, I noticed a homeless person by the exit. I pulled out of the drive-thru, and as I passed him a voice spoke to me and said "give him your lunch". So, I immediately turned back into the entrance to the McDonald's. A coworker that was with me asked, "What are you doing?" I said, I'm going to give that homeless person my lunch. He said, "Are you crazy, why would you do that?" I said, "The Lord told me to give him my lunch." The look on the homeless man's face when I handed him my lunch was priceless. I said, "Here you go man, Jesus loves you."

Spikenard, a very expensive oil or perfume. Why would she pour it on Jesus' head? I wonder if she knew why she did it. She may not even have a clue, but she did it. Certainly others that were there didn't understand. I love Jesus' response to the criticism, "She has done a good work for Me." These words from Jesus must have brought blessings of joy to her heart. The criticism faded in the background, she was reassured, above reproach, and blessed.

We may never know how the things that we do for others as "acts of kindness" are going to affect someone directly or indirectly for the Kingdom of God. What we do know is that blessings are given to us so that we may bless others with the love of God.

When was the last time you blessed someone through a random act of kindness? Go share the love that God has so richly and so abundantly given to you.

~Jeff Blaylock

MERCIFUL KING

John 3:16-17

My great-grandmother had me memorize John 3:16 as a child. She was a wise woman that I adored. Jesus was God's Son which makes him the King, and this verse is proof. But how many of us stop with verse 16? Verse 17 tells us that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it, instead to save it. I believe with the faith learned from my grandmother that this means God is merciful beyond human understanding, and this mercy extends to all people.

If we look at Jesus' life we see many examples of this abundant mercy and love. One such story is in John 8:1-11. An adulterous woman is brought to Him, and He tells the crowd that a person without sin should cast the first stone. The crowd disperses, and Jesus asks the woman who condemns her. When she says no one, He tells her neither does He; go and sin no more. This is a very valuable lesson for each of us in our daily lives. Many of us are so critical of ourselves when we sin because of shame, which then makes us quick to judge others - mainly because we have first been so unforgiving of ourselves. Jesus sets a beautiful example for us, demonstrating the importance of mercy to ourselves and to each other. He was the one person who could have judged everyone but instead showed mercy and judged no one.

Who needs mercy from me today?

Merciful Father, thank you for the grace and mercy you show me daily. Remind me that Your Son Jesus asked me to extend His mercy to every person that crosses my path.

~Lori Ayers

Genesis 3:21

The first gospel story can be found in Genesis chapter three. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God and they found themselves naked, ashamed, and afraid to approach Him. God however approached them with grace and mercy. He asked them who it was that told them they were naked. It was not God but Satan that instilled shame and fear in them. God showed them great love and reconciled them to Himself. He shed blood through the sacrifice of an animal for skins, He made them clothes and like a loving parent, He dressed them.

This story in the old testament is a foreshadowing of Jesus, our merciful king, and how His blood would be shed for all mankind. It is because of this shedding of blood that we can be united with Christ. Christ made us right with God by becoming the final sacrificial lamb. He makes us pure and holy before God as He clothes us in His righteousness.

Have you ever thought about this story in Genesis as the first gospel message and how it is a foreshadowing of the gospel of Jesus? Have you made the decision to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ and made right with God, pure, holy, and freed from sin?

Father, help us to grasp the depths of your love and mercy toward us and to share that love and mercy with others.

~Amy Stinson

1 Timothy 1:15-17

In this verse, Paul talks about the “mercy” of Christ Jesus as he referred to himself being “the worst of sinners”. Does your own past have you thinking you may have given Paul a run for his money at that self-assessment? Don’t let thoughts like that hinder you from realizing God’s love has no end! Like Paul, you can’t change your past, but you most certainly can receive mercy from the King of kings.

Paul also refers to the “immense patience” of Jesus. Patience is not a trait many of us can say we’ve mastered. In fact, most of us (especially parents) often run short on patience. While His patience will one day come to an end, there is no sin that can’t be overcome through the extraordinary mercy found through Jesus.

Webster’s dictionary defines mercy as “compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm.” Where in your life is God calling you to display more grace, mercy and patience?

Right now, praise God and prayerfully thank him for his grace, mercy and immense patience as you ask for forgiveness of your shortcomings and confess your need for His mercy.

~Carol Campbell

John 10:10

Abundance. An abundant life. For some of you that may totally click and resonate. For others, and probably most, it seems foreign. Wished for, but still so seemingly far off. Yet, these are words directly from Jesus! Truth coming straight from our Savior’s mouth and a real promise that is meant to be obtained.

I have to believe that Jesus didn’t just die on the cross so we can only have a good life in heaven instead of the *ahem* alternative. He beckons us to live an abundant life with Him right here, right now, in whatever mess you may be dealing with. In the valley. Where it’s dry. Gloomy. And just stupid hard. Where joy has been stolen, killed and destroyed. Just like the enemy intended.

But Jesus. Jesus’ plan for you is greater. It’s for that joy to remain because it is deeply rooted in something the enemy has no power over. Him. Weekly. Daily. Minute by minute dependence. In His goodness and mercy he didn’t create this earthly life to be one we can do on our own and then feel great about it. No, if we want to experience life in the abundance that He intends for it to be, we have to do this life with Him. In step, in surrender, and in dependence moment by moment every single day.

Are you coasting through this life, or tapping into the abundant one Jesus intends for you?

Ask Jesus to clearly reveal to you what changes you can make in your habits to have a more abundant life with Him.

~Katie Harlow

2 Chronicles 7

We often think of humility in connection with other people. We need to put others first, think of others before ourselves, avoid becoming proud by thinking of ourselves more highly than others. But we see in this verse, humility also concerns our relationship with God.

We need to come before God, our King, and humbly submit ourselves. Once we recognize who God is and who we are in humble relationship to him, then we humble ourselves through 1) prayer and worship, 2) turning from our sin. When we do this the King will hear us, and He will forgive our sins.

We can turn from our sins, but no person on this earth, including ourselves, can forgive our sins - only God can do that. How amazing to know that when we humbly come before the King He will listen!

Where in your life do you need to humble yourself and come before the King?

Come humbly before to the Lord in prayer right now knowing you have a one-on-one audience with the King.

~Matt Korell

THE SERVANT

Philippians 2:5-11

There's a difference in *wanting* to do something and just doing it, right? We often do things because we feel obligated or because we know it's the *right* thing. And then sometimes, we actually *want* to do the thing.

Do you think when God sent Jesus, He *wanted* His Son to die? Do you think Jesus *wanted* to suffer and die? That's a hard no!

Brace yourself...Jesus had an attitude. Yep, I said it! Attitude isn't something we typically laud, but Philippians tells us that Jesus was born in human form, so if He's like us that would explain the attitude, huh? And Jesus' attitude was clear.

He lived and ate and drank among us, taught people about His love, trained them to carry on His work. He washed feet, healed the sick, raised the dead and gave His life.

So, what do all those things have in common? They were done with an attitude of service. An attitude that Jesus *chose*. His initial choice in servanthood was coming to earth to live as man. A choice that ended in His death. Because of a love so great for His people that being about His Father's business was the only thing that mattered.

And guess what, Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created in His image. We were created for a purpose with an attitude. You too get to choose. Do you have Jesus' attitude of service? Are you serving others? Are you serving Him? If not, ask Christ to help you develop an attitude of service.

~Raquel McLamb

John 4:34-35

Jesus said this to his disciples right after his conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria. He and the disciples were traveling from Judea to Galilee, and they were about 116 miles into the trip on foot.

Theologian Albert Barnes said:

"How easily might Jesus have alleged, if he had been like many of his professed disciples, that he was weary, that he was hungry, that it was esteemed improper to converse with a woman alone, that she was an abandoned character, and there could be little hope of doing her good. In spite of his fatigue and thirst, and all the difficulties of the case, seriously set about seeking the conversion of this woman. And behold what a glorious result! The city was moved, and a great harvest was found ready to be gathered in!"

The woman at the well returned to town and said, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" Jesus did not speak literally of white fields for harvest in verse 35, but instead he referred to a spiritual harvest. Jesus knew she was one of many Samaritans who were hungry for Christ and thirsty for the living water.

What other examples can you think of when Jesus persevered in an act of service?

How do we respond when obstacles arise in serving others?

This week we pray our hearts are sensitive to pouring into the spiritual needs of others, whatever the circumstances. Pause to reflect on Galatians 6:9-10.

~Drew Shumaker

Matthew 6:1-4

We often hear how Jesus came and served “the least of these” and commands us to do the same. Often “the least of these” are referred to as the widow, the orphan, the poor, the disabled, and while that is true, Jesus’ example expands the definition to include others.

In Matthew 8:5-13, Jesus is approached by a centurion who is asking for healing for his servant. While the centurion did ask humbly, the crowd around Jesus would not have been shocked if Jesus had refused, because that centurion was a Roman – the political oppressor and opponent of the Jewish people. And Jesus healed his servant.

In Matthew 9:9-10, Jesus invited Matthew into deep community with him as an apostle, where Jesus would teach him and serve alongside him. Matthew was a tax-collector, a betrayer of Jews. He cozied up to the Romans, extorting money from his own people. And Jesus washed his feet.

In Luke 17:11-19, ten lepers came to be healed and nine of them left without even a backwards glance of acknowledgement, much less gratitude. These were outcasts who should have been so thankful for what Jesus did, but they just walked away. And Jesus didn’t regret healing them.

It’s easy to serve others when they’re grateful or when we feel they’re “worthy.” But what about those whom you consider “the least of these”? Maybe those who are unreformed criminals, who just take without recognition of the grace, or who belong to different political parties? Pray for Jesus to show you the belovedness of every person you interact with on a daily basis and ask how you can serve them as Jesus would.

~Courtney Skiera-Vaughn

Galatians 5:13

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind.” He went on to say the second most important commandment is, “love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus is not referring to our literal neighbors, He is referring to everyone He created; those who have wronged us, non-believers, those who are different from us, the ones who make it most difficult to love, all of these people and many more. So how do we really love others? The answer is simple; serving. There is an undeniable truth to the old saying, “actions speak louder than words.” Paul told us to “serve one another humbly, in love.” Jesus was the most humble of servants and led by example. Serving is a way for us to share the love and grace that was given to us. So, how do we exemplify this same sacrificial love to others? Cook for a family during a time of need, participate in Sent to Serve projects, volunteer with various organizations, do the dishes, sit with a friend during a chemo treatment, visit a new mom and give her a break. There is nothing more satisfying than serving. When you start living a life in service to your neighbor, you will be filled with joy, peace, and contentment. Each day, you have the opportunity to make a difference. Choose love. Choose to serve.

What are some ways you can serve others? Make a list and make it happen.

Pray that God would reveal opportunities for you to serve your “neighbors” in love, and that He will give you the courage to act on it.

~Bethany Deal

John 13:5-8, Luke 10:38-42

As we know, Jesus calls all his followers to be servants to everyone around us. Jesus was even willing to serve in ways that others thought were beneath him, such as washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus demonstrates in John 13: 5-8, how no service is too far beneath any of us. Service doesn't have to be some grandiose act. The act of washing feet was so small compared to the many other acts of service Jesus did, however to the disciples it was a huge deal. My love language is acts of service, so any time someone does the smallest act of service for me, I beam ear to ear. The disciples must have felt the same when Jesus washed their feet.

At the same time, Jesus warns us not to serve just to serve, (Luke 10:38-32). I am convicted of this often. Since my love language is acts of service, I tend to love those around me how I want to be loved. In turn, I am not serving in the capacity others may need. I often think about Martha and how I need to make sure my service is one of intent not just one of my own doing.

What can you do today, this week, this month, this year that might seem like a small act of service to you but would make a huge difference in someone else's life? Have you ever felt like you are serving just to serve? If so, what can you do to change that?

Please use me as a servant for your kingdom. Show me where I can be used to help relieve pressure and undo stress in someone else's life. Continue to remind me to always serve with intent and not just to serve.

~Holly Perdue

THE SACRIFICE

Mark 11:15-17

Upon first reading the story of Jesus at the temple, it is easy to be quick to recognize this as a story of Jesus's righteous anger. People rarely flip over tables with a calm spirit. His Temple had become an open market. They defiled the place of God's presence with greed and manipulation, literally creating "a den of robbers."

Looking closer, though, we have to recognize the love Jesus showed with His actions. Those selling doves and exchanging money were doing so to fill the need of the Jews coming to Jerusalem for Passover. Those Jews who traveled to Jerusalem had their foreign coins exchanged in order to purchase doves to make a sacrifice. The only way these people could make a connection to God was through this exchange. A sacrifice had to be made.

When Jesus walks into the temple, He sees this exchange and the effect it has on the people seeking God's presence. He sees the Jews making sacrifices to seek forgiveness and atonement. Moreover, He knows the sacrifice He is about to make just a few days after this exchange. With this in mind, re-read Mark 11:15-17.

Jesus made the sacrifice for our sins. He was the forgiveness that the people in the temple were seeking. And he wanted to remove the distractions and complications in the way of this forgiveness. They failed to recognize that the Presence of God had just walked into their midst.

What "tables" are in your life that Jesus needs to "flip over" in order for you to recognize the forgiveness and sacrifice that He provides? Pray, focusing on what distracts you from God's presence.

~Jason Thead

Acts 10:43

Salvation is a perfect gift from God that we can't earn. Instead, we must receive it because God's judgement is coming, and we need a Savior! Christ's perfect sacrifice for our sins is portrayed in Isaiah and fulfilled in the New Testament. Acts 10:43 says, "All the prophets testifying about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." This was God's plan from the beginning, "He was chosen before the creation of the world..." (1 Peter 1:20). How incredible that this was God's plan! We were told time and again, yet still not all believe.

The "office" of prophet was instituted during the days of Samuel. Prophets stood with the priests as God's special representatives. 2 Kings 21:10 says, "Now the Lord spoke through his servants, the prophets...." So to this point it is the prophet's role to speak for God. Although their messages often went unheeded, they faithfully and persistently proclaimed the truth. Isaiah is generally considered to be the greatest prophet as he foretold of the Messiah's birth, rejection, condemnation, and eventual death as a sacrifice.

Today, if a reliable source predicts that you are going to win millions in the lottery, but they won't tell you when you'll collect your prize – would you consider this an unearned gift? Would you believe them? Would you plan for that day and what you would do with the money? Would you prepare ahead of time? The imminent return of Christ should motivate us to prepare.

How do you need to prepare for His return? Guide us by faith, not sight, and make it our goal to please you.

~Dede Jones

Romans 3:23-25

Despite our Christian faith and belief in God's plan, we still sin. As we age, our sins may look different but they continue, nonetheless. Do you sometimes struggle with why you do this and the guilt (or weight) of your perpetual sin? We should know better, right? Dear friend, God planned for this before he even created us - a plan to forgive us and a way to counter our sin. Paul, the author of the book of Romans points this out in chapter 3.

But how can this forgiveness be so... free? Over and over again, we feel so undeserving. God knows our hearts and he understands our human nature. While we may find ourselves in a constant struggle between right and wrong, God is always right there, reaching out in love. When you find yourself shaking your head in disappointment, remember the words of the Psalmist in chapter 3:9-14:

"He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."

Where is the sin in your life? Pray now to receive God's compassionate unrelenting forgiveness and thank Him for loving you so completely.

~Laura Hutchinson

John 15:2, 6

Do you produce fruit? What fruit should be the result of genuine faith in Jesus Christ? Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that... "the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Do others see these attributes in you? Do your words and actions align? "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 2:26). A natural result of the Holy Spirit is "...to produce what is beneficial..." (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) Living faith cannot be contained - it has to be expressed.

Following Jesus requires commitment and is active. Once the Holy Spirit takes residence in a heart it cannot help but yearn for communion. When you love someone you want to be with them - time with them is precious. We should desire to spend time with the Lord. God obviously loves us and wants our attention/love. Affection for God is expressed through worship, prayer, obedience, and study of His Word. In this way, we fulfill the greatest commandment, which is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

Let us then love the Lord earnestly by spending time with Him and loving others. May those around us see expressions of a redeemed soul.

Lord, give us the boldness which never shies away from the task before us. Holy Spirit, dwell in us richly so that we more and more reflect your glory and exhibit the mind of Christ our Savior. Give us a heart which is true and a dependence on You, our Creator so that there is no deception within us.

~Dale Willis

Hebrews 4:14-16

Jesus is our Great High Priest. I didn't realize the significance of this until recently when I was studying Exodus and read the story of God appointing Aaron as High Priest of Israel. While God was on top of the mountain setting Aaron and his sons apart for generations to come as the ones selected to approach God in His holy place, Aaron was at the bottom, building an altar and sacrificing animals to a god he created with his own hands!

When I read this I questioned why God would choose Aaron, someone with so little faith in God. I realized Aaron being appointed High Priest had nothing to do with Aaron. It was the intricate wardrobe (a Breastplate of Decision with the names of the sons of Israel) God designed for him and the blood of bulls and rams that allowed him to come close to the Almighty. Without these he would die because Aaron on his own merit could never be holy enough.

Today we have a new High Priest and his name is Jesus. Our High Priest doesn't need a breastplate or the blood of bulls and rams. He is the ultimate atonement and the perfect sacrifice. He has *our* names written on His heart and He is our intercessor. Jesus's grace is the garment that we wear and Jesus' blood is the sacrifice that covers our sin and removes our guilt and shame. Today, you can come before the throne of God with confidence in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is your High Priest.

How can you allow Jesus' sacrifice to impact the way you live today? Thank God for the gift of Jesus as our intercessor and atonement.

~Victoria Heinz

THE RESURRECTION

John 11:17-27

In the story of Lazerus in John chapter 11, Jesus encounters an utterly heartbroken Martha who runs out to meet him saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus' response is, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha knows who Jesus is and she knows there will be a resurrection but she is grieving her brother now. In this moment Martha cannot reconcile how Lazerus could be dead when Jesus could have saved him. Then Jesus tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus wasn't just a man who could perform impressive feats like walking on water and making great wine for parties, he was God.

Martha knew there was a resurrection to come, but she didn't realize that resurrection was already here. Raising the dead to life wasn't just an activity that Jesus participated in, it was his identity. He was the resurrection. And good news for us, it's who he is now. When we face those same heart-breaking situations and turn to Jesus and say, "If you had been here _____ wouldn't have happened. You could have saved him/her/me from this pain and suffering." We can believe Jesus will say to us with tears in his eyes, just as he did to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." He is in the present tense resurrecting our lives. It's not just a future we can hope for, it's a reality we can live in. Right now - in our circumstances and pain - he is raising us to life.

Are there places in your life that desperately need the resurrecting presence of Jesus? Talk to Jesus about any places in your life that are dead or dying under the weight of suffering and sin. Allow him to call you out of that tomb like he did for Lazarus in John chapter 11.

~Christy Gregory

1 Peter 1:3

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Read that again. This time from the Message Bible.

"What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have Him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven – and the future starts now!"

In one short verse, God shows He is the one to be praised. "Praise Him!" He is the one who shows mercy. "Worship Him!" He is the one who gives and provides. "Thank Him!" He gives us Jesus, and He provides a new life and hope for us through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Because Jesus is alive again (resurrected), I can be alive again (resurrected). Alive in hope and born again here on earth. Best of all, alive in glorious hope of being born again in my eternal home.

God has already provided your hope of a future home in heaven. What hope has God given you right now? Now, re-read 1 Peter 1:3 in any version of the Bible you prefer and pray God opens your heart, eyes, mind and spirit to see how He provides and gives you hope.

~Sandy Dougherty

Acts 13:32-33

And we bring good news of the Promise made into the fathers, that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children in that he has raised Jesus from the dead; also it is written in the second Psalm.

This verse should bring great Joy! For it is a reminder that not even death could prevent God from keeping his promise to us. For the tomb is empty and our sins, iniquities, enemies, disease, and death are defeated. Because of God's mercy and grace, we can live fearlessly, knowing there is nothing too great for Him to conquer.

For the death of Jesus on the Cross paid for our sins. And as His followers there is nothing we can do to earn it. All we have to do is accept his Love. What are you facing today that makes you feel burdened? What are you facing that you think is too great for God to handle? What obstacle are you facing that makes you feel as if you cannot be loved by God?

The answer is nothing. There is nothing too great for God. For the death and resurrection of Jesus set us free. So, lay it all at his feet and rest easy. Put your trust and faith in Him. For God will faithfully do all He has said He would do.

Jesus, thank you for the death and resurrection. Because of your Love, I can rest assured that there is no obstacle or challenge, and not even death is a match for You! Amen!

~Eric Patrick

John 14:1-4

Many of us can become consumed with fear, anxiety, and worry about what tomorrow might bring. We may be wrestling with the loss of a loved one or someone close. You are not alone! As a matter of fact, The Bible tells us that Jesus' disciples were wrestling with the same thing when it came to Jesus' prediction about Himself. They wanted to always be with Him!

Jesus addresses this in our reading in the Gospel of John. He reminds His disciples and us of the promise of His coming death and resurrection. Jesus reassures His disciples and us of His promise to take us to be with Him and God for eternity in Heaven. He compares His Father's Heavenly Kingdom as a mansion with many rooms and He is going to prepare a place for them and in turn, each of us. What a magnificent Peace and Hope!

As Jesus has prepared a place for us by bringing us to God through Him, Have you made a place in your heart for Jesus to live? If not, simply admit your sins to God and ask Jesus to come into your heart as your personal savior. Only God can give us this peace through a personal relationship with His son Jesus Christ. Ask Him to enter your life and forgive your sins.

~Ben Morris

Colossians 1:13-14

Across the street from our house sits a beautiful church on a hillside, on a pretty piece of land with big evergreen trees lining the front. However, the most striking thing about the church for me is a large sign that passers by can see from the road that reads, "THANK YOU GOD!" Every morning as I open the curtains in our bedroom I see this sign and I can't help but smile. It is a wonderful reminder for me to stop and be thankful for all that God has done in my life and the lives of my family.

With this visible reminder across the street, I think of many things each week of which I am thankful. I think of the call my husband and I received over three years ago, just two days before we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary, the call that led us to adopt our son. There is not a day that goes by that we don't thank God for him. With Easter approaching I can't help but reflect on the most impactful, undeserving and dramatic thing God has done in my life, which is sending his son, to die on the cross for my sins, so that I might live. Thank you God, for the gift of your son.

What are you thankful for today?

Pray for the churches in our community who love and encourage us everyday.

~Christy Eige

SMALL GROUPS

DISCOVER THE LIGHT

HOOK:

- Tell of a time you got lost because it was dark.
- If you could salt one or two of your favorite foods, what would they be?

BOOK:

- Matthew 5:13-16. Use two different versions.

LOOK:

- What three metaphors does Jesus use in this text?
- How do these metaphors reflect what it means to be a follower of Jesus?
- How would you describe salt to someone who had never tasted it or seen it?
- What is salt good for?
- What makes salt unusable?
- Read Matthew 6:1-18. How do you see this text being a compliment to Matthew 5:13-16?

TOOK:

- If the disciples are already salt and light, how do these verses refer to the role of the church in society?
- What is your role in society?

~Heath Schnelle

DISCOVER THE RESTORER

HOOK:

- Discuss a time that you were injured or broken?
- Was it hard to give that to Jesus and wait for healing or restoration, or did you want to fix it yourself?

BOOK:

- Luke 6:6-10 & Mark 8:22-30. Use two different versions.
- In both accounts Jesus healed. Jesus restored the man's hand even though He knew He would be judged by the people around Him. Jesus decided to heal in His time even though others wouldn't approve. Jesus also restored sight to the blind man but told him not to tell anyone.

LOOK:

- Why do you think that Jesus told the blind man to go home and not tell anyone?
- How hard do you think it was for Jesus to do the right thing and heal on the Sabbath even when He knew he would be judged?
- Was it easy or hard to give that brokenness to Jesus and to wait on Him? Were you restored in the way you think you should have been restored?

TOOK:

- What is it in your life right now that is causing you to wait for restoration?
- How can you turn that over to Jesus instead of trying to fix it yourself?
- How can you give that to God and wait?

~Gina Duck

DISCOVER THE MERCIFUL KING

HOOK:

- Tell of a time you attended a dinner or party with non-Christians.
- Have you ever known the truth but not shared it?

BOOK:

- Matthew 9:9-13 & John 18:36-37. Use two different versions.

LOOK:

- What did the Pharisees think of Jesus' attendance at Matthew's social function?
- What do you think people would say if you associated with a "wild crowd" in order to be a witness for Christ?
- What did Jesus tell His listeners they needed to learn?
- What will happen if we never reach out to those outside the church? What can you do to remind yourself to view others as they can be, instead of seeing only their faults?
- Is it hard to comprehend the truth that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world? Why or why not? How are some ways that we know the truth but reject it?
- Since Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, how is it different than a kingdom that is of this world? What things make his kingdom attractive to you? How about to people in the world?

TOOK:

- What individuals need your encouragement and support as they seek to minister to those who don't know Christ?
- Finish this statement: This week, I will demonstrate my allegiance to Jesus' Kingdom by...

~Scott Haulsee

DISCOVER THE SERVANT

HOOK:

- Name a time when your feet were really gross.
- If you could only own one pair of shoes, what would they be?

BOOK:

- John 13:1-20 & Philippians 2:5-8. Use two different versions.

LOOK:

- Why did Jesus wash the feet of the disciples?
- Why do you think Peter wanted his hands and head washed, too?
- Reread John 13:13-15. How does this reframe how you see the people around you, their need to be served, and your job to serve them?
- How would you define "humbled" as used in the Philippians passage?
- Jesus gave up "divine privileges." What are some of the privileges that are keeping you from serving? (ex. time, family, freedoms, comforts...)

TOOK:

- This week, be honest with yourself and identify a person or group you can serve outside of the church.
- Pinpoint a privilege that is hindering your daily service and ask God for the peace and ability to release it.

~Sara Thead

DISCOVER THE SACRIFICE

HOOK:

- Tell about a time you were in complete physical darkness (i.e. cave). How did you feel? Why were you there?
- Was there ever a place/room you were not allowed to go? What would happen if you did go in there?

BOOK:

- Matthew 27:45-54. Use two different versions.

LOOK:

- Darkness came over the land from noon until 3pm. Some people say it was a sandstorm or eclipse. What do you think caused the darkness?
- Jesus very loudly yelled out a quote from Psalm 22:1. Was he just quoting scripture here or was there something more significant? What did he mean by this statement?
- After hanging on the cross for six hours, verse 50 tells us Jesus “gave up his spirit.” Is there a bigger meaning here than just death?
- The curtain in verse 51 separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Is there meaning in how the curtain was torn? Read Hebrews 9:1-10. Since there is special order in the temple, what does the torn curtain signify?

TOOK:

- Read Hebrews 9:11-28
- According to verse 22, what is the purpose of Jesus death?
- According to verse 26, what did his death accomplish?
- The centurion made a recognition that we also need to recognize. By this, we show we have faith in who Jesus is. If we have this faith which leads to repentance and baptism, what does verse 28 tell us the result will be?

~Roger Mize

DISCOVER THE RESURRECTION

HOOK:

- Are you a “place for everything and everything in its place” kind of person or an “I’ll put this here now and not be able to find it later” kind of person?
- Have you ever lost something only to have it turn up in an unexpected place?
- Have you ever been really lost and turned up in an unexpected place?

BOOK:

- Luke 24:1-12. Use two different versions.

LOOK:

- What do you think these women talked about on their way to the tomb?
- Why were they “perplexed” to find the tomb empty?
- Reread the angel’s question in Luke 24:5, do you think he’s being a bit snarky? Why/why not?
- “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” If we put this question in our 2020 context, what are some ways that people seek life but ultimately find death?
- Read Romans 6:1-5. According to Paul what must we do to be united with Jesus in his resurrection? (In other words, what must we do to find life among death?) Practically, how can we go about doing the things Paul speaks of?

TOOK:

- This week, spend time reflecting on the areas where you might be seeking life among death.
- Can you say with confidence that you will be united with Christ in a resurrection like His?

~Elliott Gregory

FORFAMILIES



WEEK ONE | Mark 11:1-11

During the time Jesus lived, kings and rulers usually traveled on large, powerful horses. Imagine a parade with its Grand Marshal riding on the biggest, most powerful float in the parade. When kings traveled, people lined the streets, threw flowers, and cheered as they passed. Jesus was even more important than kings and rulers. He was the Son of God, the Savior that people had been waiting thousands of years to see. When the people heard He was coming into Jerusalem, they excitedly lined the streets, ready to greet their king. But He didn't come on a powerful, white horse. And people didn't throw flowers as He passed. Let's read find out what happened instead, when Jesus came into Jerusalem. . . .

ASK:

Which do you think is fancier: a big, pretty white horse or a tiny brown donkey?

Why do you think Jesus decided to ride a donkey into Jerusalem?

What do you think it means that Jesus was humble?

By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a horse, Jesus showed that He is a different kind of King than what most of us would have expected. He didn't come to tell everyone what to do or be more important than everyone else. Jesus was a humble king. Just like good kings bring peace to their kingdoms, Jesus can bring us peace today. No matter what we face this week, we can let God give us an attitude of humility and peace, just like Jesus.

DO: Trace your hands on green construction paper, then cut them out. Pretend your hand prints are palm branches. Wave them around as one person pretends to be Jesus going into Jerusalem.

PRAY: God, help us to have humility and peace this week, no matter what happens. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our King. Amen.

WEEK TWO | Luke 22:7, 13-20

Passover is a special dinner celebrated by the Jewish people that celebrates how God delivered the Israelites from being slaves to Egypt thousands of years ago. In this dinner, each Jewish family used to kill a lamb and then eat it together. The lamb was a symbol that a sacrifice was needed in order to gain God's forgiveness for their sins. The last time Jesus celebrated the Passover dinner with His disciples, He knew it would be His last meal before He died. Jesus wanted to make this last supper very special because He had a big announcement. Jesus announced He'd be giving the lambs a break. He was going to take the place of all the lambs that were sacrificed. Let's read this story from the Bible to learn more about it . . .

ASK:

How do you think Jesus felt knowing that this was going to be His last dinner with His friends before He was going to die?

How is Jesus our Passover lamb?

What do you think it would have been like to be at the Last Supper and hear Jesus say He was going to die?

Jesus was going to take the place of the lamb as the sacrifice for sins. Sin is anything we do that God doesn't want us to do. Aren't you glad we don't have to make animal sacrifice in order to earn God's forgiveness anymore? Instead, we can thank God because Jesus came to earth so we can be forgiven for all the things we do wrong. Jesus is the sacrifice for all of our sins, forever.

DO: Get some bread or crackers and grape juice. Go around the table and ask each person to say one thing God has forgiven them for and one thing they're thankful for. Have communion together and spend some time singing worship music together.

PRAY: Lord, help us to never forget the sacrifice that Jesus made. Help us to live like what Jesus did matters! Amen.

WEEK THREE | Mark 14:32-42

Have you ever faced something you didn't want to do alone? Have you ever faced something you thought you needed help with? Of course! We all have! Even Jesus once felt like he needed some support from His squad! It happened right before Jesus knew He was going to die. He brought His friends to the Garden of Gethsemane so they could have His back. He asked them to pray for Him while he went farther into the garden to pray alone. When He got there, Jesus asked His Father if there was any other way He could save the world, or if He really did have to die. God didn't answer, because this was the only way, and Jesus knew it. When Jesus came back to His friends, He found them sleeping! Let's find out more . . .

ASK:

Can you share about a time when you were so sleepy that you couldn't stay awake?

Why do you think Jesus asked His Father if He could do things in a different way?

Why do you think Jesus decided to follow His Father's plan after all?

Do you think Jesus was upset with His disciples when they fell asleep?

Jesus came back to find the disciples sleeping three times! But Jesus didn't freak out. What did He do? He told them to get up, because His time had come. He accepted that He was going to die for our sins, even though He was perfect and even though it was going to be painful. Jesus chose to do the hard thing because He knew it was God's plan. Just like Jesus, we can do things that are hard (like staying awake to pray), because God will help us.

DO: Have one person leave the room and come back at any time (within two minutes). When they leave, everyone will pretend to be asleep. If the person in the room comes back in and sees anyone moving, they are out! Have fun playing!

PRAY: God, help us remember that even when You seem silent and things don't go our way, You have a plan for us that is far better than anything we could come up with on our own! Amen.

WEEK FOUR | Matthew 5:14-16

Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends. He was usually the brave one of Jesus' crew. Peter was the type of person who would take risks, do daring things, and trust Jesus — even if that meant stepping out of a boat to walk on water. So when Jesus told Peter that Peter was going to deny the friendship he and Jesus had, Peter said, "NO WAY!" Peter was confident that even under pressure he would stand tall and back Jesus up to the end. When Jesus was arrested, Peter followed closely to see what would happen to his friend, but everything changed when people in the crowd began to recognize Peter. Let's read this story from the Bible to find out what happened next . . .

ASK:

Why do you think Peter said he didn't know Jesus?

Has anyone ever pretended like they weren't your friend? How did it make you feel?

Have you ever been so afraid of what might happen if you told the truth that you lied?

Do you think Jesus still loves us after we lie?

Peter lied about knowing Jesus because Peter was afraid of what people would do to him. Peter made a mistake, and he knew it. In our lives today, we might also have times when we're afraid of what people will think of us, so we lie or pretend like we don't know God to keep ourselves safe. But with Jesus, we can be brave and bold about the fact that we know God! And if we mess up, like Peter did, we can always ask God for forgiveness.

DO: Play the game Two Truths and a Lie. Each person will share two things that are true about themselves and one lie (in any order). Everyone has to guess which statement is not true. You might have to be creative to try and trick each other!

PRAY: Father, help us to be brave and stand up for you no matter what. Forgive us for the times we denied you with our actions, words or attitudes. Amen.

WEEK FIVE | Mark 5:24-34

After Jesus was arrested by soldiers, He was bullied and beat up and brought before the temple priest to go on trial and see if He was guilty of breaking the law. Even though He was innocent, they sentenced Jesus to die on a cross. Jesus already knew this would happen — He was born for this very reason.

Jesus came to earth to lay down His life and be the sacrifice for our sins. Even while He was on the cross, Jesus prayed for the Father to forgive the people God had made. He even told one of the two thieves that were being crucified next to Him that the man would join Jesus in paradise when He died. Let's read more about what happened . . .

ASK:

How do you think Jesus felt when he was being bullied by the people He loved?

If Jesus was innocent, why do you think He had to die?

Who did Jesus die for?

Why can we find hope in the death of Jesus?

Jesus died on a cross not because He deserved it, but because He loves us. Jesus would have died on the cross for each and every one of us, even if we were the only people on earth. Isn't that amazing? Let's thank Him for His great love for us.

DO: Use painter's tape to make a cross on a piece of paper or a canvas, then paint over the paper with watercolor paint. When the paint is dry, take the tape off and reveal a beautiful cross picture. Hang it somewhere in your house that will remind you of the amazing sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

PRAY: God, thank you so much for loving us so much that you would sacrifice Your Son for us.. Help us to love one another and share His love with others. Amen.

WEEK SIX | Matthew 28:1-8

Have you ever felt sad and disappointed because you thought something amazing was about to happen, but instead something terrible happened? That's how Jesus' family, friends and

followers probably felt when He died. They thought Jesus was about to save the world and become King . . . but then He died! Jesus died on a Friday. Since no one could do any work on Saturday because it was against the Jewish law, early in the morning on Sunday, some of the women who followed Jesus went to prepare His body for burial. When they got to the tomb where Jesus' body was supposed to be, they found the huge stone that had been placed at the entrance of the tomb had been rolled away! Let's see what happened . . .

ASK:

Have you ever missed a friend or family member that was gone for a long time? How did you feel when you saw them again?

Do you think Jesus' friends believed Him when He said he would come back to life?

How do you think they felt when they found out He was alive?

Why was it important that Jesus came back to life?

The angel told the women who visited the tomb that Jesus wasn't there, because He was alive! How excited do you think those women were when they heard that good news? We can celebrate and share the Good News today too — the best news ever! It's the news that Jesus is alive!

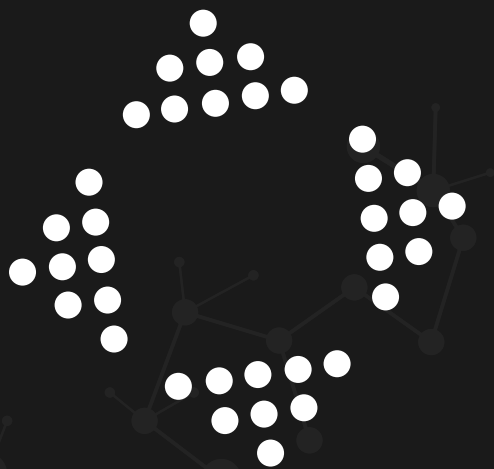
DO: Use blankets and couches or chairs to build a fort and pretend it's the empty tomb. Dance around the empty tomb to celebrate that Jesus is alive! Go inside the empty tomb and sing a song your favorite song of celebration. Then take turns going in and out of the fort and shout "The tomb is empty! Jesus is alive!"

PRAY: God, thank you that we have hope and can have a relationship with you because of Jesus. Thank you that He conquered death and is alive today! Amen.

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