

Six40

DISCIPLESHIP

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DAVID TIECHE *with* STEVE CLIFFORD



WESTGATE CHURCH

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A group of diverse people are gathered outdoors at night, holding hands in a circle. The scene is illuminated by string lights, creating a warm and festive atmosphere. The background shows a brick building and more people in the distance. The text "Before We Get Started" is overlaid in a white, cursive font on a dark, semi-transparent rectangular background.

*Before We  
Get Started*

**Welcome** to this journey of discipleship. We are thrilled that you are joining us. This book will expose you to the teachings of Jesus, challenge you to embrace those teachings as your own, and equip you to live in a way that reflects His love and grace. This book marks the beginning of a lifelong process of becoming more like Jesus.

Before we get started, we want to let you know we wrote this book based on six of WestGate's fundamental beliefs. You may not be sold on any or all of these. We'd be glad to talk with you. In fact, we welcome all questions about faith, life, God, and Jesus that you may have.

You won't find all the answers in this book, but it may serve as a spark for some good discussion with a brother or sister in the Lord.

- Steve

### **Six Westgate Beliefs**

- 1.** God exists and can be known.
- 2.** Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the finest and most complete demonstration of who God is.
- 3.** God's Word—the Bible—is the only accurate and authoritative manuscript for those who want to follow Jesus Christ.
- 4.** Every single person on this planet has an innate worth as an image bearer of God and is invited to the journey of following Jesus Christ.
- 5.** Individuals who embrace Christ by faith are commanded to be a living example of Jesus Christ and to invite all people into the wondrous journey of knowing and loving God.
- 6.** The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. He convicts the world of sin, sanctifies forgiven sinners, empowers Christians to reflect Jesus in all we say and do, and is our abiding Helper, Guide, and Teacher.

# About the Authors

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## David Tieche

David Tieche joined WestGate Church as a teaching pastor in 2014. He served as a teaching pastor, young adults pastor, and youth pastor prior to WestGate, and before that, he was an English teacher in the San Jose Unified School District, teaching Senior English and AP English. A former journalist, David co-authored the *One-Year Devotional for Men* (Zondervan, 2012) and the *Life Application Study Bible Devotional* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2011); he was a lead contributor to the *NIV Men's Devotional Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2007).

He is married to Nicole and is the father of a son, Justus, and a daughter, Jaelle.

## Steve Clifford

Steve Clifford joined WestGate Church as lead pastor in 2001. After receiving his graduate degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, he served as an associate pastor, youth pastor, and worship pastor prior to serving at WestGate. He's been married to his lovely wife, Dana, for more than thirty years and is thrilled to be "Pops" to his beautiful granddaughter and handsome grandson.

Steve and Dana are the architects not only of WestGate Church and its core culture, but of every idea and concept in this book. Steve has been preaching these concepts and ideas to WestGate congregants for the past decade.

## Note to Reader

Although this book is written in David's voice, Steve's leadership, mentorship, and teaching provide the content of this book. In fact, if this were an academic paper, David would be kicked out of school for plagiarism. But Steve gave David permission to copy and paste whole paragraphs from his sermons, so it's all good.



Steve Clifford (left) and David Tieche (right).

# The Genius of Jesus

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**The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. — Brennan Manning**

“The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.”  
— Luke 6:40

## Meet Katie

After graduating from college with a degree in political science, Katie wanted to make a difference. So in addition to working for a local state senator, she served as youth director at a local church. At the Wednesday night high-school group, Katie often talked about the dangers of being self-centered and how Jesus tended to the outcasts of society. Katie mobilized students to volunteer at food pantries, where they sorted onions and potatoes and canned food while singing Disney songs. Every summer, Katie rented several 18-passenger vans and took fifty students to an Indian reservation more than twenty hours away. There, Katie and her students had a blast building houses for the Lakota Sioux Tribe in South Dakota.

And on most Friday nights, Katie was hammered drunk. She had a serious boyfriend with whom she was sexually intimate. When the older sister of one of Katie's students saw her at a club, sloppy drunk and sitting provocatively on her boyfriend's lap, the news spread—as it always does. The elder board called Katie in. When they asked her about the rumor and her lifestyle, Katie's normally bright eyes narrowed.

"I don't see how my personal life has anything to do with my work with these youth," Katie said. "I was hired to lead these students. If you're not happy with the trips I've led and the programs I've developed, then fire me."

Katie made it clear she was offended by the conversation and that, should such a conversation ever happen again, the church could start looking for a new director.

## Meet Joseph

Thirty-four-year-old Joseph works in the financial services industry where he helps people invest their money. He's good at it and likes helping people this way. Joseph has been a Christian for as long as he can remember. He never misses a Sunday, the Bible guides his life, and he nods enthusiastically at the sermons. Joseph doesn't read the Bible at all during the week—but he also doesn't go to bars. Also, Joseph has very strong opinions especially about people whose opinions don't match his.

After services on Sunday, Joseph goes out to lunch with his friends from church just as they have done since high school. Joseph always lets the server know that the tip is dependent on the service. It starts at 15 percent

and goes down from there. Don't greet the table within thirty seconds? The tip's down to 12 percent. Don't quickly refill his drink? Down to 10 percent. Joseph lets servers know when they have lost a percentage point. He thinks it's funny; the servers rarely do.

Joseph's coworkers don't really like him. It's hard to like someone who goes on a tirade about a political issue and calls anyone who disagrees an idiot. Joseph thinks the alienation he feels at work is largely because he stands up for his faith. Rejection comes with following Jesus. Actually, his coworkers don't like him because he's dismissive of people, holier-than-thou, and incredibly judgmental.

## **What Do Katie And Joseph Have in Common?**

Katie and Joseph are failing to take Jesus seriously. They are leaving Jesus out of key areas of their lives.

Katie believes that doing the right things makes her right with God, but she chooses which of Jesus' teachings to emphasize and which to ignore. Her personal life is a mess, but she lives as if God is only interested in the ways she serves the church, as if He doesn't care who she is on the inside when no one is around. Katie says she's a Christian, but her personal life doesn't reflect Christian values. God is interested in faith being lived out in every aspect of a person's life.

**Although Katie claims to follow Jesus, Katie is simply not doing so in critical areas of her life.**

Joseph thinks that believing the right things makes him right with God. He sees faith in Jesus as an intellectual assent to a series of ideas. Joseph believes that a person's faith is only a matter of belief. Joseph says he's a Christian, but his personal life does not reflect Christian values. God is interested in faith being lived out in righteous actions.

**Although Joseph claims to follow Jesus, Joseph is simply not doing so in critical areas of his life.**

## Our Tension

Have you noticed that many so-called followers of Jesus don't really look or talk or act like Him? The nonbelievers around us definitely have! That's one reason why WestGate is committed to making disciples who love Jesus and live like Jesus.

One of the final commandments Jesus gave to His followers is the Great Commission. (Commission is from the prefix co- meaning "common or shared," and mission means "marching orders.") Jesus' marching orders to His disciples are for us as well:

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20*

The word disciple appears 261 times in the New Testament, and it is a word with far-reaching cultural and linguistic implications.

- The Greek word for *disciple* is *mathētēs*, meaning "one who learns." This definition implies a relationship between a Master and an apprentice.
- Being a disciple requires personal humility and teachability: there is a Master to learn from.
- *Disciple* has the same root as *discipline*: being a disciple will mean working hard.
- The term implies a deeply personal and ongoing relationship between the Master and the student. Many of Jesus' first disciples, for instance, adopted His itinerant lifestyle and literally followed Him.
- In the Gospels, *disciple* refers to the people who believed that Jesus was actually who He said He was—the Son of God—and followed Him to learn how best to live.
- After Jesus' resurrection, *disciple* shifted slightly to mean anyone who

joined the circle of first Christians and devoted themselves to living out the truth and teachings of Jesus.

- Jesus' call to discipleship was extreme. He called all who believed in Him to recast their inner lives (Luke 11:1) and to care for others even if doing so cost them their possessions, career, and family (Mark 10:28; Luke 14:26, 33); even if doing so cost them their lives (Mark 8:34–35; Luke 14:27).
- In first-century Jewish culture, a disciple not only wanted to learn what the Master knew, but to become what the Master was. Jesus put it this way: *“The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher”* (Luke 6:40).

## Our Tension

At WestGate, Luke 6:40 has been a mantra for more than a decade. We want to be Six40 Disciples, followers of Jesus who are fully trained and have become more like our Teacher.

At WestGate, we want to live as fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, becoming more and more like Him every day. We want to study Jesus' words and dig deep spiritual truths that can transform our lives. We want to think about things the way Jesus thinks about them. We want to speak to people the way Jesus would speak to them. We want to love Jesus and live like Jesus. And we want to do this together in community.

Of course we fail at this.

All. The. Time.

But that's OK because being a disciple doesn't mean you never fail. It means you never stop training and trying; it means you never give up. After all, a disciple has decided that the most important thing in life is to learn how to do what Jesus says to do. Furthermore, a disciple is not a person who simply knows a lot of things or has life under control. In fact, disciples are constantly revising their affairs in order to carry through on their decision to follow Jesus.

A photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a person wearing a dark jacket, blue jeans, and a red backpack is walking from left to right. They are carrying a young child on their shoulders. The child is wearing a bright yellow jacket and a blue hat. The background shows a building with a grey stone facade. On the left, there is a doorway with a sign that reads "EL CORTE MILITAR". To the right, there is a glass display case for "Freddo Freddo" and a sign above it that says "Souvenirs". The overall lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting an overcast day or a shaded area of the street.

**“ We want to be  
Six40 Disciples,  
followers of  
Jesus who are  
fully trained and  
have become  
more like our  
Teacher.”**

# The Genius of Jesus

But why should we follow Jesus? The vigorous process of being a disciple of Jesus seems to demand so much. Why go through with that?

Jesus answers that: “I have come that you might have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

The genius of Jesus is that His call to discipleship actually gives us everything that we’re searching for in life. Jesus is calling us not to give up the life we’ve always wanted, but to find the life we’ve always wanted.

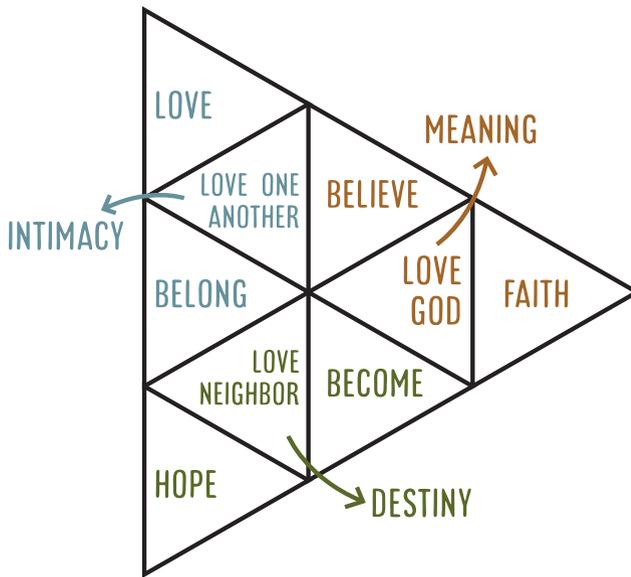
Oh, God will not just give you what you want. After all, sometimes the things we think we want don’t turn out to be very good for us.

Think about what you wanted when you were nine years old. The other day my nine-year-old son came up to me and asked me for ninja throwing knives. He promised he’d only throw them at our Japanese plum tree outside—and not at his sister. Later, he asked me how much a flamethrower cost. He was saving his allowance to buy one. The point is, what my son thinks will make him happy could end up killing him and likely destroying our neighbor’s house.

And it’s not just nine-year-olds. Imagine if you had gotten everything you really wanted when you were 15. I would be driving a Ferrari and married to Mariah Carey with a pet Tiger in a Shack. (Extra points if you got that reference to the childhood game M.A.S.H.) The point is, I was dazzlingly foolish when I was 15. And so were you.

But, going further, now imagine if you got everything you really wanted when you were 25. And my mentors (all of whom are awesome older men) tell me that when I’m 50, I’ll look back at myself in my current state now and think of myself as just as ignorant as I do looking back to when I was 25.

If we follow Jesus and do what He says, life will be an amazing adventure filled with ups and downs, but Jesus promises that along the way we’ll get three things: Meaning. Destiny. Intimacy. Think about Katie and Joseph: both wanted to do something significant with their lives, both were thirsty for true friendship and intimacy, and both wanted to use their unique God-given talents. Meaning, destiny, and intimacy are what we human beings most need and want. And that’s what Jesus is offering.



In this book, we'll explore what Jesus teaches and what He means when He calls us to love God. We have chapters on what Jesus taught and modeled about loving God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

## Meaning = Love God

*Meaning in this life is found by knowing and loving God in a personal way.*

### 1. Jesus Offers Meaning

**Big Question: Why am I here? What was I made for? How do human beings find meaning in life?**

#### **Matthew 22:34-38**

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "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 commandment."*

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychologist born in 1905. He was captured by the Nazis and put in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. He survived and later wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*. The most-read book about the Holocaust and one of the top 10 most influential books of the 20th century, it attempted to answer the question "How can you find a reason to live in the middle of the Holocaust?"

Frankl wrote, "Our main motivation for living is to find meaning in life. Without meaning, men will wither and die."

Frankl added, "He who has a 'why' to live can deal with almost anything." But where do we find a why? Where do we find meaning?

Jesus has the answer to that.

One time in the New Testament, a teacher of the Jewish law asked Jesus, "What is the most important commandment?" In other words, "What is the most important thing that God wants us to do?" Or, even simpler, "What is the meaning of life?"

For centuries, the Jewish people had had a clear answer. From their 613 laws and regulations, the Israelites clearly identified one as the most important, and every parent would have taught it to their child. Found in Deuteronomy 6, the passage is affectionately known by Jewish people even today as the *Shema* (pronounced "schmah"). Here it is:

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-9 The Shema**

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

So, when asked which commandment was the most important, Jesus quotes the *Shema*.

### **Matthew 22:37-38**

*Jesus replied: "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 commandment.”*

This teacher did not ask Jesus a trick question. Jesus’ answer, though, would let the religious leaders in Jerusalem know whether or not this country preacher was orthodox. *Does He get it? Is He with us?* Yes, He did, and, yes, He was.

Jesus says the most important commandment was to love God with all we are. Put differently, the ultimate meaning in life is found in having a vibrant relationship with God that engages your heart, your strength, your soul, and your mind.

## Destiny = Love Your Neighbor

*God has given you unique opportunities to show His love to the world by sharing His message of hope in Jesus Christ and by living a life of generosity toward those in need.*

### 2. Jesus Offers Destiny

**Big Question: What is my role—my unique part—in human history?**

#### **Matthew 22:34-40**

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘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 commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

Quick quiz. Which movie franchise has made the most money in the history of film? What’d you guess? *Batman? Star Wars? Lord of the Rings? The Hunger Games?* All good guesses. Let me give you the top three.

*Harry Potter  
James Bond  
Iron Man*

Now, in case you're Amish and haven't heard about Iron Man, the story centers around an unlikely hero named Tony Stark. This brilliant man invents. He builds. He's a visionary. In short, he's a genius. And that genius nets him billions of dollars.

Tony Stark's genius is the first reason he is cool. We as a culture love geniuses. We love professional sports geniuses. We love musical geniuses. We love performer geniuses. And I live in Silicon Valley, a place that highly rewards geniuses in the area of technology and innovation.

Now, for most of my life, I assumed that geniuses are very rare in this world. Like people who are seven feet tall. Or people who like the music of Neil Diamond.

But here's a thought: What if everyone is a genius? What if everyone is a genius but perhaps in an area that isn't highly regarded or even noticed?

Now, I imagine some of you are scoffing at that idea. Perhaps you're thinking, "Oh, you're one of those people who thinks everyone should get a trophy even if they finish in twelfth place." Or perhaps you think I'm vastly overestimating the potential of the human race, especially in light of the number of Internet searches for cat videos. Or perhaps the idea that you yourself are a genius seems ludicrous because not only do you not remember most of eighth-grade algebra, but often you can't remember why walked into the room.

But stay with me.

I've worked with teenagers for a dozen years now, and I've spoken at literally hundreds of high schools. It has always bothered me that there was no way to reward or formally acknowledge that many of the students I met were extremely gifted at things for which there was no report card.

Like Monica, whose father was severely injured in an accident at work. She went to high school and worked two jobs to help support her family and pay medical bills. And she managed to get into UCLA. I'd like to give her an A for resiliency and resourcefulness.

Or Julian, an unstoppable locomotive of laughter and optimism, brightened every class he was in with his sheer joy. He was a "cliq-ue-slider," able to

relate to every sort of student of every social level. He made everyone feel better when he was around. I'd like to give him an A for his passion for people.

Or Brittany. She always seemed to be walking alongside someone going through a tough time. At one point, her friend was dealing with self-harm, so Brittany took a purple Sharpie and drew a butterfly on her friend's wrist and an identical one on her own. Brittany told her friend, "Now, when you want to cut, remember, you can't kill the butterfly. Call me instead, and I'll get you help. Let's just take it day by day until this butterfly fades, okay?" I'd like to give Brittany an A for creative compassion.

I think these gifts of resiliency, resourcefulness, optimism, joy, passion for people, and creative compassion are exceptional. They can't be monetized. You don't get rich by being nice to people who are usually ignored. There's no TV show called "America's Next Top Compassionate Friend." But I think there's a level of exceptional genius in that.

What if every single person has been given an A gift? And what if part of our purpose is to discover what that A gift is, and then use it for the benefit of others?

Now, I know that some people have been blessed with an A+ gift. And some rare individuals have multiple A+ gifts. But it does no good to compare yourself to other people and their gifts. At the end of my life, God will not ask me, "Why didn't you win *Dancing with the Stars*?" That's not the skill set I have. (Besides, God hates *Dancing with the Stars*...)

But what if? What if every single person alive has an A gift? What if everyone on earth is a genius at something? What if everyone has a little Tony Stark in them?

But wait. What if it's worse than that? What if everyone has a little Tony Stark in them? I'm not talking about the genius part. I'm talking about the incredibly selfish part.

See, Tony Stark is a self-absorbed, egotistical mess of a human being. In the comic books, Stark is a narcissistic alcoholic who comes within millimeters of destroying his life.

“ Jesus is saying,  
‘Use your genius  
to help people.  
This is your  
destiny in the  
world—and  
doing so will  
make you  
a hero.’”



What if, in addition to being geniuses, we're also in danger of simply living our lives with the primary goal of getting what we want? What if the real danger is not that we're *not* geniuses, but that we are geniuses who waste that genius because we never use it to help other people?

What if we just continue on to live quiet, self-absorbed lives?

This is what Jesus is—in part—trying to rescue us from. And most of us—down somewhere in our core—know that our lives are supposed to matter. We have an innate need to do something of value with our lives. In the same verse we looked at regarding the question of meaning, Jesus also addresses the question of individual purpose.

### **Matthew 22:37-40**

*Jesus replied: "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 commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Now, Jesus is not the first person to speak these two commands, but He is the first one to put them together. In essence, Jesus offers a hugely important clarification as He, in effect, changes the words to the national anthem. And He does so right in front of the religious teachers of the day.

Jesus is saying that it's not merely enough to love God. Why? Because if you really love someone, you will love what that person loves. And what God loves the most is people, so Jesus says if you want to please God, if you want to love God, if you want to know God better, then you have to love people.

Jesus' words are revolutionary. He says that you can't really love God unless you love that which He loves: people. Jesus says this is the most important thing: Love God and love others.

Now, Jesus' words may seem like no big deal to us because we've said, "Love God and love your neighbor" all along. But Jesus would have shocked the religious leaders by saying, essentially, that loving God is only part of the equation. Jesus teaches, "If you truly love God, that love for Him will always lead to an expression of love for other people. And if you say you love God but you don't begin to love people more, you're just playing at religion."

**Twitterable: Jesus is saying, “Use your genius to help people. This is your destiny in the world—and doing so will make you a hero.”**

One of my favorite authors, Frederick Buechner, once wrote, “To find your meaning, just look to where your greatest passion meets the world’s greatest need.”

For example, for years Bono was a rock star genius with the band U2. But what made him a hero was his willingness to speak up for the world’s poor. Bill Gates was a genius when he built Microsoft. But what made him a hero was his willingness to use his considerable resources to tackle some of the world’s biggest problems, like disease in Africa.

What makes Bono and Bill Gates and Tony Stark interesting is that they’re geniuses. But what makes them heroes is their decision to make the world a better place.

So find out what you’re good at. And then use that gift to help other people. And then, maybe you’ll turn into a real-life superhero. Just like Jesus.

Destiny = Love Your Neighbor

God has given you unique opportunities to show His love to the world by sharing His message of hope in Jesus Christ and by living a life of generosity toward those in need.

## **Intimacy = Love One Another**

*True intimacy comes when you are fully known and fully loved. Having experienced that love from God, Christians attempt to create communities where that same love is embodied and lived out among them.*

### **3. Jesus Offers Intimacy**

**Big Question: Is it possible for me to be truly known and truly loved despite my failings and weaknesses?**

**John 13:34-35**

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you*

*must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

In our modern world, people are lonelier and more disconnected from each other than ever, making them really thirsty for community. The idea of being a part of an authentic, dynamic, I-am-devoted-to-you-come-hell-or-high-water community appeals to everyone. *But where can I find it? And why is it so rare?*

God created us human beings to be part of a community. That’s why solitary confinement is such a harsh punishment. We are social creatures. We need community. You might even say we’re hardwired for it.

In his book *The Meaning of Marriage*, author and speaker Tim Keller wrote the following:

To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.

And being fully known and truly loved is exactly what Jesus is offering to His disciples—and to us. Now, community can be very, very hard work. But anything worth anything is hard work.

Consider the first community of Jesus-followers. Jesus invited His first followers to form *ecclesia*, the Greek word for “gathering.” Then Jesus taught how to make sure those gatherings—those communities—were healthy and life-giving. Jesus said things like “Forgive one another even when it’s tough.” And “If you want to be important, serve one another.” And “Take care of each other’s needs.”

In John 13:34, right before He is about to be arrested and crucified, Jesus gathers His closest followers together around a meal. At His last meal, mere hours before He would be tortured and killed, Jesus gives His final instructions:

**John 13:34-35**

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you*

*must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*"

Jesus has told the disciples to love the Lord completely, with all their mind, heart, and strength. He has told them to love their neighbors compassionately in ways that they themselves would want to be loved and cared for. And then Jesus tells His disciples to love one another, to love those people who are members of this amazing community of disciples. Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you."

Then, just hours later, sinless Jesus would show His disciples—and the world—the full extent of His love by dying on a cross to pay the penalty of their sin. And that is the kind of love that Jesus wants His disciples—in the first century and the twenty-first—to exhibit. That kind of radical love for one another.

Intimacy = Love One Another

True intimacy comes when we are fully known *and* fully loved. Having experienced that love from God, Christians form communities where that same love is embodied and lived out.

In the following chapters, we will dive deeper into each of these three commands to love.

The genius of Jesus is that He is calling us to what we most deeply want.



# Love God with all Your Heart

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**Every Christian would agree that a man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God.**

— C. S. Lewis

*"The days are coming,"  
declares the Lord,  
"when I will make a new  
covenant  
with the people of Israel  
and with the people of Judah.  
It will not be like the  
covenant  
I made with their ancestors  
when I took them by the  
hand  
to lead them out of Egypt,  
because they broke my  
covenant,*

*though I was a husband to  
them,"  
declares the Lord.  
"This is the covenant I will  
make with the people of  
Israel  
after that time," declares the  
Lord.  
"I will put my law in their  
minds  
and write it on their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people."  
— Jeremiah 33:31-33*

## Baby Jordan

During the 1992 NBA draft, the Miami Heat used its twelfth overall pick to select USC player Harold Miner. Miner was a standout player at USC, and his 6'6" frame, shaved bald head, and spectacular dunking ability earned him the nickname Baby Jordan, in reference to fellow high-flyer and NBA legend Michael Jordan. When Miner dunked, he sort of looked like Michael, so people assumed Miner would be a star NBA player.

Miner did win the Slam Dunk Contest twice, but after four years, Miner averaged 3.2 points a game. He was traded to the Toronto Raptors but failed the physical, and with that, his pro career ended.

The point is this: just because something looks like the real thing doesn't mean it is.

In Luke 6:40, Jesus drives home this same idea. Jesus says that His disciples must not be Baby Jordans who bear only a superficial resemblance to their Master. Jesus says, "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher." Jesus wants His disciples to not just look and feel and act like Him but actually, down to their core, be just like Him. All the way down to the bottom.

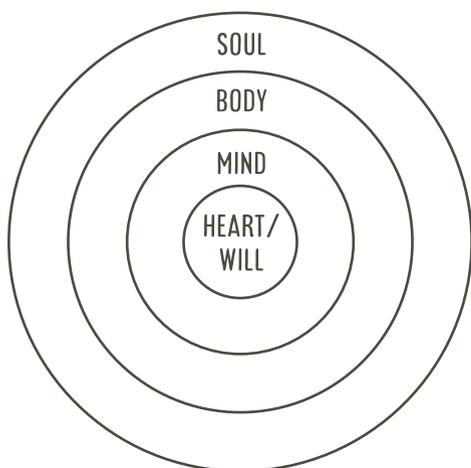


# Loving God

When Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, tells us that the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and then follows that sentence with, “This is the first and greatest commandment”—well, it’s probably important to have a good working definition of some key words.

This diagram was developed by philosopher Dallas Willard. He wanted to help people who made intentional decisions to follow Jesus learn about activities that aid spiritual transformation into the likeness of Christ. This diagram was published in Willard’s book *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (NavPress, 2002).





## **Bull's-Eye**

There, in the bull's-eye, you'll notice that the heart—the will—is at the center of everything that we do. The Greeks called the heart “the seat of the affections.” That's a good term, for the heart is where emotions, visions, and desires are born out of what we want and love the most. The heart is the source of our attitudes and motives.

## **Mind**

Your mind is the site of the ideas and values that drive your life. The mind contains what we actually believe about life, and those beliefs guide our actions. The mind also filters information that comes our way, keeping some and discarding the rest. If you don't believe something, you won't act as though it's true. Conversely, if you deeply believe something to be true, you will begin to change the way you behave.

## **Body/Strength**

The body is the means by which I can follow through on the mind's good intention or noble idea and act on achieving my heart's desire or living out my core beliefs. The body enables me to make the effort, design the plan, and focus my energy to go after the thing my heart most loves and the things my mind most strongly believes to be true.

## **Soul**

The soul is the integrated system that includes your heart, your mind, and your body. Just like a car has many systems (the electrical system, the steering wheel, the engine) that must work together, so it is with your soul. As C. S. Lewis noted, “You are not a body with a soul; you are a soul with a body.”

Again, what you focus on with your mind and what you use your body and strength to get is determined by what's at the core of you: by your heart. This chapter and the next two will flesh out what it means to love God with our heart, our mind, and our strength.

# What does the Bible say about the heart?

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Philosophers, poets, musicians, and songwriters have been attempting for millennia to describe the curious and wonderful workings of our hearts. The Bible offers its divine perspective with its emphasis on the importance of the heart, its centrality to the person each of us is, and its being the home of our motives—and motives matter to God.

Proverbs 27:19 says, “As water reflects the face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.”

Jesus said, “For from within, out of people’s hearts, evil thoughts come, sexual immorality comes, theft, murder, adultery, that the heart is said to be deep waters and capable of great evil” (Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21).

Proverbs 4:23 says, “From the heart everything will flow” and calls us to guard it well.

In 1 Samuel 16 the prophet Samuel speaks God’s truth when he says that people look at the outside, but God looks into our hearts—and that can be good news or bad.

God had rejected King Saul and told Samuel He had chosen a new king from among the sons of Jesse. When Samuel went to Jesse’s home and saw the eldest son—huge, muscular, handsome—Samuel thought to himself, “This guy has got to be who the Lord has in mind.” But the Lord said, “You look on the outside, Samuel, but I see into the heart of people.” And it was youngest of Jesse’s sons—a red-haired firecracker named David—whom God chose to Israel’s next king.

Yes, the heart matters.

## Greek Etymology

# Getting to the Root

### What does the word *heart* mean in the Bible?

The word *heart* (Hebrew *lebab/leb* and Greek *kardia*) appears in the Bible more than 1,000 times. Although the word *heart* does denote the actual organ that beats inside a person's rib cage, it also means much, much more.

Old Testament scholars Dr. Tremper Longman (author of an Old Testament dictionary) and Dr. Bruce K. Waltke (writer of a two-volume commentary on Proverbs) studied the Hebrew use of the word *heart*. They concluded that the best English translation for the word *heart* is not *emotions*, but rather *motives*. Longman explained that the Hebrew word *heart* is distinct from the will, the mind, and the emotions. In fact, it is the driving force for all three.

Your heart is what motivates you. It determines what you will pursue and invest in during your life. Your heart guides the focus of your mind and the emotions of love or hate. It also informs your desires and directs your will.

Some people, for example, are willing to lose power in order to have people like them. But other people don't mind losing relationships as long as they maintain or gain power. These two types of people have different hearts and therefore entirely different motives.

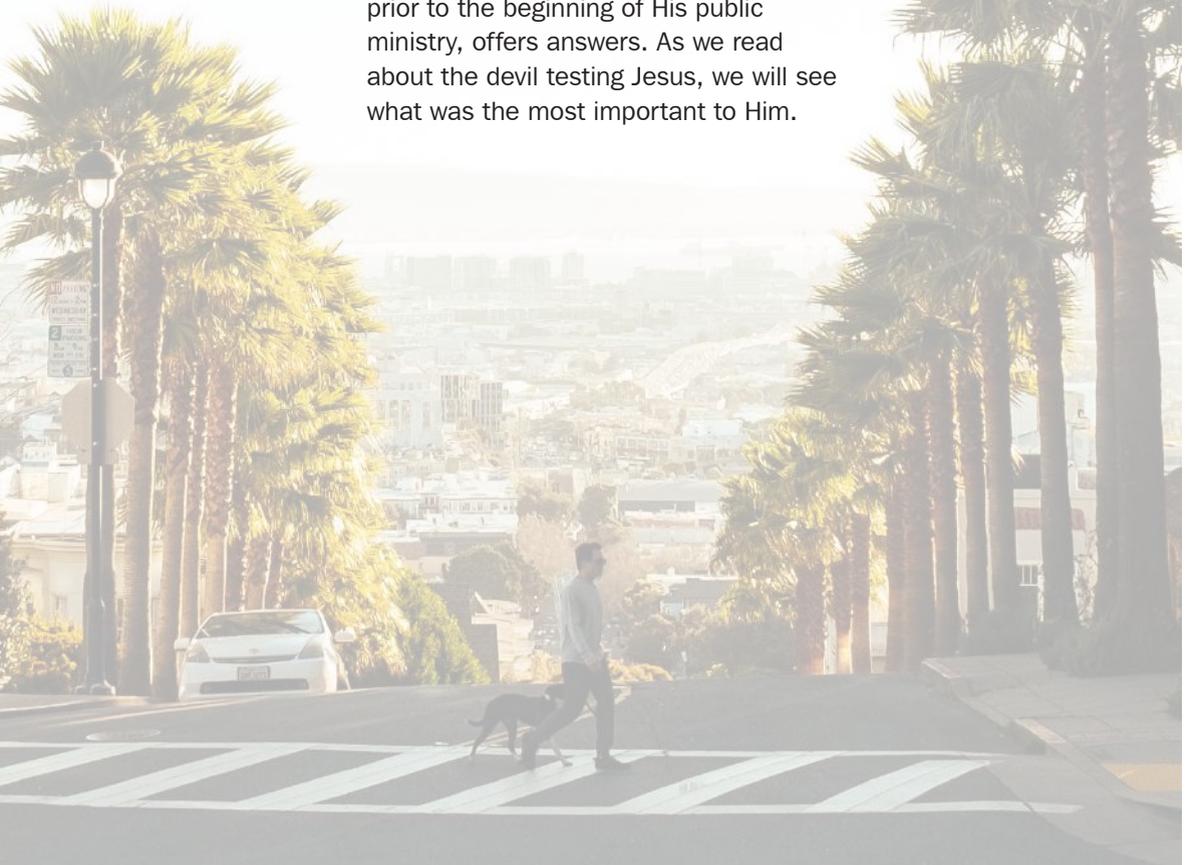
Different hearts—different motives—are evident in a stingy person and a generous person. A stingy person's central motives are based what money can give them (comfort, status, etc.). Or if you are deeply offended when someone insults you, your central motive in life—your heart—may be your reputation and standing in society.

Waltke noted that the Bible constantly asks us to examine our heart. So, in obedience, ask yourself these questions: What are you really after? What is your highest goal? What gives your life meaning? What do you most want in this life? Where is your heart... really?

# What were Jesus' motives?

If we're going to be Six40 Disciples—if we want to follow Jesus' example—we might benefit from answers to questions like these: What can we discover about Jesus' motives? Why did He do what He did? What about His example can we follow? Can His motives be our motives? Perhaps the foundational question is “What was Jesus' main reason or motive for coming to earth?”

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, prior to the beginning of His public ministry, offers answers. As we read about the devil testing Jesus, we will see what was the most important to Him.



# Facing Temptation

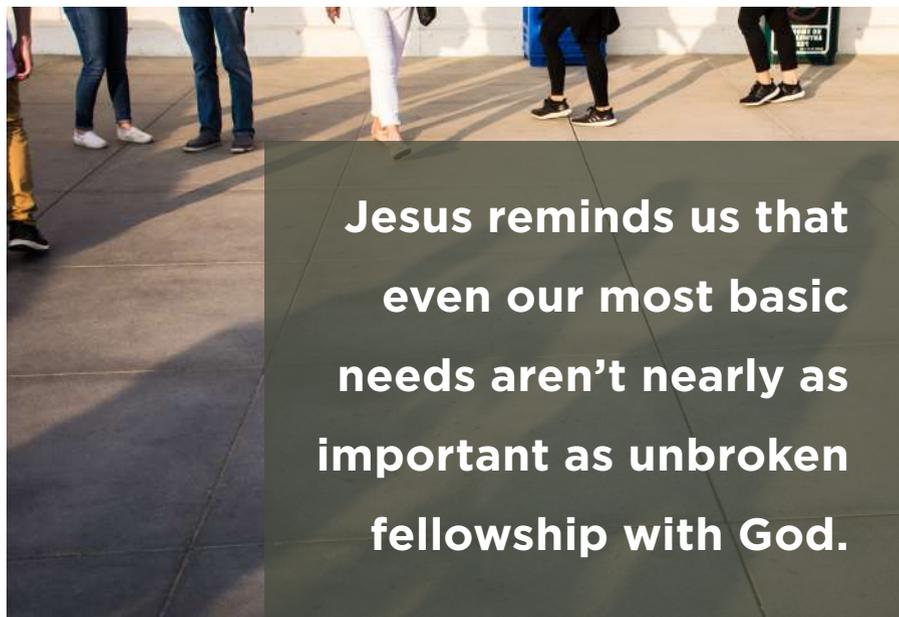
## What does the word *heart* mean in the Bible?

In Matthew 4, we read that the Holy Spirit leads Jesus out into the Judean desert to be tested by Satan. And that is exactly what happens: Satan lays out three specific temptations in an attempt to trap Jesus. The devil offers to make a trade with Jesus, and in each case, Jesus refuses.

Now, if I offer you \$1,000,000 for a piece of art in your home and you say no, that means one of two things: either the piece of art is worth more than that amount, or you don't value the money as much as the piece of art. Whatever your answer, I will learn what you value most.

If we are going to be Six40 Disciples, we have to examine how Jesus was tempted: What did Satan offer Jesus? What would Jesus have had to give up? What choice did Jesus make?

Jesus' choices will reveal His motives and His heart—and we'll learn from Jesus how to withstand temptation.



# Temptation 1: Have Something

The first temptation by Satan happens rather soon in the account:

*After fasting forty days and forty nights, [Jesus] was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” (Matthew 4:2-3)*

Don't you just love the Bible? It is so real-life: after not eating for forty days, Jesus was hungry. And Satan invites Him to eat some bread. Now, there is nothing inherently sinful about eating bread. But in this temptation, we see that something bigger is happening. Jesus is fasting in order to develop a richer fellowship with His Father.

In this temptation, Satan tempted Jesus to meet a legitimate God-given need—the need for food—in a way that was not pleasing to God. To get or have something, but do it in a way that you're swapping something great (union with God) for something good (anything else).

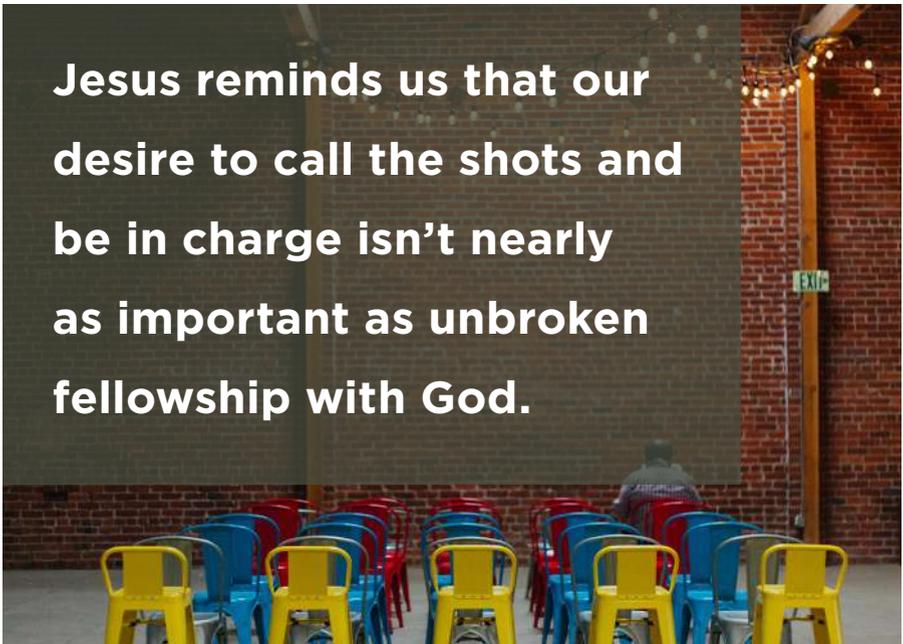
Jesus responds, using Scripture.

*“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4)*

While the Israelites were wandering around the desert after escaping Egypt, God supernaturally fed the thousands of Hebrew people by causing bread to literally fall from heaven. In the verse Jesus quotes, Moses was reminding his people that God is the Source of all nourishment and that being in relationship with God is even more important than food.

At times you and I will face the option of meeting a natural, God-given desire in a way that doesn't honor Him.

Jesus reminds us in this temptation that even our most basic needs aren't nearly as important as unbroken fellowship with God. Jesus refuses to make this trade.



**Jesus reminds us that our desire to call the shots and be in charge isn't nearly as important as unbroken fellowship with God.**

## **Temptation 2: Be Something**

After failing with his first temptation, Satan transports Jesus to Jerusalem to the highest point of the temple and says, "Jump off!" Satan then goes so far as to quote a psalm:

*"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"*

This sounds good. After all, Jesus is God's Son, and what Father wouldn't do anything to protect His Son? But look again, this time more closely, at what Satan is asking.

When you do something and then demand that God help you, who is the boss? Who's telling whom what to do? Satan tempts Jesus to manipulate God rather than cooperate with God.

So Jesus rebuffs Satan and says:

*“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

Jesus basically says, “I am not willing to do whatever I want and presume that God will go along with it. Instead, I will listen for God’s instructions and look to Him for my marching orders.”

At times you and I will face the temptation to live our lives the way we want, act on our own desires, pursue our own dreams, and never even consider what the Lord might want us to do. Our temptation is to live as though what we want for ourselves and what God wants for us is always the same. And that’s just folly.

In this temptation, Jesus reminds us that our desire to call the shots and be in charge isn’t nearly as important as unbroken fellowship with God.

Jesus refuses to make this trade.

**Jesus shows  
us here that  
success is not  
as important  
as unbroken  
fellowship with  
the Father.**



## Temptation 3: Do Something

Satan's final temptation of Jesus may have been the most difficult for our Lord to endure. Satan takes Jesus to a very high mountain, shows Him the splendor of the world's kingdoms, and tries to make a deal. "I'll give You all this," Satan says. "All You need to do is bow down and worship me." Awhile ago, I read a short story about a poet who imagined what this interaction might have looked like. This creative imagining is not in the Bible, but it still might be helpful.

Satan shows Jesus what the world would look like if Jesus were in control, if He were the supreme Ruler who had authority over every political realm. Jesus sees the peace, prosperity, goodness, and fairness that would characterize His reign. Then, slowly, like a fire burning a piece of parchment, Satan removes that vision and shows Jesus the result of horrid leaders who are guided by their selfish ambition and avarice. Jesus sees the wars and violent deaths on battlefields throughout history. He sees little children starving to death because of corrupt governments. He sees slavery. He sees the gas chambers of the Holocaust. He sees all the endless, needless human misery.

"You can stop all this agony and suffering," Satan whispers to Jesus. "You can be King. I'll make it happen. I'll turn over power to You. Just bow down."

This third temptation is common to anyone with a burning sense that the world is *not* how it should be. Strong leaders and Type A perfectionists also encounter this temptation, as do people who know that things could – and must! – be better.

The third temptation Jesus faces is to do something very good by using means that displease or dishonor God; to do something bad to accomplish something good; to take a moral shortcut. Jesus again combats this temptation with Scripture:

*"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

At times in our lives, we may have a chance for great success, an opportunity to make significant progress toward something very important, but to succeed we will have to take a moral shortcut. You could land that account, but you'd have to mislead the client. You could move into a position of

greater responsibilities and leadership, but you'll have to sacrifice a little bit of your integrity to land the position. You'll gain influence and favor, but you'll have to leave a little bit of your values behind.

One lesson Jesus teaches here is that the end never justifies the means.

Jesus is also showing us here that no success is as important as unbroken fellowship with the Father.

## **In Summary: Jesus' Motives**

This desert exchange between Jesus and Satan makes a monumental point about our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Specifically, we see that if we trade unbroken fellowship with the Father for all the kingdoms of the world, we get neither. But if we are willing to trade all the kingdoms of the world for unbroken fellowship with the Father, we get both.

Put another way:

Everything – God = Nothing

Nothing + God = Everything

Jesus did not stand strong against Satan's temptations because He had done a careful economic analysis of the options. Jesus wasn't looking for the action that would yield the highest return on His investment. Jesus simply would not trade His unbroken fellowship with His Father for anything Satan offered.

This Matthew 4 exchange between Jesus and Satan reveals Jesus' highest priority: unbroken fellowship with His Father.



## HEY, STEVE!

I hear all this talk about “loving” God. Isn’t it kind of weird to talk about God like you’d talk about a girlfriend or something?

In December of 1978, I was one of several leaders/chaperones who took several hundred high school students from the Dallas area to Colorado for a week. I was assigned bus, got on, and ended up sitting next to another leader, a young woman named Dana. I spent the entire 20-hour bus ride with this girl. By the time I got off the bus the next day, I knew to the core of me that I was going to do whatever I needed to do to get to know this girl.

### **My Heart**

During that bus ride my heart—my affections—entirely changed. Dana completely captured my heart, the seat of my affections.

### **My Mind**

Because Dana had captured my affections, I naturally began to think about her. Constantly. She occupied more real estate in my brain than anything else. I don’t know what I’d been thinking about before that bus ride, but Dana displaced all of that. I began plotting and planning ways I could get time with her.

### **My Body**

These captured affections and my preoccupied mind began to impact my actions. I began changing what I was doing. First, I immediately broke up with my girlfriend of eight months: “It’s not you, it’s me,” I assured her. I also started driving up and down Dana’s street, hoping she would be outside. I also knew her brother and sister, and if they were outside, I could strike up a conversation and find out what Dana was doing. Long story short, I ended up marrying Dana.

## **A No-Brainer**

Now, I want you to know that when I made a ton of changes in my life after that bus ride, I did so gladly. This wasn't a reluctant, mopey kind of change. This was a no-brainer. I didn't mourn the loss of my freedom, or that other girl, or pine for the lost hours I now spent around Dana. Come on. And that's how real relationships—and real love—work.

## **Jesus Is Crazy for You**

It seems strange that sometimes we don't think about God's love in terms of a relationship. Jesus Himself described humanity's relationship with God as Father/Child and Groom/Bride. In fact, Jesus came to earth to establish for us the possibility of a personal relationship with God Himself.

But we have a problem. For God to be in relationship with anyone, that person must be without sin. So is the relationship doomed before it even begins? No, because when Love is strong, it makes a way.

And Jesus is the way: He paid the debt that we could never pay so that we could have the relationship with Holy God that would otherwise be impossible.

But we can either accept or spurn this offer of deep love. If you reject the offer, the relationship cannot develop. Our part is to respond to God and His offer of a relationship.

And—just as in marriage—if we choose to be in relationship with God, we need to be all in, 100 percent, and free with grace and forgiveness.

If we're not all in, we're straddling a barbed wire fence. And I know people like that: they do what they want on Saturday night and then come to church Sunday morning. But they don't—they can't—really enjoy either side. They're wracked with guilt on Sunday morning after having that vague sense of “This isn't right” on Saturday night.

Real relationships work only when we commit to throwing our legs over the barbed wire fence and getting all on this side: “I am Yours. For better or worse. For richer or poorer. In sickness and in health. I'm in.” That's what it's about.

After all, that's what Jesus did for you.

# Why should I love God that much?

A little while ago, a young man who began attending our church was very interested in religion, but—being a young man—was vastly more interested in members of the opposite sex.

As we talked about the Bible and he described his sexual behavior, our conversation shifted. He came to properly understand that following Jesus would require something of his sexual behavior. He would have to stop treating women like disposable cell phones and using their sexuality for his own enjoyment.

I explained that the Bible is quite clear that this approach to women and sex and relationships is destructive. I explained how God's love is a covenant, and a covenant says, "I'm never out of here because I love you."

I said to this young man,

"That's the kind of love you're looking for. Someone who sees the true you— and loves you anyway."

This young man, however, was outgoing, pretty wealthy, and really handsome. The idea of giving up all that female sexual attention must have seemed like Jesus was asking him to give up a winning lottery ticket. He looked at me, unfazed, and said, "Why should I give up what I have for God? Why should I love God that much?"

I didn't have a chance to answer that question. But it haunted me.

Why should someone give up his will? Why should someone change elements of her life that she likes? Why try to obey the Bible? Why try to live like Jesus? Why?

Because of the cross. Because of God's love for you.

# The Rattlesnake

At the time, the church where I was working was located at the edge of a large field, and one summer, developers started building homes at the far south end of the field, furthest away from us. This agitation drove a whole slew of animals across the field toward our church, presumably to escape the buildings and loud machines.

Soon, we started seeing a lot more field mice.  
And grasshoppers.  
And rattlesnakes.  
Yes, rattlesnakes.

In the morning, they would come out onto the black asphalt to sun themselves, and then when the noonday sun got too hot, they'd crawl under something for the shade.

One time, our facility guy, a buff college student named Christian, was moving a traffic cone, and there was a nice, thick 5-foot rattler inside. Good thing Christian was athletic. Another time, I walked out to my car in the afternoon, and as I reversed I felt a bump. A rattler had curled up behind my front tire to cool off. Our facility guys killed 5 snakes in less than a week. Needless to say, it was an invasion. And it was more than a little unnerving.

And after that conversation with the young man, as I went to sleep that night, I had a dream.

In my dream, I was walking out toward my car. My son Justus, who was 7 at the time, was with me. As he was getting into the car, I realized a very large rattlesnake was poised right beneath the vehicle. As the snake rattled and drew back to strike my son's leg, I put out my forearm. The snake bit me. I could see the yellow-green drops of venom. The snake struck me again on my other arm. I pushed my son to get him out of the way. The snake struck at my son's leg, but I put my hand in front of it, and it bit my wrist instead. And then, to my horror, it struck my son's ankle.

In my dream, I realized that my son was too small, too little to withstand a bite of venom. I screamed for help, and one of the facility guys (my friend Christian) came running, and killed the snake with a shovel. Then he loaded me into his white truck, put my crying son next to me, and sped off toward the nearest hospital.

I looked at my arms, and could see the poison spreading, like an infection, through my veins. It was heading toward my heart. I knew I was going to die from the hemotoxin – I watched as it seeped up my arms toward my chest. And in my dream I felt sheer terror because I realized that even the one bite from the snake would kill my son.

I pleaded for Christian to drive faster. Christian screeched into the ER roundabout, where paramedics stood waiting.

“Help my son!” I cried. “Help him first. Get him the anti-venom. He’s little!”

As the paramedics put me on a stretcher and cut off my shirt, I looked down and saw my chest. The poison had spread into my veins. I could see it under my skin, as if it were burning the veins past my shoulder, creeping toward my heart. I knew I was going to die, but all I could think of was my son.

“Save him!” I yelled. “Forget me! Tend to my son.”

Then I started crying.

A doctor approached me. His white coat was as bright as the sun.

“Calm down, sir. Calm down.” He said, quietly, with a gentle strength in his voice.

“My son was bit,” I began.

“Sir. When the snake bit you, it released all its poison. All of the poison went into you. All your son has are two small puncture wounds. He’s safe.”

I fell back onto the gurney. I turned my head to the side, and saw my son being tended to by the other medical staff. He wasn’t crying. He was sitting up. He looked over at me. I saw him smiling. And then my vision narrowed as the room went black.

I heard someone say, “He’s coding.”

Everything went silent.

And, as if it were a movie that faded to black, a single Voice came on and said,

“That’s what I did for you, My son. Death struck Me, and killed Me, so that you would never have to die. I took all the poison. Death lost its sting and its victory over you.”

The Voice continued.

“Now, imagine that your son grew up, knowing the high sacrifice you made for him. Would he ever try to pick up a rattlesnake? Would he play in a viper’s den? Would that not disrespect what you had done for him?”

And then that Voice said:

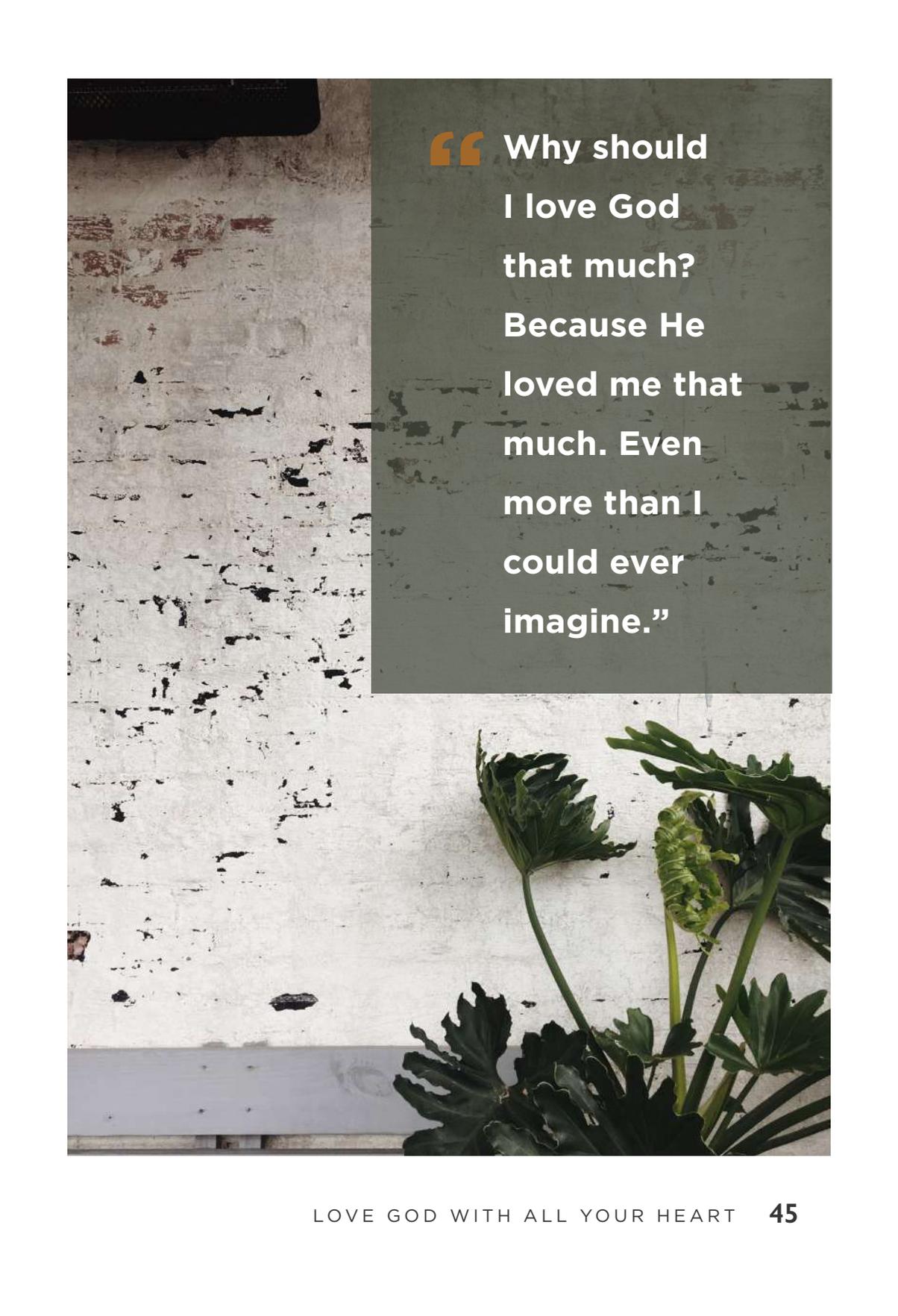
“So why, My beloved son, are you constantly trying to play with snakes? Trying to handle things you know have poison that can kill you?”

Then I woke up.

The dream was burned into my memory as real and bright as any actual memory. That dream was my answer. Why should I love God that much? Because He loved me that much. Even more than I could ever imagine.

And that’s not only the “why” but also the “how.” Think about that kind of love. Really meditate on how much Jesus sacrificed for you. Just how far He went.

That’s the kind of thing that will change your heart.



**“ Why should  
I love God  
that much?  
Because He  
loved me that  
much. Even  
more than I  
could ever  
imagine.”**

# Digging Deeper:

## Jesus Is Totally into You

Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Loving God must truly be the focus of our hearts, and we must desire God not for what He can give us or the good things that come from God, but because of the grace and mercy, the beauty and wonder of God Himself. This kind of love is possible only through the active work of the Holy Spirit, but as you read the following passages, may their truth capture your heart and prompt a joyful response to God’s great love for you.

### **Question 1:**

One of the ways to connect with Jesus is to stop and contemplate His great love for you. Read Philippians 2:6-11, an overview of what Jesus did for you. After reading the passage, list all that Jesus has done for you.

**Question 2:**

Think about your own life. What were some specific pivotal moments in your relationship with God. Write down as many moments as you can think of.

**Prayer**

Read Hebrews 12:2 and Romans 5:6-8. What was the central motivation—“the joy set before him”—that helped Jesus to endure the Cross? It was you. That’s why Jesus did what He did. He was motivated—to His core by His deep love for you. Reflect on that. In your prayer time, respond to God’s great love for you.

# Love God with all Your Mind

## SIX40 DISCIPLESHIP

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**Knowledge is indispensable to Christian life and service. If we do not use the mind that God has given us, we condemn ourselves to spiritual superficiality and cut ourselves off from many of the riches of God's grace. — John Stott**

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

— Philippians 4:8

## Ancient Wisdom

The Shoshoni Indians—a Native American tribe that lives in Wyoming’s Wind River Range in Wyoming—have an ancient tradition that continues to this day. Every tribal meeting begins with the chief declaring words that have been uttered by Shoshoni chiefs for hundreds of years. It’s a simple call and response. The chief says, “I am here if you are here.”

The members of the tribal council reply, “We are here if you are here.”

The Shoshoni chief simply responds, “I am here.”

Although at first glance this ancient tradition might seem to be little more than a wildly ineffective roll call, it is actually a profound practice that we, in our fast-paced modern lives, might learn from.

The Shoshoni greeting is a way to say, “Hey! Are you really here? Or are you focused? Are you distracted?”

The sad answer for most modern people is “I’m sorry. What were you saying? I just got a text from my friend.”



# Pay Attention!

What exactly does it mean to think?

One definition is “the process of using one’s mind to consider or reason about something.” One of the ultimate freedoms we enjoy as human beings is the power to choose what our minds will dwell on. Although we do not have complete control over what runs through our heads, we do have a great deal of freedom in deciding what we allow to remain there. No one can take that away from us.

In his book *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*, psychologist Daniel Goleman writes about what he is calls “the impoverishment of attention.” Our Smartphones and other networked gadgets allow us to jack into an unending supply of messages and alerts. Some of them are important, some of them are trivial, but—and this is the problem—all of them demand notice. The resulting “neural buzz” can easily overwhelm our ability to control our focus.

It’s fitting that our culture—that is filled with individuals longing to be endlessly entertained—doesn’t realize that the word *amusement* comes from the Greek prefix *a* (meaning “not”) and *muse* (meaning “to think deeply or consider something thoughtfully”).



## The Very First Distraction

In the opening pages of the Bible, we meet Adam and Eve, who literally walked and talked with the Lord in paradise. When Satan looked to draw Eve away from God, he didn't hit her with a stick, but with an idea. And the idea was paradigm busting: Satan introduced the idea that God was unreliable and not to be trusted. The enemy went on to say that people need to take matters into their own hands if they are to know happiness.

### **Genesis 3:1-5**

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"*

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*

*"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

This, of course, was a lie. But ever since, the Eves and Adams who have believed that false idea have experienced tragic results.

After all, ideas are powerful things. They can start wars...or end them. And ideas largely determine your life. Have you ever met someone with a rock-hard rigid worldview that is, but also a little... not in touch with reality? (Have you ever met a teenager?)

Think back to something really dumb you did in your teen years. (That didn't take long, did it?) Most of us look back on our adolescence, shake our heads, and wonder, "How did I make it out alive?" Then we think, "I was so naïve—and so irrationally overconfident." Arrogance and ignorance make a lethal cocktail.

As most of us get older, we start to realize that ideas really do matter and that they can shape us. That's why pastor and writer A. W. Tozer maintained that "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.... I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine

or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”

Deep lies we tell ourselves show our lack of accurate thinking about God. These lies creep in, especially during tough times. Lies like:

God is punishing me.  
God doesn't care about me.  
I can't change.

We have to change how we think about God. But how do we do that? And if we're supposed to become like Jesus, what does that look like in terms of how we think about God? Simply put, what did Jesus think about God?

I want to show you that Jesus' mind was filled with the Scriptures. The Israelites believed the Scriptures were the actual and literal words of God, a gift from God Himself to help His people. Because of that belief, Jesus' mind would have been intensely focused on the Scriptures from the time He was old enough to tie his shoes. (Just a figure of speech! I know that Jesus wore sandals.)



# Life in Jesus' Day

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## Did the Messiah go to kindergarten? Jesus' teachings

It's hard to think about our mind without thinking about education, about school and teachers and learning. Maybe you think about basic math and the alphabet. But what kind of education would Jewish children have had in and around the area of Capernaum in the ancient Near East when Jesus was born?<sup>1</sup>

In other words, what kind of school did Jesus go to? Did He go to kindergarten? When did Jesus learn to read and write—and did He learn with other kids His own age? Did Jesus play on a teeter-totter with kids who ate paste? The answer—according to historical records—is yes. Well, not necessarily about the paste—although adhesives were invented in Egypt more than 6,000 years ago to fix ceramics. So paste did exist in the ancient world of Jesus. Archaeologists are unclear, however, if these adhesives were used by Jewish six-year-olds for papyrus projects, or if those six-year-olds consumed the glue.

But back to the schooling. It would have looked quite a bit different than what you might imagine.

### **Elementary School: *Bet Sefer* for Ages 6-11**

First of all, if you or I had been born in the region of Galilee during the first century and we were Jewish (like Jesus), we absolutely would have gone to school. During the time of Jesus, nearly all Jewish children in that region went to school. The Old Testament scribe Ezra (440-480 BC) probably put in place the Jewish school system: he provided a public school in Jerusalem to

<sup>1</sup> For the information in this section, I'm incredibly indebted to the work of scholar Ray Vander Laan (whose website [www.followtherabbi.com](http://www.followtherabbi.com) and lectures/books/articles help unearth the customs and life of ancient Jews) and David J. Stern's reference book *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*.

educate fatherless boys who were sixteen years and older.

The first phase of Jewish schooling was called *Bet Sefer*—which means “House of the Book” or, as it is sometimes translated, “Place of Reading.” Both boys and girls, ages six through ten, went to school, although the curriculum varied a bit.

**Boys:** Boys would have been taught math, basic agricultural principles, the basic geography of their world, and their people’s rich history. Most importantly, the boys would have been taught the *Torah* (also known as “The Law”), which is comprised of the first five books of our Old Testament. In fact, the boys didn’t simply learn the Torah; they actually memorized all five books in their entirety! The goal was for a boy to memorize the entire Torah by the time he turned twelve years old. (Not every boy could do this. We all have different mental capacities. The goal was for each boy to do his best memorizing what was, after all, the Word of God. There was no disgrace in not being able to recite the whole Torah if you had given it your best shot.)

**Girls:** The girls’ curriculum was slightly different. They would have studied all of the Psalms, the Proverbs, and the Law in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. They also learned how to lead worship. After all, the Lord commanded His people to go to the Temple three times a year: Passover, Pentecost, and *Sukkot* (or Tabernacles). The rest of the time, Jewish families would be at home for the Sabbath worshiping around the family table. In Jesus’ day, the women almost always led worship. (Maybe you’ve seen *Fiddler on the Roof*: the mother, Golde, lights the candles, says the Sabbath prayer, and prays a blessing over her children.) So girls needed to learn all the passages that would help them lead family worship. And, yes, girls would have had the same goal that the boys did: complete memorization of these texts.

(Several times in the gospels Jesus addresses a group of women, and each time He quotes from the book of Proverbs, and those passages would likely have been supremely familiar to them.)

## **High School: *Bet Midrash* for Ages 12-15**

The completion of *Bet Sefer* meant the end of formal education for the girls. This was mainly because after their first menstrual cycle, girls would prepare for marriage. Within a year or two of finishing *Bet Sefer*, most young women had married and moved into the roles of wife and then mother. Similarly, after *Bet Sefer*, most boys would begin learning their father’s or their family’s



trade.

But a few of the brightest and most capable young men—those who showed real skill in their studies and who had memorized the Torah in its totality—would be invited to continue their schooling. The next level called *Bet Midrash*, meaning “House of Learning.” Here, the students moved beyond memorization and sought to understand the Scriptures.

These young men would be apprentices in their family business and part-time students. They would commit the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures to memory, including the books of history, the Psalms, and the works of the prophets. Yes, after a few more years of schooling, these gifted young men would have memorized the entire Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. That’s 39 books, 929 chapters, and more than 20,000 verses.

One way these boys declared to the world that they had successfully memorized the Torah was to go to their first Passover at Temple. This would not have been a boy’s first Passover: he’d been going since he was an infant. But this was the first time these young men would have been old enough in their faith to participate. If they showed off their skill and demonstrated they were properly trained, they were allowed to kill the animal sacrifice on behalf of their family.

*Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom... After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Luke 2:41-42, 46-47)*

Of course Jesus was *Bet Midrash* material: He would have memorized the entire Old Testament.

## **College + Grad School: *Beth Talmid* for Ages 15-30**

At age 15, most boys were done with their formal schooling. Jesus and the other adolescent boys in His school would have completed the Herculean task of memorizing all the Hebrew Scriptures. And afterward, nearly all of them moved into their family trade.

But a few of the boys—we're talking one out of thousands—would proceed to the next level, a level that was only for the truly gifted. (This was like going from playing high school basketball to playing in the NBA.)

This advancement happened by invitation only. A boy couldn't be a *talmid* unless he was invited to follow a rabbi. And now, instead of studying in a synagogue or with a Torah teacher, he would study full-time with a rabbi. A *talmid* lived with the rabbi, ate with the rabbi, walked with the rabbi, followed the rabbi around, listened to everything the rabbi taught, and, when the rabbi was mad, watched what he did. A *talmid* observed the rabbi in every conceivable situation.

Many people translate the word *talmid* into *disciple*, but our English word *disciple* doesn't capture the cultural significance of the word *talmid*.

## **Being a Talmid**

Being a *talmid* was not the same thing as being a student. A student wants to know what the teacher knows; a *talmid* wants to become what the teacher is. A *talmid* wants to become just like the rabbi. This is a massive shift.

Later in His life, when Jesus called His disciples, He didn't call them to simply

know or be trained—although there was a lot to know and learn. Jesus called people to become what He is, and this was a lifelong, life-consuming venture.

The difference between what most people think about the word *disciple* and what *talmid* meant in the ancient world is the difference between you and me splashing around in the community pool and what Michael Phelps did in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. (He won eight gold medals.)

The point is this: as a *talmid*, a person spent a staggering amount of time interacting with the Scriptures.

## Jesus as Rabbi

When a *talmid* turned 30—and if he had demonstrated true mastery of the Scriptures, if he lived and breathed the Word of God as perceived by all his teachers and others in the learning community—he gained the title “Rabbi.”

By the way, that learning community was significant. Hardly backwoods, Capernaum was home to the largest synagogue in the ancient world. It was so large, in fact, that it would take more than 1000 years before a larger synagogue was built. This synagogue was a center for Jewish scholarship, the Harvard/Yale/Princeton/Stanford of its day.

According to the biblical record, seven different groups of people referred to Jesus as *Rabbi*: His disciples (Mark 9:5, Mark 11:21, etc.); the Pharisees (John 3:1-2); John the Baptist’s disciples (John 1:35-38); common people (Mark 10:51, John 6:24-25); *Torah* teachers (Matthew 8:19); Herodians (Luke 3:12); and the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-32). Additionally, Jesus refers to Himself by this title (John 13:12-14, Luke 22:10-11). It’s clear that Jesus was a rabbi, an authority recognized even by people who were opposed to Him and antagonistic toward Him.

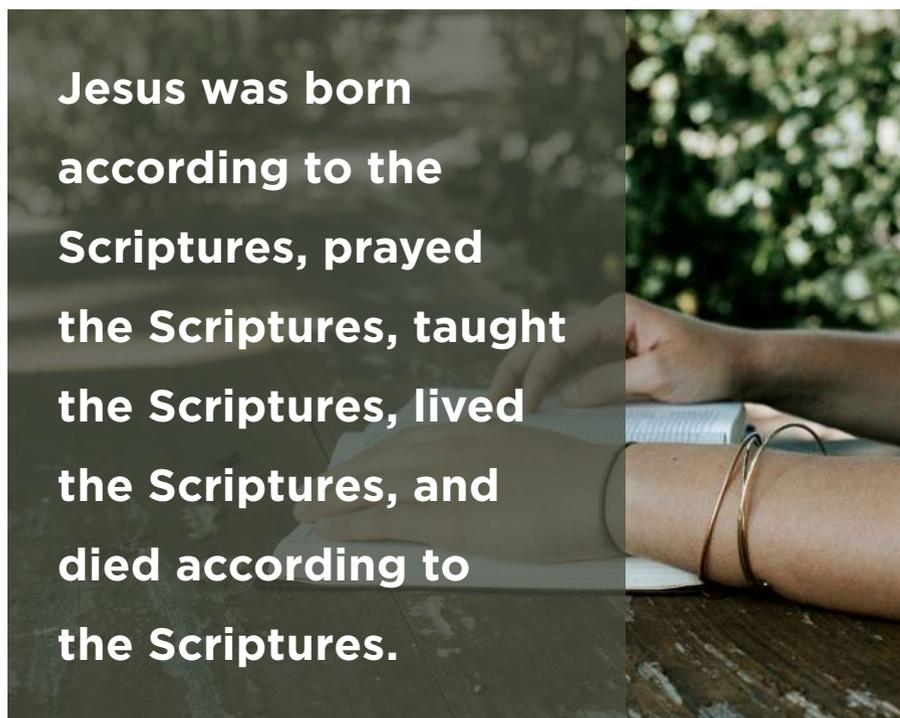
Jesus had eleven Galilean disciples and one Judean disciple (Judas). Each of these young men would have completed, at the very least, *Bet Sefer*. They would have memorized the first five books of the Old Testament and been familiar with the Word of God.

But when Jesus called these men, they were not at the synagogue; they were all out plying their family trades. That fact means they had not been chosen to continue studying as anyone’s *talmid*. They didn’t have what it took; they had been cut from the team.

But, as is so often the case with Jesus, He looks at the same thing that other people look at but sees something entirely different. Jesus calls these twelve young men to be his *talmid*. They lived with Jesus, listened to Jesus, interacted with Jesus.

Jesus' twelve *talmid* wanted to not only know what their Master knew, but also to become what their Master was. They would have been challenged to focus not only their minds on what Jesus focused His mind on, but to focus their lives on what Jesus focused His life on.

And, as we talked about earlier, the single most important thing to Jesus—the focus of His heart—was unbroken fellowship with His Father. Scriptures are the words of His Father: they came from the mouth of God. That's why, for instance, during His temptation Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, saying, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus lived and breathed the Scripture.



## Jesus was born according to the Scriptures

The Old Testament contains 44 prophecies about the Messiah. They range from explaining what the Messiah will do to the exact town where the Messiah will be born. The Gospel of Matthew, in particular, is keen on making sure that readers understand that Jesus is linked to the Old Testament in real and concrete ways. Matthew started off his book with a Jewish genealogy of Jesus, showing that the Messiah is from the family line of both Abraham and David, just as the Hebrew Scriptures promised. Again and again, Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is the fulfillment of specific Old Testament prophecies.

The point is this: Jesus was born according to the Scriptures.

## Jesus prayed the Scriptures

Matthew 6 is the most famous example of Jesus praying. Here, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus articulates exactly how to pray. His words would have sounded familiar to first-century Jews because Jesus makes clear and compelling references to the Old Testament in this prayer. Here is what Jesus prayed:

*This, then, is how you should pray:  
“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be 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 debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but  
deliver us from the evil one.”  
For if you forgive other people when they sin against  
you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.  
But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father  
will not forgive your sins.*

Now see how steeped in the words, ideas, and concepts of the Old Testament this prayer of Jesus was:

**Our Father:** The word used here is *Abba*, a supremely familiar term akin to Daddy. But this isn't the first time a word like this has been used. The Old Testament prophets Jeremiah (3:19) and Malachi (2:10) both used that tender terminology to describe God's loving, paternal nature. The use of *Abba* would also have reminded those first-century Jewish listeners of God's long history of protecting and loving Israel like a firstborn son, as "Israel is my son, my firstborn; let my people go, that they may serve me." (Exodus 4:22-23) and "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1) illustrate.

**Hallowed** means "sacred." This word reminds listeners of the Lord's burning bush encounter with Moses (Exodus 3). God said to Moses that the ground he was walking on was "hallowed."

**Your Kingdom Come:** Jesus reminds His Jewish listeners that although they might live under the rule of the Roman Empire, the Lord God is the true Sovereign. Earlier in the Israelites' history, Moses battled with Pharaoh over the question of who was really in charge on this earth. Later in Israel's history, Elijah battled the prophets of Baal about whose God was stronger. Isaiah 52 offers a poetic and compelling look at exactly who is in charge of the universe.

**Daily Bread** is a reference to Exodus 16 and the Israelites' time in the desert when God fed these thousands of wandering travelers every day with literal "bread from heaven," known as *manna*. Jesus was reminding us that God has always been a good and faithful Provider for His people.

**Forgive Us Our Debts:** Not only did Israel need actual food while they wandered through the desert, but they also needed God's forgiveness because of their rebellion, hardheartedness, and lack of faith. This prayer for forgiveness is central to what God is offering His people, and His forgiveness is the greatest gift God offers. (Jeremiah 31 is one of the more moving portraits of God's heart for His children in the entire Old Testament.)

**And Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us from the Evil One:** The word *deliver*—found in the Old Testament more than 220 times—would have brought to mind God's constant faithfulness. The sheer number of times the Lord delivered the Israelites from certain doom is overwhelming, whether the threat was the Egyptian army, a giant

Philistine, being outnumbered in battle 300-to-1, or running out of water in the desert. Yet, despite the Lord's incredible centuries-long track record of loving-kindness, Israel was constantly tempted to idolatry, to the worship of other gods. This is no small issue: the first three of the Ten Commandments address the issue of idolatry. So here Jesus is driving home the truth that God has promised to be faithful to His people no matter how faithless they are. That fact is encouraging—and a reminder that we should always be faithful to the God who will always be faithful to us.

Clearly, Jesus' central teaching about prayer is filled with references and content from the Old Testament: Jesus prayed the Scriptures.

## Jesus taught and lived the Scriptures

After Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus shows up and begins walking on a dusty road to Emmaus alongside two men who are disappointed and despondent (Luke 24:13-35). The text says that neither man recognizes Jesus. That's especially surprising because one of the men is named Cleopas, whom historians believe was the brother of Joseph, the husband of Mary, who was the mother of Jesus. So Jesus is walking alongside his uncle, who likely would have known Him since He was knee-high to a grasshopper. But Luke reports that the men didn't recognize Jesus. We don't know if this is some act of God, or if they're so despondent and utterly disappointed that they don't even notice who is next to them.

So these two men describe for this stranger the amazing events of the last several days, and we get a glimpse into the reason for the depth of their sadness.

*“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”*

Jesus says to them:

*“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

Jesus is basically saying, “The entire Bible is about Me. The entire long-view of Jewish history has been a giant preparation for this moment. The entire Old Testament contains hint after hint after hint about the Messiah, and I am fulfilling all of those prophecies.”

Awhile ago, *The Sixth Sense* was a very successful movie. Now, I don’t want to give anything away, but the film’s surprise ending *completely* changes the way you view the entire rest of the movie. The ending is such a plot twister that all the previous elements of the story—that you thought stood on their own—entirely change their meaning retroactively. And I mention the movie because this “Road to Emmaus” account is a metaphor: God has been active and at work in human history, and we didn’t see it. Then God Himself came down from heaven and lived among us, and we didn’t see it. But then, with help from God, we finally see that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Jesus taught Scripture and lived it out.

## **Jesus died according to the Scriptures**

Jesus died one of the most horrific deaths ever: He was crucified—but before that He was beaten and scourged, losing a massive amount of blood and strength, and that after not eating the Last Supper or sleeping since the night before that.

As Jesus was about to die, He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” reflecting a reality that made His death even more excruciating. Our sin separated Jesus from His Father.

Now, we don’t necessarily hear it, but every first-century disciple would have immediately known that Jesus was quoting the song Psalm 22. Yes, from the cross, Jesus was singing the first line of a song.

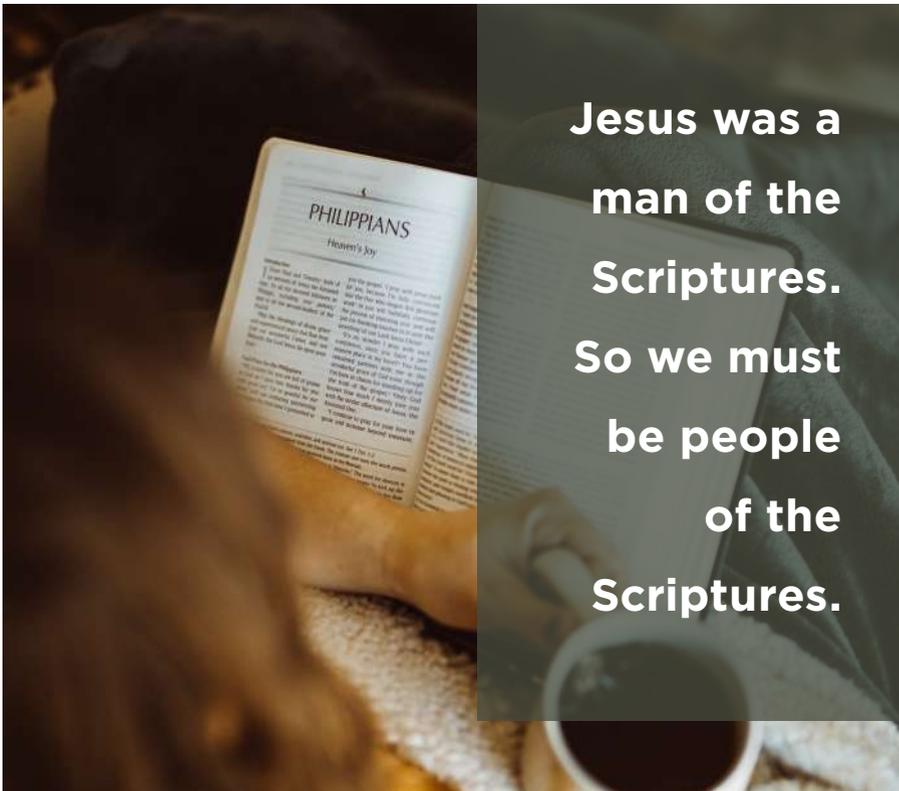
I don’t have the space to include all of Psalm 22 here, but I encourage you to stop and read it right now. Actually, first read the accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion in Matthew 27:27-50, Luke 23:26-50, and John 19:16-37. Then

read Psalm 22. Notice the details in the gospels that match the details in the psalm—and King David wrote Psalm 22 more than 1000 years before Jesus was born.

And, amazingly, Jesus is not singing a bleak song of despair. Psalm 22 is a song of victory. A song of triumph. A song of hope. It's a song about how God will do something wonderful that generations to come will talk about. It's said that Jesus had you and me in mind on that cross, and this psalm is proof.

God the Father wrote His Son this song of comfort. And in His darkest hour, delirious from pain, Jesus sang its words. Again, God had written this song specifically for Him. Only for Him. And it is a song of comfort. A song of promise. A song of hope. A song to remind His Son that He was not far away.

Jesus died according to the Scriptures.



**Jesus was a  
man of the  
Scriptures.  
So we must  
be people  
of the  
Scriptures.**

# Jesus Is Looking for a Few Good Disciples

I hope it's clear that the Scriptures were the central focus of Jesus' mind. But what does His example mean for you and me? What can we do to make the Scriptures—the Word of God—the central focus of our minds?



## You're probably feeling pretty inadequate right now...

Now, if you're anything like me, after reading what a *talmid* had to do, I'm not only intimidated, but wildly discouraged. Memorize the entire Old Testament? And work at it several days a week starting when I was six years old? I'm not sure I have what it takes.

But in Isaiah 51:1-2 the Lord says something amazing:

*"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him, he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many."*

Apparently, according to this Scripture, when I say to God, "I don't have what it takes," God looks at me and says, "Oh yeah? Well, I got you from the exact same quarry I got Abraham."

I have the same essence as Abraham? As Sarah? What? These people are heroes of the faith. I'm nothing like them. But then I realize that what God can do is not about the rock: it's about God Himself, the One who works the rock. The One who removes the edges and makes it fit perfectly with other rocks. The Master Builder who has a plan. That's what my spiritual growth is about. It's not about me; it's about Him. So I need to let Him work.

I need to draw near God and let Him work. And near the Scriptures and focus on the Word of God. Doing so can change me—and you.



## HEY, STEVE!

I'm not super great at reading.  
I'm afraid I'd be one of those  
kids who the rabbis sent home  
after the first years of schooling.

One of the main mantras of spiritual development is the simple statement “Don’t try. Train.” If I asked you to complete a triathlon tomorrow, you could try really hard, but it would be tough for you. But if I asked you to train as if you were going to run a triathlon, then the expectation is that you’d train—which is another way of saying that you’d really stink at it for a long, long time, but that you’d be gradually getting better. And even if you don’t complete the triathlon, you’d be in much better shape because you trained. Right? Train. Don’t just try. Give it a shot. Give it your best. Because, in the words of the great Wayne Gretzky, “You’re going to miss one hundred percent of the shots you don’t take.”

At the end of this chapter, I’ll introduce a Bible study approach called SOAP that will help you interact with Scripture. This simple but powerful method still helps me in my personal study. So look for that, or heck, if you’re in the mood, just skip to the end of this chapter and read it now. I won’t tell anyone.





## HEY, STEVE!

It makes sense that reading the Bible helps us grow spiritually. Of course Jesus knew Scripture, but didn't the Pharisees also know it? Yet Jesus harshly condemned some of those Pharisees. So how do I avoid becoming like them?

You make an excellent point. We don't want to grow as smarter sinners! The goal is to allow the Word of God to come into our lives and transform us. If we're reading the Word of God but not growing in our love for people and what we read is not impacting our actions, there's a good chance we're just studying to get smarter. The Word of God should be changing us into people who are filled with more love, more peace, and more joy.

# A Final Story

Consider the wisdom of Philippians 4:8.

*Whatever is true  
Whatever is noble  
Whatever is right  
Whatever is pure  
Whatever is lovely  
Whatever is admirable  
If anything is excellent or praiseworthy  
Think about such things.*

Focusing your mind on the Word of God can utterly and radically transform your life.

Consider the story of Horatio Spafford (1828-1888), a prominent lawyer who decided to take his family to vacation in England after his only son died of scarlet fever at the age of four. The Spafford family was well known in Chicago in the 1860s, and Spafford was a partner at a large and thriving firm. In 1871, Spafford began investing in real estate in the area just north of Chicago. When the Great Chicago Fire reduced the city to ashes in October of that same year, it also destroyed most of Spafford's sizable investment. Then, Spafford's only son died of scarlet fever at the age of four.

Delayed because of business, Spafford sent ahead his wife and their four daughters, ranging in age from eleven to two. On November 22, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic, the steamship they were on was struck by an iron sailing vessel and sank. Among the 226 people who lost their lives were all four of Spafford's daughters. Miraculously, his wife survived and, upon arriving in England, sent her husband a telegram: "Saved alone."

A grief-stricken Spafford sailed to England to join his wife. During the voyage, he looked out over the water and wondered if his ship was near where the accident had happened. Can you imagine this father's heartache? In the

span of two years, he'd lost all five of his beloved children.

While he was crossing the waters that had taken his four beloved daughters, Spafford wrote this poem:

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

*Chorus: It is well, (it is well),  
With my soul, (with my soul),  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet,  
though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*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!*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,  
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
A song in the night, oh my soul!*

Horatio Spafford was doing exactly what Paul had said:

*Think about what is true.  
Think about what is noble.  
Think about what is right.*

Spafford fixed his mind on God.

Now consider how the apostle Paul thought about death as he awaited his execution in Rome:

**1 Corinthians 15:51-57**

*We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:*

*“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*

*For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

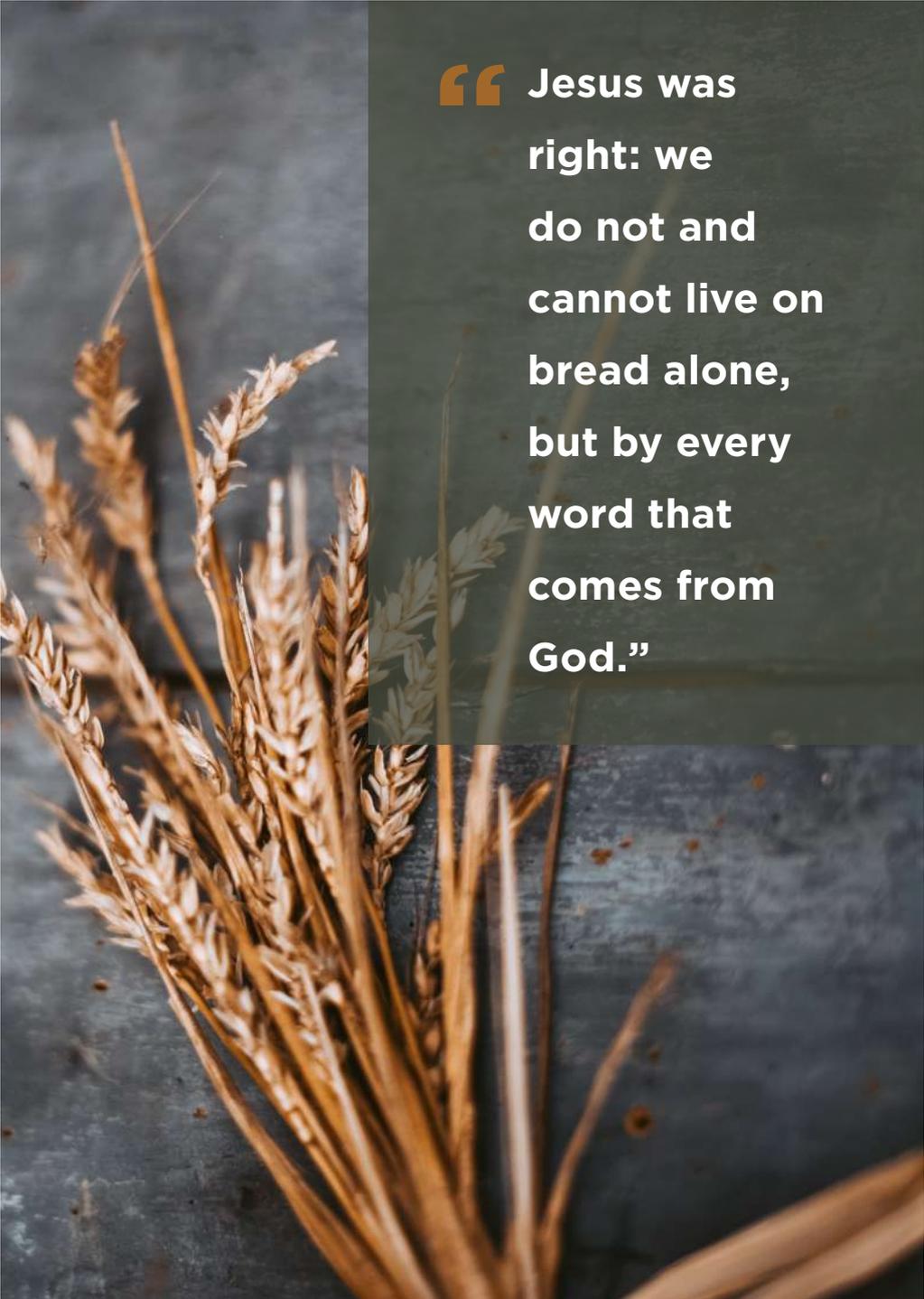
For Horatio Spafford and for Paul, the hope that death isn't the end wasn't just a fairy tale or wishful thinking. Their hope was founded on the historically validated physical (not metaphorical or fictional) reality that Jesus defeated death. Given that truth, Horatio anticipated hugging his son and daughters again someday. He believed that this life is not the end.

This kind of thinking changes your perspective on even the most incomprehensible tragedy. This kind of thinking provides hope. This kind of thinking nourishes your soul.

And this kind of thinking comes only if you spend time in the Word of God.

What is your mind most focused on? What directs your thoughts?

Jesus was right: we do not and cannot live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.



“ Jesus was  
right: we  
do not and  
cannot live on  
bread alone,  
but by every  
word that  
comes from  
God.”

# Digging Deeper:

## Practicing Focus

If the idea of studying the Bible sounds nerve-wracking, relax. We'll walk you through it. First, a brief overview of the SOAP method of Bible study.

### The SOAP Method of Bible Study

(Yes, SOAP.)

As we read God's words, we begin to see how God responds to things. Also, doing daily devotions repatterns the way we think and transforms our minds.

The spiritual practice of SOAP actually encompasses several important spiritual disciplines, including journaling, silence and solitude, prayer, engagement with Scripture, and meditation on Scripture. We've also found that SOAP is an excellent way to both record and process what God has spoken to us.

To start off, here are some things you might want to make sure you have:

#### **A Bible**

I know you know you need a Bible to study the Bible, but you may not know which version to use. The New International Version (NIV) and English Standard Version (ESV) are two of the more accurate and very accessible translations, but the New Living Translation (NLT) is more fluid and readable.

#### **A Journal**

I recommend getting a paper journal and using the first few pages to keep an index of what you are learning, but of course you can record your thoughts on an electronic device. Whichever medium you prefer, be sure to journal. You'll be encouraged to look back from time to time and see what you have been learning.

#### **A Reading Plan**

We recommend using a reading plan or else you'll spend half your time

trying to figure out what to read. One of the best resources on the internet is YouVersion. Go to <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans> and browse through the dozens of different types of plans.

### A Planner

It's going to happen: You are going to be in the middle of a wonderful time with God, journaling your heart out, when you suddenly remember that you're out of milk. This is where your planner comes in handy. You can write down "Get milk" and go right back to your journaling. If you don't have a planner, use a piece of scratch paper. I don't know how many times my God time has been hijacked by random thoughts of things I need to do for the day....

### A Final Note

We realize that the SOAP method of Bible study might be a new concept for you, so we've included the following to help you:

1. A more detailed explanation of each of the parts of SOAP
2. An example of a SOAP of a Bible passage from 1 Peter
3. Two step-by-step practice SOAP worksheets to help guide you as you begin doing this on your own.



# SOAP:

## Scripture

Choose a passage of Scripture. As you read on, you'll see that we have a few suggestions, but you can use your own reading plan if you'd like. Begin by praying that you will hear God would speak to you through His Word. Then, as you read, underline or highlight anything that jumps out at you.

## Observation

The point of the observation section of SOAP is two-fold. First, it's to begin to ask questions of the text and, second, it's to chronicle anything that stands out to you. It's good to go ask who, what, where, when, and why: *Who* was this written to? *What* does this passage reveal about God? *What* is going on in the text? *Where* is this happening? *When* is this happening? *Why* was this written and why is it important? Answering these 5 Ws will help lead you to application. (If you're reading a longer passage and a smaller section got your attention, focus your observations on that section.)

## Application

At this point ask yourself, "What now?" Perhaps the text forbids you from doing something. Maybe it commands you to do something. Ask God to show you how the passage applies to your life right now. His answer may be very personal and specific to your situation.

## Prayer

Last but not least, spend some time praying. Confess your sin to God, especially any sins that were brought to light while you were reading, and repent of those sins. Also spend time thanking God and, in silence, listening to God. We recommend writing out a short prayer to God about the Scripture and what you learned from it.

# SOAP Example from 1 Peter 2

## Scripture

### 1 Peter 2:4-10

*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:*

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will  
never be put to shame.”*

*Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

*“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”  
and,*

*“A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”  
They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what  
they were destined for.*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who  
called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a  
people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received  
mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

## Observation

As 1 Peter 1 says, this letter was written to the early Christians scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (which, according to the notes in my study bible, are in modern-day Turkey). Peter was calling the believers there to let Jesus Christ be the cornerstone for their church. A cornerstone is the master stone in a building: all other stones were set in reference to it. This one stone influenced the construction of the entire structure. Peter was saying metaphorically that each Christian is a living stone in the body of believers (the building) because of the work of God. Jesus, however, is a stumbling block to people who don't recognize Him as God's resurrected Son, Victor over sin and death. These people live as they wish, making no decisions in reference to Jesus.

## Application

First off, I find it comforting to think of myself as a “living stone” in God’s building. We who are members of the family of God are all different and unique. Here’s the big question: Am I living out my God-given uniqueness to the benefit of the building God is constructing?

Also, I see that I was called by God. Among all the humans who have ever existed, God has spoken to my heart. He has not left me in the mire of my own sin, in a desperate meaninglessness. Instead, He rescued *me* and invites me to live a different sort of life with Him and for Him.

## Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, thank You for the cornerstone of Jesus. I don’t have to wonder how to live my life because Jesus Christ is a constant and unchanging example of character, words, and actions. His life offers me a plumb line so I can see when I am off-center, and when I notice that, He is faithful and willing to help me get back on track. Thank You, God, for being that sort of God. Also, thank You for making me a living stone in the building You are building, God. Help me find my place. Put me right where I need to be, and if some rough edges need to be chipped off so I can fit with other people, then please do that. And please let me utilize my uniqueness to serve and honor You. In the name of Jesus. Amen.



## Now It's Your Turn...

### **Scripture**

Read Ephesians 3:14-21, one of the more famous passages in the New Testament and the apostle Paul's prayer for the first Christians in Ephesus, to whom he was the spiritual father.

### **Observation**

*Who* was this passage written? *What* does it reveal about God? *What* is going on in this text? *Where* is this happening? *When* is this happening? *Why* is this being written and why is it important?

### **Application**

What is this passage showing you about changes you need to make in your life, your thoughts, and/or your attitude? What do you feel God is trying to communicate to you through this text?

### **Prayer**

Write a short prayer to God.

# Love God with all Your Strength

## SIX40 DISCIPLESHIP

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**The reason that most major goals are not achieved is that we spend our time doing second things first.** —*Robert McKain*

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

— 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

## Olympic Feats

One of the biggest stories from the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics was the emergence of gold-medal winning ice skaters Meryl Davis and Charlie White, who wowed the world with their superlative-defying partner skating. The pair not only completely dominated the competition, but amazed global audiences with their precision and scored a 99.18 from the judges, which is just about as close to perfection as you can get.

But these two didn't always gel. When Meryl and Charlie began skating together, she was so shy she couldn't even look at him, and, a skater for a whopping six months, Charlie was annoyed about having to break in someone new. They were, in the words of their coaches, terribly incompatible and very immature.

That's not a big surprise when the skaters are nine years old. That's right. Meryl and Charlie began skating together when they were prepubescent kids. By the time Sochi rolled around, the pair had been skating together—ninety minutes a day, every day of the week—for 17 years. Yes, 17 years!

That's longer than many marriages! That's 85 percent of two decades.

The math is staggering: they spent nearly 8,200 hours of skating together. Talk about investment!



## Another Example

Michael Phelps is, by any measure, the greatest Olympian of all time. Winner of 22 medals (18 gold), Phelps began swimming at the age of seven. By the age of ten, he was setting records for his age group, and at 15 he qualified for the US Olympic team that competed in Sydney.

At one point early in his career, Phelps trained in the water every day of the week for five years. During the eight-year peak of his training (the four years leading up to the Athens games and the four years leading up to the Beijing games), Phelps trained 6 days a week and spent, on average, 5 hours per day in the pool. His long-time coach Bob Bowman reported that Phelps swam a minimum of 8 miles a day.

I did the math for you. That's more than 19,000 miles. That distance is like swimming from LA to NY more than 7 times.

For more than 20 years, Phelps spent nearly every day in a pool.

That is definitely all in!

## Strength = Life's Focused Energies

Any story from the Olympics reinforces something we all know instinctively: our lives reflect to one degree or another whatever we have devoted ourselves to and focused our energy on.

In Mark 12, a man approached Jesus and asked Him what the most important commandment was. In essence, he was asking, "What does God want from me the most?" And—as we've seen—Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." What does that word *strength* mean?

*Strength* means "to be able to; to have the power to do something." Although we don't have control over many things in this world, we do have complete and total power over a few things. Specifically, we can choose to focus our mental and physical energies in order to get things done.

**Question:** Have you ever met someone who is bound and determined to do something? Perhaps it was something good, or perhaps it was wildly



destructive. It is pretty impressive what humans can accomplish when they're highly motivated!. We can go to the moon and back. But we also invented New Coke.<sup>2</sup>

The question is not “Can human beings accomplish something amazing if they focus their life’s energies?” Rather, the question is “What am I devoting my focused life’s energies to? And is that getting me what I most want?”

## Another Example

Some time ago in *USA Today*, I read an article about experts from all different fields who were asked “How much time does the average person need to devote to your particular field just to get by?” Not to excel, mind you. Just to get by. They asked various experts in such fields as sleep, physical fitness, vocational training, and family life. When these experts added up the minimal time we’re all supposed to spend on all these aspects of life, it totaled up to 36 hours a day.

That’s what we’re supposed to do just to get by. Again, not to thrive. Just to get by. There are simply not enough hours in the day to get done what needs to get done. Have you ever felt that way? Do you feel that way now? I’d ask you to raise your hand if you have ever felt that way, but I’m sure you’re already exhausted.

<sup>2</sup> In case you don’t know what “New Coke” is, it was a reformulation of the recipe for Coca-Cola that debuted in 1985 and was an absolute debacle. The American public hated it with the kind of passion usually reserved only for the IRS, Brussels sprouts and people who insult your mother. Other terrible inventions: Red Dye #2, Betamax, CFCs, the Pontiac Aztek, Asbestos, Crocs, Clippy the Microsoft Helper, Agent Orange, and Olestra. It’s sort of hit-or-miss with humanity, isn’t it?

# Life in Jesus' Day

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## How Did Jesus Organize His Life?

If we're going to be Six40 disciples, we need to open the gospels and learn how Jesus focused His life energies. So, to help you (and me) out, I surveyed the gospels looking for any patterns in Jesus' life. What I found was Jesus frequently withdrawing into what the Scriptures described as "lonely" or "isolated" places (the Greek word used literally means "wilderness") so He could be alone with His Father.

Read about some of those times here:

### **Matthew 4:1-2**

Immediately after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to a solitary place where God would continue to prepare Him for His public ministry. Jesus' "solitary" or wilderness place was where He fasted and prayed—and where Satan came to tempt Jesus. Satan invited Jesus to take shortcuts in His earthly work, shortcuts what would enable Him avoid the Cross. Jesus rebuffed each temptation.

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

### **Matthew 14:13-14**

When Jesus heard that Herod had beheaded His cousin and friend John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to a solitary place to pray. When the crowds heard Jesus was in town, they followed Him and interrupted. But compassionate Jesus healed their sick.

*When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot*

*from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

### **Mark 1:35**

After an exhausting day healing people in the town of Capernaum, Jesus nevertheless got up very early to pray.

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

### **Mark 6:45-46**

Immediately after feeding the 5,000 men plus wives and children, Jesus retreated to pray. Later that night, Jesus walked on water out to the boat where His disciples were struggling against the wind to get the boat to shore.

*Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

### **Mark 6:30-32**

Again, after a period of intense ministry, Jesus pulled His followers aside. Again, He said to them, “Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*

### **Luke 5:15-16**

Gospel writer and doctor, Luke reported that crowds of people want to Jesus to seek healing, but Jesus would often leave the crowds and withdraw to isolated places to pray. Mark reported that, at one point, Peter ran up to Jesus and said, in effect, “Where have You been? Everyone is looking for You!” Jesus calmly moved on to the next town. Apparently, of all the people in

history who have had messianic complexes, the actual Messiah was not one of them.

*The news about [Jesus] spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

### **Luke 6:12-13**

The night before Jesus called His disciples, He withdrew to pray, undoubtedly asking God to guide these important decisions. This was a monumental moment in Jesus' ministry of Jesus because these young men (along with about seven women and one murderous Pharisee named Saul) would literally change the course of history.

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.*

### **Mark 14:32-34**

On the night He was betrayed, the day before His execution, Jesus went to a private garden to pray. He was facing a number of things that would cause even the most courageous man to tremble. First of all was the excruciating execution Jesus would have to endure. In addition, all His followers and friends would abandon Him at His moment of His greatest emotional need. But those imminent events paled in comparison to the furnace Jesus would endure as He took on Himself the sins of all of humanity.

Simply the thought of facing that furnace caused Jesus to sweat blood and beg His Father to "let the cup pass": Jesus did not want to experience God's wrath for all humankind's sin. The very thought caused Jesus to sweat blood. Imagine having to drink that cup to the very bottom.

*They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."*



**Jesus focused His life's energies  
on creating space in His schedule  
to be with His Father.**

## **What This Means for You and Me**

Looking at the life of Jesus, we see His pattern of engaging the world, then disengaging from the world to be alone with His Father. Which raises a big question for me: If Jesus needed to withdraw and be alone with the Father, how much more do I need to do that as well?

Jesus' example seems to clearly indicate that I should prioritize—above all other things—carving space out in my schedule to be with God:

- Before major decisions
- After exhausting outputs of energy
- When tragedy strikes
- When life is falling apart
- When things are going pretty well

Before exhausting outputs of energy  
At crucial crossroads in my life  
As part of my daily calendar

I need to spend some time each day being alone with the Lord, getting my mind in tune with His truth and my will surrendered to His. I need to make this time my number one priority, no matter what important demands are pressing on me.

In addition, the rhythms in Jesus's life seem to communicate that I need to regularly spend some extended time with Him. The prospect was rather daunting at first. *Maybe a half-day or a day at least once a month.* I thought, *The next time I have a free day, I'll spend it alone with God.*

Well, I was reading this week that if you live to be seventy years old, you will live twenty-five thousand days. Twenty-five thousand. It would be ironic to get to the end of them and say: "God, I was never able to devote just a day to being with You because I had so many things I had to get done."



# What's Your Plan, Man?

Best-selling author and pastor Tim Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, tells a story about a young man in his congregation who was a very successful trader who worked in the financial district. Keller contacted him and asked to meet with him. The young man inquired back, "What do you want to meet about?" Keller repeated his question. The young man pressed again, "Sure, I'd love to meet, but what's the reason for the meeting?" Each time, Keller politely refused to answer the question and simply reiterated the request.

When they met, Keller said, "As we were preparing to meet, you asked me three or four times to explain the purpose of the meeting. I was thinking about that. I imagine you asked because you knew you would have to fight traffic to get up here, then fight traffic to get back to work. You wanted to make sure you didn't waste your time. And yet, you are living your entire life without even asking yourself, 'What is the point of my life?' Forget about the purpose of meeting me for coffee! You've never even thought about the grand purpose of your very existence."

Keller is right: most of us are not very intentional about our spiritual lives.

If I were to ask, "What's your plan for retirement?" most people would say they have a plan. It might not be a good or very specific plan, but most people have at least tossed around the idea in their head a bit.

If I were to ask, "What's your educational plan?" most people would either point to the degree they've already earned or outline their plan ("I'm working on this, I should finish by this time, and here's how I'm going to pay for it").

If I were to ask about career plans, most people would have thought about this. They'd say something like, "Well, I'm in this job right now. But my plan is to leverage that job and move over here. Eventually, I'd like to end up there."

If I were to ask you about your plans for your most important relationships, you'd also probably have an idea: "Well, we're planning on getting married in spring, and then—after four years—we hope to have two kids and a dog and a minivan."

You have all these plans. For your job. For your spouse. For your kids. For

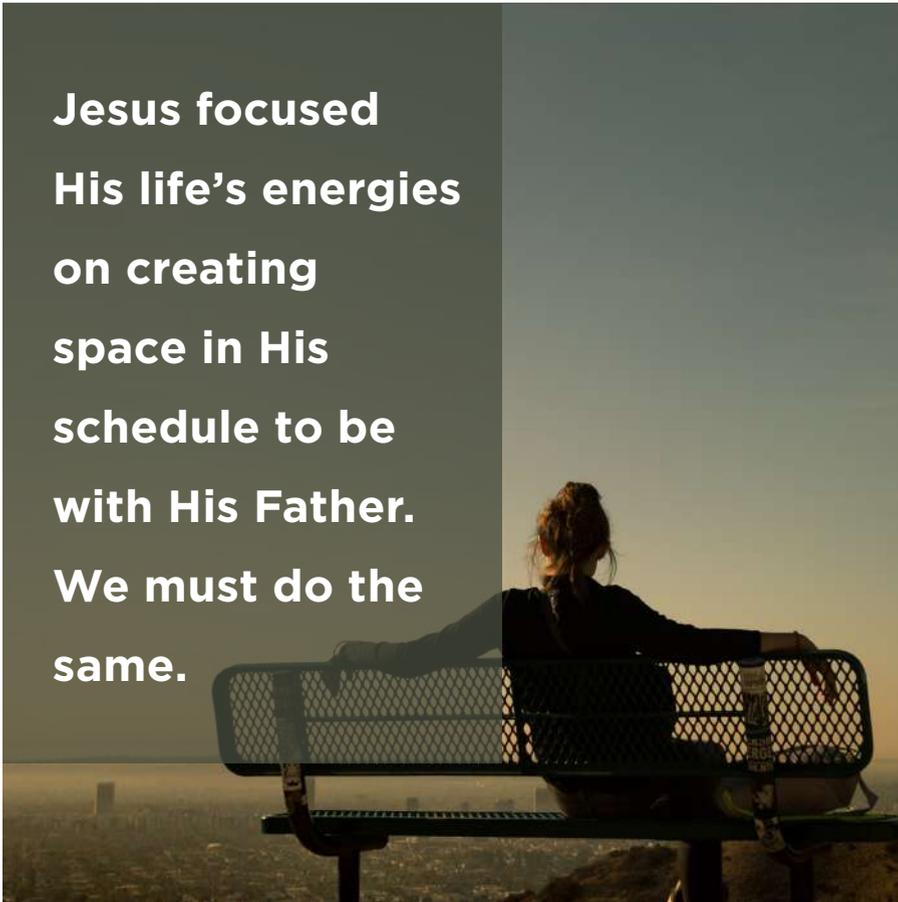
your money. For your vacations. But if I were to ask you, “What’s your plan spiritually? What’s your plan for the health and growth of your soul?” Well, I bet you’d stand there stammering.

I ask this all the time, and nine times out of ten, this is what I get: “Well, uh, uh, I’m going to go to church.”

Look. I’m glad you want to go to church. I’m thrilled you’re here. But I gotta be straight with you: listening to a preacher once a week—that is *not* going to get it done. Jesus has so much more for you. So much more!

But here we sit.... Most of us don’t have a plan for our spiritual life.

**Jesus focused  
His life’s energies  
on creating  
space in His  
schedule to be  
with His Father.  
We must do the  
same.**



# Final Thoughts for This Section

As we said in the opening chapter, the question of the Ultimate Meaning of life has haunted humanity since the beginning of time. *Why are humans here? What is the meaning of life?*

The world's great poets, artists, and philosophers have weighed in on this incredibly important question (some of them with more interesting insights than others).

It's into this discussion that Jesus wades, like a man entering into a crowded lecture hall bubbling with the cacophony of famous voices. And Jesus gives a provocative answer: the Ultimate Meaning of life is found in having a vibrant relationship with God, a relationship that engages your heart, your strength, your soul, and your mind.

Meaning = Love God

Meaning in this life is found in knowing and loving God in a personal way.

In the previous three chapters, we've delved deeply into the Schema from Deuteronomy 6. We've looked at what the Bible and Jesus have to say about loving God with all your heart, your mind, and your strength.

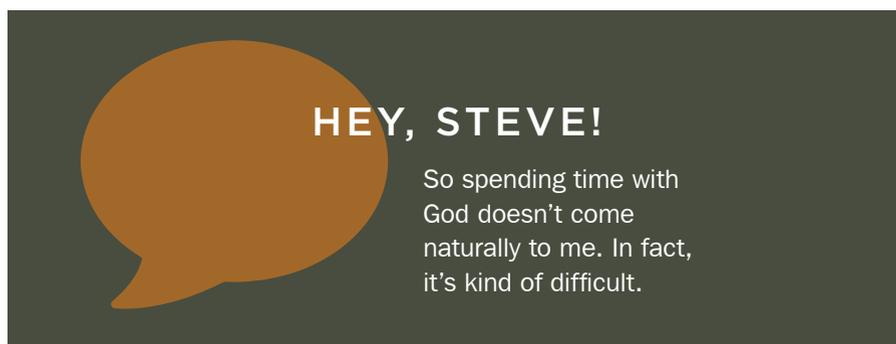
But Jesus isn't finished teaching.

Loving the Lord your God with your entire being is not the only aspect of what it means to be fully alive. Jesus also addresses the areas of Purpose and Intimacy, the other two giant needs of the human heart.

So don't stop reading! That'd be like turning off the movie halfway through.

# Meaning = Love God

**Meaning in this life is found by knowing and loving God in a personal way.**



Same here. I also find it hard to spend time with God. But I—we—shouldn't be surprised that it's not an easy thing to do. After all, what God wants to do inside of us whenever He meets with us is usually not easy. You see, Jesus is not just trying to teach a moral code so we can behave better.

Jesus doesn't want you to sin, but even more He wants you to *not want* to sin.

Jesus is after *genuine* change. He is after real transformation. He didn't come to Earth to get us to behave better. He doesn't want me just to not fight when I get mad; He wants me to not to even get angry. He doesn't want me to love just the people who love me; He wants me to love the people I don't want to love. He doesn't want me to not have sex with somebody else's wife; He doesn't even want me to look at her with that idea in my head.

Man! I don't know about you, but those changes come hard for me.

Yet Jesus is not into sin management; He's into character transformation.

So expect it to be difficult. But also expect that it will pay off big dividends in the long run.



## HEY, STEVE!

Your advice to me is to carve out time in my schedule for God to act, but then I look at my calendar and I just get depressed. I don't have an extra hour a day lying around. So now, I feel guilty, like I'm disappointing God yet another way.

I get it—and I sympathize with you. Let me tell you first off: you're never going to regularly spend time with God if it's just one more item on your to-do list. So let's back up for a minute. What do you most want in life? From life? I took some time and thought about that question. I sat with my journal and I asked myself, "What do I want?"

My point is, I think we'll say yes to the things we most want in life, and our heart will focus on what we say yes to. So it's worth spending some time thinking about what you want. *First, do you even invite the Lord into the conversation about your dreams and goals? Do you have a new heart that's centered on God instead of yourself? If so, what is the Holy Spirit saying to you? What do you most want?* Write down your thoughts. Paint as vivid a picture as you can.

I'll share with you what I wrote down:

### **What I Want Most**

I want to spend eternity with family members, who have passed down from generation to generation a faith in Jesus that is real and vibrant. I want a family heritage that is marked by service to Christ from this day forward. I want to love one woman really well all my life. I want to bring out Jesus in her and honor all that she was created to become. I want her to love me more on our last day together than she did on our wedding day. I want to give my life to Jesus' church, to serve her so that she can become all Jesus wants. I want to be a part of a dynamic,

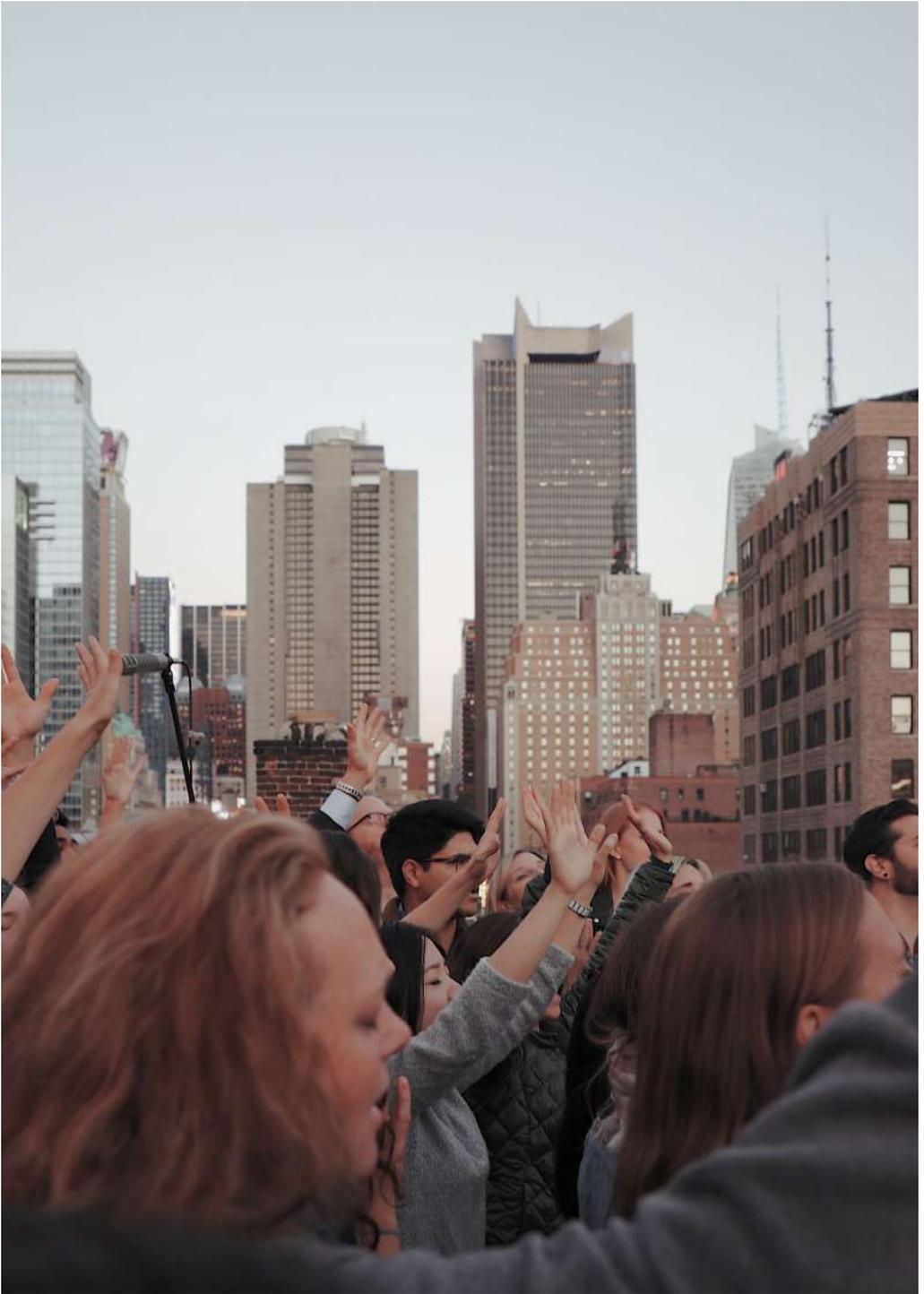
soul-winning, Bible-preaching, world-changing group of people who are becoming more and more like Jesus every day. And I want to do all these things with joy, I want to guard my gifts and my health so I can give my life fully and joyfully to Jesus all my days, and I want to finish my life with integrity and courage.

But most of all, I want to love Jesus and become more like Him. And that's simply not possible if I don't really, truly devote my life's focused energies on Him.

That's what I want.

So when I say no to pornography, I'm not just saying no to pornography; I'm saying yes to what I want in life. When I say no to television, or no to sleeping in, or no to not getting up and preparing for a message, I'm not saying no to those things as much as I'm saying yes to what I want in life. So I gotta ask you that question again: What do you want? What do you desire most deeply in your heart?

I'm askin' because I believe that you will say yes to whatever heartfelt desire means the most to you. And when you do say yes, rearranging your calendar becomes automatic.



# Digging Deeper:

**Training Tip:** Make space in your schedule to meet with your Lord.

## **Task 1: Find a Time**

Examine your schedule. If you were to put in place a regular time to meet with God, what time works best? Are you a morning person? Are you a night owl? When do you have the most energy?

## **Task 2: Find a Place**

List quiet places where you can go on a regular basis and not be interrupted. It's important to find a safe, quiet place that's reasonably free of distractions.

## **Task 3: Expect It to Be Difficult**

Nothing good and important in life will be accomplished without resistance. The only things in life that just naturally happen—without any human effort—or outside resistance are mold, weeds, and weight gain. So expect to encounter a wall to push through.

## **Task 4: Train; Don't Try**

As I've said before, if I asked you right now to run a marathon tomorrow, unless you're an elite endurance athlete, the chances of your being able to do so are pretty slim. Now, what if I told you that it was really, really important that you run the marathon? Would that help you complete it? Or what if I encouraged you to give it all you have and to try really, really hard? Would my words help you complete the 26.2 miles? No. Because you don't try to run a marathon when someone randomly suggests it; you train to run a marathon. Begin to train in the area of spiritual practices. SOAP, prayer, small groups—these are aspects of you training. So take the next step—and don't try. Train!

**Start your training this week. Create a space and plan for your week. When will you meet with God? Where? What obstacles do you anticipate—or did you encounter? How will—or did—you push through them?**

Now that you've found a place and set aside a particular time to meet with

God, choose one or two of the prayers listed below, read them, and then reflect on them: *What did this prayer reveal about the heart of the person praying it? What did it reveal about God? What did you find most striking or encouraging about the prayer?*

## Great Prayers of the Bible:

### **Psalm 51**

David's prayer of repentance

### **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**

A prayer for the future

### **1 Samuel 2:1-10**

Hannah's prayer of desperation

### **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**

A prayer for encouragement

### **Jonah 2:1-10**

Jonah's prayer of surrender

### **Romans 15:13**

A prayer for peace

### **Luke 1:46-55**

Mary's prayer of revolution

### **Hebrews 13:20-21**

A prayer for personal power

### **Acts 4:23-31**

The early church's prayer for boldness

### **Psalm 121**

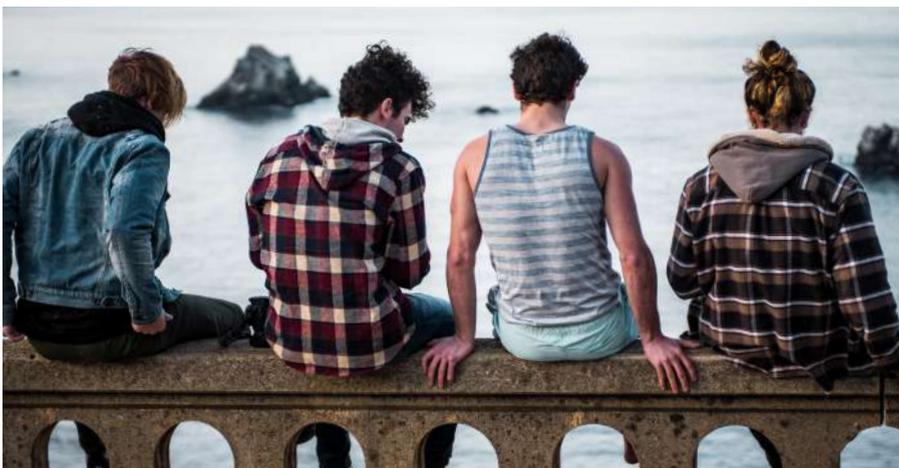
A prayer for God's presence and protection

### **Ephesians 3:14-21**

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians

### **Numbers 6:24-25**

A prayer for God's favor



# Love Your Neighbor Part 1

## SIX40 DISCIPLESHIP

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**We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our neighbor. —G. K. Chesterton**

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘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 commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

— Matthew 22:36-40

# Destiny = Love Your Neighbor

*God has given you unique opportunities to show His love to the world by sharing His message of hope in Jesus Christ and by living a life of generosity toward those in need.*

## Destiny

As we said in the opening chapters, the idea of finding meaning in life is a quest for every generation. Each one of us also has a deep desire to discover our unique destiny in the world. We have an innate need to not lead empty, selfish lives. We know we are supposed to matter. We want to live with purpose; we want to live out our unique purpose.

### **Destiny = Love Your Neighbor**

God has given you a unique purpose, and you find it when you look at the intersection of your great passion and the world's great need.



# What did Jesus teach about loving your neighbor?

This conversation in Matthew 22 is not the only time Jesus taught about loving your neighbor. In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus addresses this very issue.

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

*“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”*

*He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

*“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”*

So Jesus affirms His earlier teaching about loving God and loving your neighbor. But the man who asked the question asks another question to get some clarification:

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

This is a valid question. The ancient world was filled with various forms of tribalism—a



situation that we, sadly, can too easily identify with in today's world of conflict and division. In Jesus' day, the rising and falling empires and conquered people groups made for confusing lines between people groups, different subsets of national histories, and a range of cultural practices and religious identities. So the man was asking an important question: *Who should I love? Who is my neighbor?*

Jesus' famous response—brilliantly told in story form—turns the question entirely upside-down.

*Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."



## Jesus' telling of the parable of the good Samaritan is a masterful teaching moment for at least three reasons.

1. Jesus never answers the question directly. Instead, He tells a story. In a world of “Tell me what to do and what to believe,” Jesus responds with “Once upon a time.” This approach is brilliant because it forces listeners to put themselves into the story and draw their own conclusions.
2. The hero in the story is a Samaritan, which doesn't cause a reaction among 21st-century listeners, but first-century Jewish people would have definitely reacted. The backstory: Samaria was the capital city of the ten northern tribes of Israel. As the punishment handed down by the Lord for their idol worship and steadfast refusal to obey Him, Assyria had conquered these Israelites in 722 BC. An especially brutal captor, Assyria forced the conquered people to intermarry, and their half-Jew, half-Gentile offspring—Samaritans—were despised and persecuted by Jewish people in the time of Jesus for both their religion (which was seen as idolatrous and despised by God) and their racial identity (they were biracial). Despite this historical context, Jesus makes the Samaritan the hero of His story about neighbors. Which is just awesome on several different levels.
3. The story flips the question on the expert in the law. Instead of answering, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus asks him, “Which one of the people in the story acted like a good neighbor?” The expert can't even say the word *Samaritan*. Jesus had made His point: Don't ask, “Who is my neighbor?” Instead ask yourself, “Am I being a good neighbor?”

# The Implications of Jesus' Teaching

Of course, after hearing (or reading) this challenging story of the good Samaritan, followers of Jesus have—for centuries—grappled with both the personal and the corporate implications of this teaching. We can't avoid the question “What does it look like for me to love my neighbors?”

There is no simple answer, but a good place to start has to do with the word share:

First, share the hope you have found in Jesus.

Second, be willing to share your resources and love those in need in concrete, tangible ways.





## HEY, STEVE!

Do you have any practical advice for me on becoming a more effective “ambassador” for God? To be honest, it sounds good, but I’m unclear where to actually start.

I do have some insight into this, and the reason is that my wife and I moved to a new city and a new neighborhood fairly recently. Here’s what that experience taught me.

**Learn people’s names.** It’s tough to actually love someone well if you don’t even know that person’s name. So, as Christ’s ambassador, get out there. Learn people’s names. Remember, too, that your neighbor is anyone in your sphere of influence, folks you bump into as you live life. Talk to people. Get to know them.

**Figure out if your neighbor needs help.** Loads of people are hurting but don’t look like it. So be concerned. Show your concern. Ask with sincerity and give your full attention to the person’s answer.

**When you find out your neighbor has a need, do your best to meet it.** Of course it’s not always possible, but try your best. Give it your best effort.

**Pray**—and I should have listed this first. Pray for opportunities to be the Lord’s ambassador. Ask Him to open doors—and to help you recognize them when he does. As God’s ambassador, you are partnering with the Lord of Creation to bring help and hope to people who are hurting. If you don’t involve God, you’ll either be wracked with guilt that you’re not doing enough, or you’ll turn into a self-righteous jerk who gloats about all the people you’re helping. Neither is a good option.



## HEY, STEVE!

I feel a lot of guilt sometimes because I'm pretty timid about sharing my faith — mainly because I'm afraid I'll do something wrong or say something wrong. But then I worry that I'm not doing enough and God will be displeased. Any advice?

As we talked about in “Love God with All Your Heart,” motives really matter. Fear and guilt are very effective motivators, but they will eventually take a toll on your soul and hurt you. I don't think God wants that for you.

Talking to people about Jesus should always come from a place of gratitude and our love for God. That's the best, healthiest motivation.

Some religious traditions essentially put a sales quota on their members: “Convert this many people, or God won't be pleased with you.” The reason I share the good news about Jesus' love with my neighbor is because I love God and I'm responding to His love for me.

Changing your perspective and adjusting your motives can help free you from guilt and fear.

## Greek Etymology

# Getting to the Root

### What does evangelism even mean?

The word *evangelism* comes from the Greek word *euangélion*, meaning “good news.” In classical Greek, the term originally referred to the reward given to a messenger bearing really good news. The word morphed into meaning the good news itself.

Before telephones and Twitter, these ancient messengers carried important information. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the ancient Greek hero Pheidippides, who ran 26.2 miles to report to the people of Athens Greece’s victory over Persia at the Battle of Marathon. This is where we get both the name for—and the curious distance of—the modern marathon.

Anyway, it’s in this context of messengers being rewarded for bearing good news that the New Testament writers, especially Paul (who used the word 21 times) and Luke (25 times), repeatedly affirm two main facts:

1. The message is not an idea or philosophy. God has done something. The gospel is an account of an action of God. An action for which there were actual witnesses. Jesus was crucified for our sins, dead and buried, and then He rose from the dead.
2. People who have been affected by this news will share it with others, even if it costs them their possessions, their freedom, or even their lives. (“Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine!”).



# What is the Good News?

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(DISCLAIMER: This subject is so magnificent, I could type for a hundred years and not come close to capturing the majesty or importance of what Jesus did on the Cross and why that's good news for all of humanity. I can't possibly summarize all this into a few paragraphs. But my editors tell me I have to try. So here goes.)

If you said to me, "Hey, I was at your house, and a guy came by with a bill. But don't worry about it. I paid it," I would be grateful, but my response would depend on the amount of the bill. If it was postage due on a letter, then OK. Great. I owe you two quarters. But if you covered a bill from the IRS after I hadn't paid any taxes in seven years, if you paid off \$119,000 in back taxes—that's a different story! And hold this thought.

The Bible is clear: humankind is in trouble. As Dallas Willard once famously said, "The reason we do not run to God is because we don't know how much trouble we are in." Genesis 1 paints a picture of man and woman walking with God, a beautiful picture of intimacy and community and relationship. Then, man and woman choose to be their own gods. Sin enters the world and breaks everything. Through the millennia, sin has completely corrupted this world.

It is a death.

A disease.

A stain.

A cancer.

A parasite.

A corrupter.

And we humans can do absolutely nothing to get rid of it without God's

help. Even more horrifying is the fact that we can't even become aware of our sin without God's help.

But God intervened! Jesus voluntarily left heaven, overcame the power of sin by absorbing the debt we incurred with our sin, substituted Himself in our punishment that we deserved, and paid that final price of His own shed blood for all of our sin.

For Paul, the good news was that God brought salvation through the death of Jesus Christ, independent of the rules and regulations that characterized Judaism. For other writers, like the writer of Hebrews, the good news was about a God whose love for us is so strong that He'll do anything to get us back. Hebrews 12:2 says, "It was for the joy set before him [Jesus Christ] endured the cross." What was that joy? You and I reconciled to His Father, able to enjoy a life of peace with God here and now—and forever.

Salvation is accomplished through Jesus and applied to us when, by faith, we embrace His death and resurrection as the complete payment for our sin.

Part of being a Six40 Disciple is introducing people to this life-changing, life-transforming message.

You are God's messenger!

## **But What If I'm Not a Good Messenger....**

Many people (myself included) don't feel as though they're really qualified to be messengers for God. There's this fear that if people saw who I really am ...

But let's go back to the John 9 story of the man born blind. He's a rather unlikely messenger of the good news. But being a messenger is not about his qualifications. Or his financial worth. Or his social status. He is a messenger for God because Jesus did something for him that changed his life.

The man's story is that Jesus gave him his sight. And all the man does is simply share it.

The Pharisees keep pressing him. *Is Jesus a sinner? Where did Jesus get the power to do this? Why would He heal you, of all people?*

The man doesn't respond to those questions. He can't, really. All he says is "I once was blind, but now I see."

If that line sounds familiar, it's probably because it appears in John Newton's beloved song "Amazing Grace" (1779). Growing up without any particular religious convictions, Newton joined the British Navy and became involved in the evils of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. When he fell very sick on a voyage and nearly died, he turned to God in desperation.

Newton eventually became a follower of Jesus and, later, an active abolitionist and a pastor. He published pamphlets describing the horrors of slavery and used his influence to change public opinion. Newton wrote in one pamphlet, "It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."

Newton called "Amazing Grace" his "spiritual autobiography." In the first verse he marveled that Jesus "saved a wretch like me." Many people today find that wording too negative, so they change it to "saved a soul like me" or "saved and strengthened me." But Newton was under no illusions. Simply changing some lines of poetry couldn't change his dreadful past. He wrote:

When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders there. The first wonder will be to see people there I did not expect to see; the second wonder will be to miss many persons whom I did expect to see; and the third and greatest wonder of all will be to find myself there.

These are the words of a man whose eyes have been opened to how much God has done for him. This hymn is John Newton's lasting message to the world..

*Amazing grace!  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.*

The man John 9 and John Newton proclaimed, "Here's what I know. I was blind, but now I see. And Jesus is the One who did all this for me."

And this is your message too. Find a way to share your unique, beautiful story of redemption. Share what the Lord has done in your life. What He rescued

you from. How He's continuing to rescue you. Talk about where you'd be if He had never come into your life.

Really, at its core, evangelism is a bunch of people who were utterly lost, being rescued by Jesus, and simply telling the world, "Here's what Jesus did for me."

Share your message about what Jesus has done for you. Because that's a message the world is dying to hear.

## HEY, STEVE!

I'm super weirded out at the idea of "sharing my message" with people. Even the word *evangelism* sort of creeps me out. It brings up images of people in ties knocking on doors on Saturday morning passing out tracts or that guy standing on a crate with a bullhorn outside the concert venue, yelling things that nobody is listening to.

I get it. To most people, the word *evangelism* has the connotation of either an irrelevant distraction or meaningless babble. Or both. That's why I intentionally don't use the word *evangelism*. Instead, I use the term "love your neighbor" when I talk about sharing the news about what Jesus has done, both for me personally and for the world.

After all, if we talk about evangelism without talking about loving your neighbor, we can get wonky and start thinking that the only thing Jesus wants us to do is deliver a message. And we don't have to love someone to deliver a message to them! As I read the Scriptures and see Jesus' example, I don't think He leaves that option open to us.

Paul wrote the following lines while he was in jail. Read the passage first and then the practical steps from this passage we can take into our lives.

### **Colossians 4:2-6**

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for*

*us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

**First, always pray. Listen to the Holy Spirit.**

God draws people to Himself. You can't by your eloquence or knowledge convict people of sin, make them recognize their need for Jesus, or make them want God. The Holy Spirit does that work in people's hearts. So ask God to open doors for you—and pray that He'll nudge you across the threshold.

**Be a good friend.**

Sometimes a person's very first step toward getting to know Jesus is meeting a Christian they like who isn't totally weird. You could be that person. Find out what's important to someone you want to get to know and make an effort to be a friend.

**Share what God did for you.**

As you share, remember this is a dialogue, not a monologue. So be quick to listen. Ask about their spiritual opinions and ideas, and listen first. Don't be quick to tell them what you believe. When the time comes to talk about your faith, simply tell them—in real and relatable and honest terms—what Jesus did for you. Don't sugarcoat things. Just be as honest as possible.

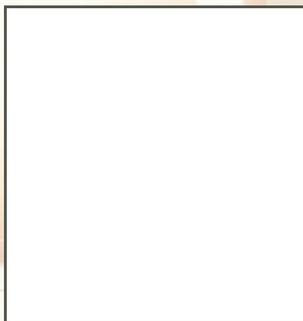
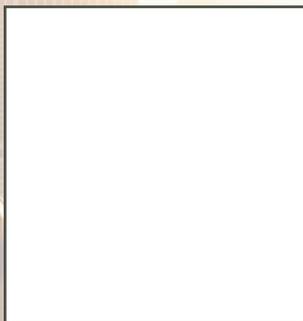
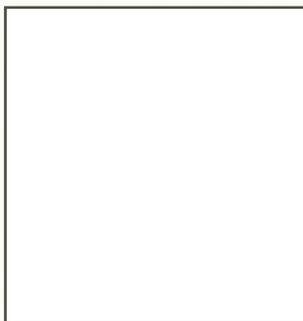
**When life happens, help.**

It's an unfortunate reality that tragedy happens. People need help when life falls apart. So be a good friend who helps. Don't be afraid to ask people if you can pray for them. In all my years, I've never had anyone say no. I have heard, though, countless stories of people who came to faith in Jesus Christ largely because they had a close friend who loved God. Your devotion as a friend can give you the opportunity to share your story and the story of Jesus, but it will be the Holy Spirit in you who gives your words their life-changing power.

**When the door is closed...**

Sometimes people will politely say, "Listen, I don't want to talk about spiritual stuff or God or Jesus anymore." Respect that. And pray, pray, pray. Don't end the friendship. Wait with God. You never know what He is going to do.

# Who Are Your Five?



# Digging Deeper:

Getting started on loving my neighbor

Pray. Ask the Lord to bring to your mind and heart some people who are not yet fully devoted followers of Jesus whom He might want you to talk to as His messenger.

List the five people God has placed in your life and on your heart. Write their names on the closed doors.

Determine what steps you will take to be intentional about building a spiritual relationship with each person.

**Example 1:** *I will ask Susie to meet at Starbuck's before work on Tuesdays. I will invite her to dinner every other month. I will invite her to events with my friends from church.*

**Example 2:** *We will host a neighborhood barbecue this summer. We will invite the Smiths over for a game night. We will invite them over for dinner two times this fall.*

Pray for these people and ask the Lord to give you an open door so you can share your story with them.

# Love Your Neighbor Part 2

## SIX40 DISCIPLESHIP

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**When we learn to read the story of Jesus and see it as the story of the love of God, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves—that insight produces, again and again, a sense of astonished gratitude. —N.T. Wright**

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

— Matthew 25:37-40

## Would Jesus Approve?

“If Jesus were to come back today, would he approve of the modern version of Christianity?”

That was the online question posed by the website [www.isidewith.com](http://www.isidewith.com), and roughly 20,000 people responded. The response was overwhelmingly negative, with 87 percent saying Jesus would likely disapprove. Those numbers should not surprise anyone.

But what exactly would Jesus disapprove of? What would cause Jesus to get irritated? Is it possible to offend Jesus? What makes Jesus angry with the kind of righteous anger that comes from a place of deep love, that brings life, and that causes someone to protect and defend another? What attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs would cause Jesus to go on the offensive and clarify, in clear and direct language, “That is *not* what God has in mind”?

Because that would be cool to watch, right? Someone pompous getting put in their place by God Incarnate? A bully getting served by the Son of Man? A jerk being called out by Jesus?



Well, wouldn't you know it, we find in Scripture—in Luke 14—a moment when all that happens. During a dinner party, Jesus picks three fights. In a row. If we watch and listen closely, looking beyond the fun of the dramatic fireworks, we'll also see the heart of Jesus and His Father. And if we're lucky, by eavesdropping in on this event and watching Jesus bring out the big guns of correction, we will see a truth about God, and we may also find ourselves motivated to course correct preemptively.

## Jesus Picks a Fight

### **Luke 14:1-6**

*One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.*

*Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" And they had nothing to say.*

Now, we need a little bit of historical and cultural background. A meal like this would typically be served in the courtyard area of a large home. Everyone who was formally invited would have a particular place to sit at the table, and those people not invited would hang out on the edges. They want to hear what's being said, but mostly they want to see if there's any leftover food. (That crowd might make folks think twice about having seconds!). So, these onlookers can't provide a meal for themselves.

Our text says that Jesus was "being carefully watched." Literally, this word means "to watch suspiciously."

Along the edges of the party was a man whose arms and legs were swollen. Some translations say he had dropsy or edema, a very serious condition where tissues in the body swell up due to an abnormal accumulation of fluid. This disease can usually be treated to day, but in Jesus' time it was rather serious. So this man is disfigured and gravely ill, and everyone in the room believes he is sick because he's being punished by God.

Jesus sees this man and asks the religious leaders, "Is it permitted in the

Law to heal people on the Sabbath day or not?”

And what do they do? They remain silent. They refuse to answer Jesus. Now, I think it's just magical that this whole conversation is happening right in front of the sick guy. Talk about awkward! Jesus is calling out the religious leaders' callousness. When they refuse to answer Him, Jesus touches the sick man, heals him, and sends him away.

This event is shocking for a number of reasons. First, no Jew in good standing would touch someone who is sick. Second, Jesus did work on the Sabbath day when he healed the man.

Jesus takes on both these objections, asking His dinner partners, “Which of you doesn't work on the Sabbath? What if your son or even your cow falls into a pit, don't you rush to get him out?”

Again, these religious leaders “had nothing to say.” Jesus has forced them to recognize that their religious system keeps them from loving their neighbor. In fact, their religious system—the way they read the heart and the rules of God—has actually become a barrier to compassion.

So, with His actions and His words, Jesus begins to tear down this barrier.





## LESSON 1: Treat everyone as though they have bestowed worth—because they do.

### Who Does God Like?

In the Luke 14 story about the man with dropsy, Jesus is arguing for a concept called “bestowed worth.” Now, bestowed worth is this: if someone you love and respect values something or someone, that something or someone is important to you.

Here’s the truth. Theologians use the phrase *imago Dei*—the “image of God”—to declare that human beings are created in God’s image (Genesis 1) and therefore have inherent value independent of their utility or function. So, according to the Scriptures, God says of every person you will ever meet, “They are of infinite worth to me. Jesus Christ came for them. My plan of salvation is offered to them. I long for them to know Me, love Me, serve Me, be part of My family.”

One of the reasons we can love our neighbors well is because the Lord loves them. We love the Lord, so we love the people the Lord loves. Bestowed worth.

This is the first lesson from Luke 14 about what it means to love your neighbor:

**Lesson 1:** Treat everyone as though they have bestowed worth... because they do.

The religious leaders simply don't get this. At all. But school is open, and they are about to learn.

Jesus has only taught Lesson 1, and He is just getting started.





## HEY, STEVE!

Jesus clearly commands and models that we are to love our neighbors. So why are some Christians mean? Why do some have no tolerance for anyone who doesn't believe what they believe?

First of all, I'm sorry that you've run into so many people bearing the name of Christ who don't do a good job demonstrating His love. That stinks. It really does.

You know, as I thought about your question, it occurred to me that “being mean to people who are unlike you and don't believe the same as you” is a gigantic problem—and not just for Christians. It's a huge problem for humanity.

In fact, if I'm honest, it's a big problem for me. Because of my human nature, I tend toward selfishness. That's why I love the story of the Good Samaritan. In this one parable, Jesus—whose brilliance as a teacher never stops knocking me off my feet—confronts that selfishness. He shows me that loving people does not mean having a sentimental-and-nice-warm-fuzzy-emotion kind of love. Instead, Jesus shows us that real love is an active meeting-the-actual-needs-of-someone kind of love.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, the two men who passed by, the priest and the Levite, both asked themselves a question: “If I stop and help this man, what will happen to me?” But the Samaritan asked a vastly different question. He actually reversed the question, saying, “If I *don't* stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows me that *loving my neighbor will cause me to be uncomfortable*. I'm likely going to have to interact and love people who are different from me, even those whose value systems and

beliefs are completely opposite of mine. But Jesus doesn't give me an out.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows me that *loving people will demands my time*. The Samaritan delays his journey to help the man get to an inn. Who knows how long that took? I don't like giving up any of my time. But Jesus doesn't give me an out.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows me that *loving people will demand my resources*. The Samaritan not only applies first aid from his own stores of oil and wine, but he also pays two days' wages for the man's hotel room—and promises to pay any and all debt incurred as the man returns to health. This generosity is incredible, and Jesus is warning me through this example that He might very well ask me to use my money to help other people. I don't like giving up my money, either. I'd like to keep it for myself. But Jesus doesn't give me an out.

Finally, in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows me that my *comfort, my security, or even my personal agenda for the day is not to be my highest priority*. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a steep, curvy road known in Jesus' day as Bloody Pass because of the presence of thieves and robbers. The Samaritan would have had good reason to fear for his own life, yet he stops to help. Again. Jesus doesn't give me an out.

Well, actually, I do have an out. I can choose to be like the priest or the Levite and hurry along on my way. I can ignore the clear needs of people around me and justify or rationalize my decision the entire time.

I do have that option. Jesus has left that option open to me. But let me tell you, I don't want that option. So, to answer your question, perhaps stop focusing on the people you've seen pass by the Samaritan. They've made their choice. Jesus is inviting you to make yours. And I'd encourage you to make a different choice.

Be like the Good Samaritan.

# Life in Jesus' Day

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## Did Jesus' teachings about bestowed worth have any effect on the ancient world?

The teachings of Jesus about bestowed worth—about the God-given dignity of all people—did indeed have a huge impact on both the ancient world and our own, especially on these groups:

**Children:** The ancient world was a darker and crueler place than people today realize. In ancient Greece and Rome, the beautiful, strong, and wealthy were admired; the weak weren't. So children—especially girls—were routinely left to die of exposure or sold into slavery. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote, "We drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound." Jesus' treatment of children and His teachings led to the end of such practices and the establishment of orphanages and godparents. A Norwegian scholar named Bakke wrote a study on this impact, simply titled "When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity."

**Women:** Rome fined widows because they were seen as a drain on society. So the church took them in and cared for them. Jesus, however, valued women. He assigned a woman named Mary Magdalene to deliver the most important news in the history of the world, the news of His resurrection. A deaconess named Phoebe took Paul's letter to the church at Rome. In that capacity, she probably fielded questions and served as Paul's spokesperson if anything needed clarification. Jesus' radical inclusion of women caused them to flock to the community of believers in disproportionate numbers.

**The Sick:** In the fourth century, a man named Benedict founded an order of monks who vowed to love God better. Benedict believed that the Divine Presence was in everyone and that helping the poor and sick was akin to helping Christ Himself. Benedict founded the first hospital in the fourth century. By the sixth century, hospitals were often attached to monasteries patterned after Benedict's. The Council of Nyssa decreed that wherever a

cathedral existed, there must be a hospice, a place to care for the sick and the poor. Even today, hospitals—the world’s first charitable institution— have names like “Good Samaritan,” “Good Shepherd,” or “Saint Anthony.”

**The Poor:** The Red Cross, Easter Seals, Goodwill, The Salvation Army, Compassion International—all of these organizations were started by disciples of Jesus who too seriously His words about the poor and sick.



## The Next Fight Jesus Picks

Now, showing up the religious leaders in their own house by healing the man with dropsy would, for most people, be enough drama for the day, but apparently Jesus felt that the lesson had not yet been learned. So He kept going. (Reading this passage is like watching a train wreck. Seriously, it’s seriously so great. It’s always sort of voyeuristically fun to watch people get in big time trouble, isn’t it? Just as long as it isn’t you!)

*When [Jesus] noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be*

*honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

*Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

In this fantastic and clear picture Jesus paints—one that is still quite accessible to us today—He is saying to the religious leaders, “You think you’re important, but a cosmic dinner party will happen someday. My Father will host—and don’t be so sure that you’re a guest of honor. And stop fighting about places of honor now and instead serve even those people who are lower than you on the social scale.”

What Jesus is advocating here—and what the religious leaders He is dining with totally miss—is humility. The ancient world honored virtues like courage and wisdom, but not humility. “Rank must be preserved,” said Cicero. But Jesus turns this Greco-Roman value upside down. In fact, Jesus’ example as a foot-washing servant eventually led to humility being regarded as a virtue.

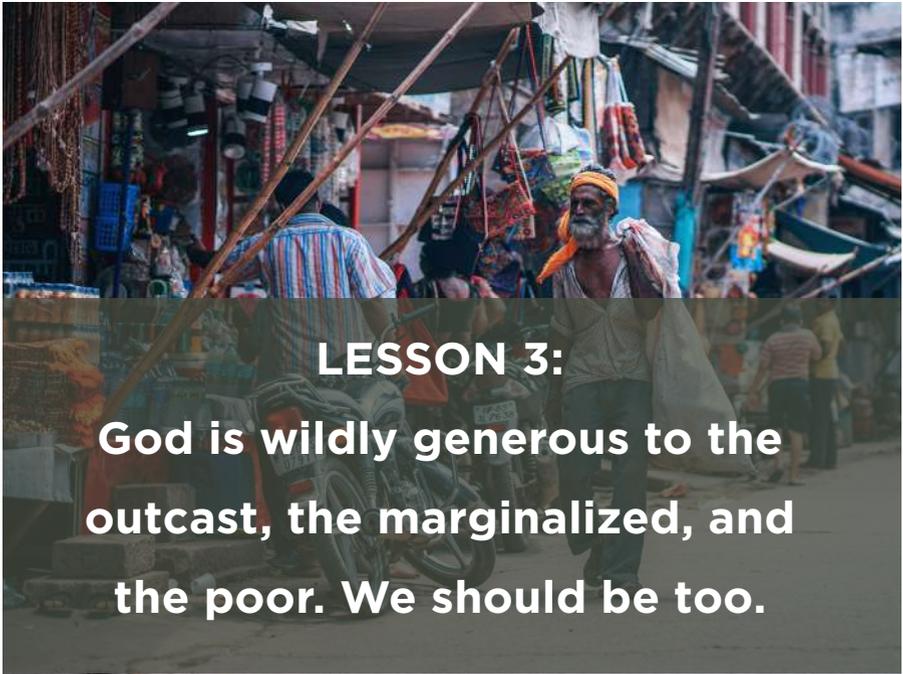
Yet humility is often misunderstood. As C. S. Lewis helpfully explained, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” In other words, humility is not about pretending that you don’t have the gifts or talents you actually possess, and it’s not thinking that the possession of those gifts and talents makes you better or more valuable than other people. The apostle Peter put it this way, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

It’s tough to be clearer than that.

Now, this is the second lesson Jesus taught about loving your neighbor:

**Lesson 2:** The kingdom of God belongs to people who humble themselves. The religious leaders simply don’t get this. At all. But school is still open. And they are about to learn some more.

Jesus has only taught Lesson 1 and Lesson 2. He isn’t done yet..



**LESSON 3:**  
**God is wildly generous to the  
outcast, the marginalized, and  
the poor. We should be too.**

## **The Third and Final Fight**

Jesus has officially ruined this dinner party. It's quite amazing, really. And picking up on this incredible awkwardness, one of the guests tries to transition out of this conversation and says: *"Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."*

It's as if this guest was saying, "Wow! That was awkward, wasn't it? Well, heaven will be quite a feast, you can bet on that. I wonder if they'll serve lobster! Ha-ha!"

This is a clear conversational out. This guest is pouring a metaphorical bucket of water on the conversational fire Jesus has started. He's jumping on the social grenade Jesus has tossed out. And you'd think that would be the end of it. But no. Jesus doesn't stop. He keeps going. Like a dog attacking its favorite chew toy, Jesus is not about to let go.

*Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those*

who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

*"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*

*"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'*

*"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

*"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'*

*"'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'*

*"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"*

So much is going on in this story. Here are a few thoughts:

1. When Jesus sets the scene by saying that a man was "preparing a great banquet," this does not mean the same thing to our modern ears as it would to the original audience. Preparing that much food for that many people would have taken dozens of people dozens of hours of work.
2. In Jesus' story, the original invitees begin backing out. This is not like saying, "Sorry I can't make it over for Monday Night Football." This would have been an act of massive disrespect and a rejection of all the hard work the man had invested in the banquet.
3. Notice the reasons why the people don't go to the great banquet. One had bought a field. Since property ownership was akin to social status, perhaps Jesus is implying that this man thought his reputation was his most important priority. Another had bought some oxen. Perhaps his priority was his possessions. And yet another had just gotten married and is apparently more interested in pleasure. Evidently, even in the ancient world, people tended to make social status, possessions, and pleasure more important than God.

4. His guests' rejection—especially in light of the man's lengthy and thoughtful preparation—clearly wounds the man. Actually, Jesus says that he becomes angry: "Fine then! Invite anyone you see from the streets."
5. In His story, Jesus has the man send his servants out into the county lanes to invite to the banquet the weakest members of society, the poorest of the poor.
6. The "certain man" in this story is God the Father. Apparently, God's party will not be stopped because human beings reject His invitation. God is *going* to have a party. And the room will be full.
7. Jesus' main point is this: If you think you have a spot reserved at the heavenly feast, but you lose focus of God and start paying more attention to status, power, possessions, or pleasure, you might find yourself outside looking in just as these poor, outcast people surrounding your party are right now.

**Lesson 3:** God is wildly generous to the outcast, the marginalized, and the poor. We should be too.

## Luke 14 Recap

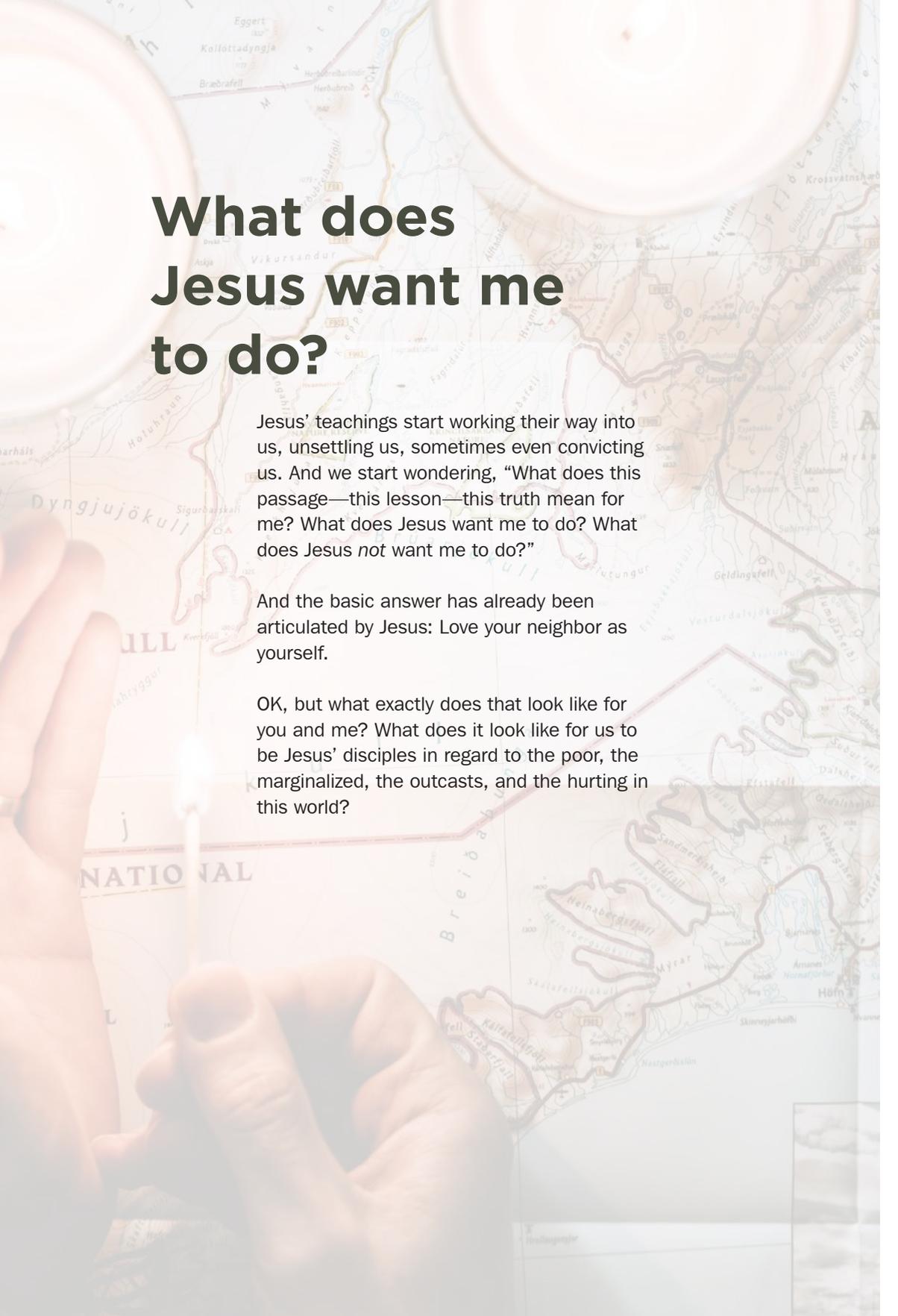
So what did we learn here?

### **Jesus really does not like it when people:**

- Treat the sick and poor like they're worth less than other people.
- Spend their time trying to climb the social ladder to achieve positions of honor in society.
- Assume that they—because of their status and wealth—have secured a place at God's table even when their hearts are far from God.

### **To avoid being put on blast by Jesus, we should probably:**

- Treat everyone—even the disabled, the very sick, and the very poor—as though they have infinite worth to God... because they do.
- Humble ourselves before the Lord and live as His loyal servants.
- Be very aware of the outcasts, the marginalized, the sick, and the poor—just as Jesus is. Serve them and invite them into God's kingdom.

A topographic map of Iceland is the background. In the foreground, a hand holds a lit matchstick, with the flame glowing. The map shows various geographical features, including rivers, mountains, and towns. The matchstick is positioned vertically, with the flame at the top. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the matchstick providing a focal point of light.

# What does Jesus want me to do?

Jesus' teachings start working their way into us, unsettling us, sometimes even convicting us. And we start wondering, "What does this passage—this lesson—this truth mean for me? What does Jesus want me to do? What does Jesus *not* want me to do?"

And the basic answer has already been articulated by Jesus: Love your neighbor as yourself.

OK, but what exactly does that look like for you and me? What does it look like for us to be Jesus' disciples in regard to the poor, the marginalized, the outcasts, and the hurting in this world?

# Ping-Pong Balls, the NBA Draft, and Jesus

When I was in college, I read the works of a philosopher named John Rawls who developed an important idea he called “the veil of ignorance.” But, being a simple man, I took his concept and renamed it “The NBA Draft Ping-Pong Ball Theory of Justice.”

Let me explain: back in the '80s and '90s, the order that the teams in the NBA drafted was decided by a giant machine filled with ping-pong balls emblazoned with each team's logo. The worst teams had hundreds of balls, while the NBA Champion had only one or two. The host pulled a lever, and a random ping-pong ball would be sucked into the tube. The host grabbed it, showed it to the world, and then placed it in its draft position.

Now, imagine that you're a child about to be born into this world, into the next available spot. Inside a giant machine are 100 ping-pong balls representing all the places in the world where a baby will be born, and whatever location pops up, that's where you'll start life on earth. Of course you don't know where you'll end up, but here's how the ping-pong balls would fall based on global statistics:

- There would be 60 ping-pong balls from Asia, 15 from Africa, 11 from Europe, 9 from Latin + South America and 5 from North America.
- There's a 17 percent chance you'd be born into a place where you, as a baby, will be undernourished.
- There's a 1 percent chance (1 ball) that you'll be born and then immediately die of starvation.
- There's a 2 percent chance (2 balls) that you'll be born and contact either HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis and then die.
- You have an 80 percent chance of being born into a family that makes less than \$10 per day.
- You have a 14 percent chance of never learning to read.
- You have a 20 percent chance of not having safe drinking water in the village where you're born.
- You have a 23 percent chance of being born into a village where you don't have adequate shelter and protection from the elements.
- You have an 18 percent chance of owning a car.
- You have a 22 percent chance of being born into a village without electricity.

- You have a 7 percent chance of getting a college degree.
- You have a 16 percent chance of being born into a village with no sanitation.
- You have a 48 percent chance of living on less than \$2 per day.
- You have a 3 percent chance of living in the United States.

Aren't these numbers astonishing? Based on actual global statistics, the chance of anyone being born healthy or rich is really, really low. God's sovereignty aside, you or I could have been born into any position in the global society. This was Rawls's point.

Picture being among 100 people behind that veil of ignorance and waiting to be born based on whatever ping-pong ball pops up. What would we say to each other? Here's a thought: "Hey, we should probably help each other out and share our resources to make sure everyone has a fighting shot at life."

Because—as you've seen—you are quite likely to be born into crippling poverty.

**Twitterable: You'd want everyone to feel a deep burden to seek out the most at-risk and help those people, right? Because the chances of you being that person would be pretty high.**



# Life in Jesus' Day

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## Did Jesus' teachings about compassion have any effect on the ancient world?

In 165 AD, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a devastating epidemic swept through the Roman Empire. Some medical historians suspect that it was the first appearance of smallpox in the West. Whatever the actual disease, a third of the entire population of the Roman Empire died. In 251 AD, a new and equally devastating epidemic—measles, perhaps—swept through the Roman Empire. As many as 5,000 people per day were dying in Rome. Terrified citizens fled the cities, frequently leaving their families behind in the interest of self-preservation. But one group—a group of people who did not seem to fear death—did not flee: the Christians.

In *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark wrote that the selfless care for the sick and the poor by early followers of Jesus had a vast impact on the ancient world:

1. Christians believed they pleased God when they cared for one another. So they stayed to care for the sick.
2. Survival rates increased: the provision of simple nursing and care (food, water, basic hygiene) reduces mortality by almost 70 percent.
3. As a result, an increased proportion of Christians lived in urban centers, meaning more people had contact with Christians.
4. Christians cared for non-Christians, bringing nonbelievers into their sphere.
5. Christians staying to care for the sick—while other groups fled—exposed the bankruptcy of pagan religions.

## Live Generously

It's one thing to say we believe Jesus has called us to be generous toward the poor and marginalized. It's quite another to actually *be* generous. A group of people (a culture) can never become generous if its constituents aren't also becoming more generous. Learning to live generously is both a personal journey and a cultural/leadership dynamic. Consider a fleet of ships: each ship has to be seaworthy, but the captain of the fleet has to be directing the ships toward the right destination.

This is what WestGate is trying to do.

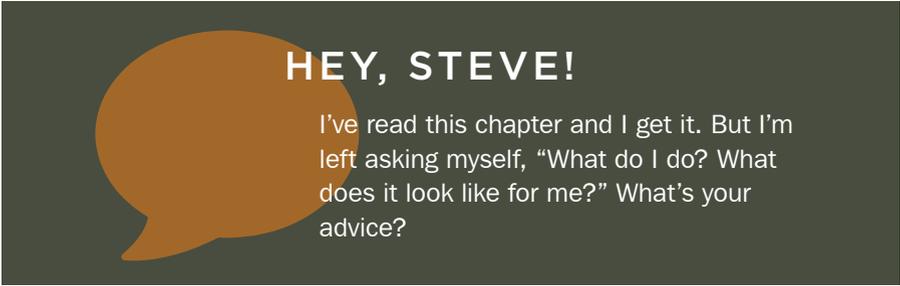
But it hasn't been easy, and we haven't always done well.

For example, a number of years ago, we made a huge push for our people to get actively involved in acts of compassion. We mobilized a lot of people who served on various projects. During that time, the Lord taught us quite a bit, and we learned what to do—and what not to do:

1. **Never divorce compassion from discipleship.** If we're doing the right thing, but our motivation is off, we might as well be doing the wrong thing. We are to serve simply because Jesus did, and we want to be like Him.
2. **Never confuse compassion with evangelism.** Certainly, by all means, we hope in every situation we'll get to share about Jesus and what He's done for us. But that's not the reason we do acts of compassion. We do acts of compassion and service because that's what Jesus did, and we want to be like Him.
3. **Build actual relationships.** Don't show up as a group to do service projects and say you care unless you have built actual relationships. People matter to God. Doing a service project isn't the same thing as actually caring about people.
4. **Stick around.** Don't show up as a group to do service projects and say you care unless you're willing to stick around long-term. If there are still needs after your project and you ignore them, then you're just showing up to do something to make yourself feel better and assuage your guilt. You're not acting out of actual friendship and love.



5. **Generosity is so much more than writing a check.** Although being generous with your money is supremely important, it also isn't the be-all and end-all to generosity. The point of generosity is that you sacrifice something of yourself for the benefit of someone else, and for some people, if we're honest, sometimes it's more difficult to interrupt our schedules and give of our time than it is to write a check. God wants us to be as generous as we can be with our two biggest resources: our time and our money. In fact, sometimes what people most need is your time as proof that someone actually cares about them.



## HEY, STEVE!

I've read this chapter and I get it. But I'm left asking myself, "What do I do? What does it look like for me?" What's your advice?

I think generosity starts with an understanding that every person we encounter has worth far beyond our understanding.

If I truly see people as individuals with incredible bestowed worth *and* if I humbly recognize that what I have in my life—my wealth, my health, and everything else—is a gift because of God's grace, *and* if I recognize I have so much more than most people who have ever lived on this planet simply because I live in the zip code I do, then how can I *not* get involved? How can I not give my time and money?

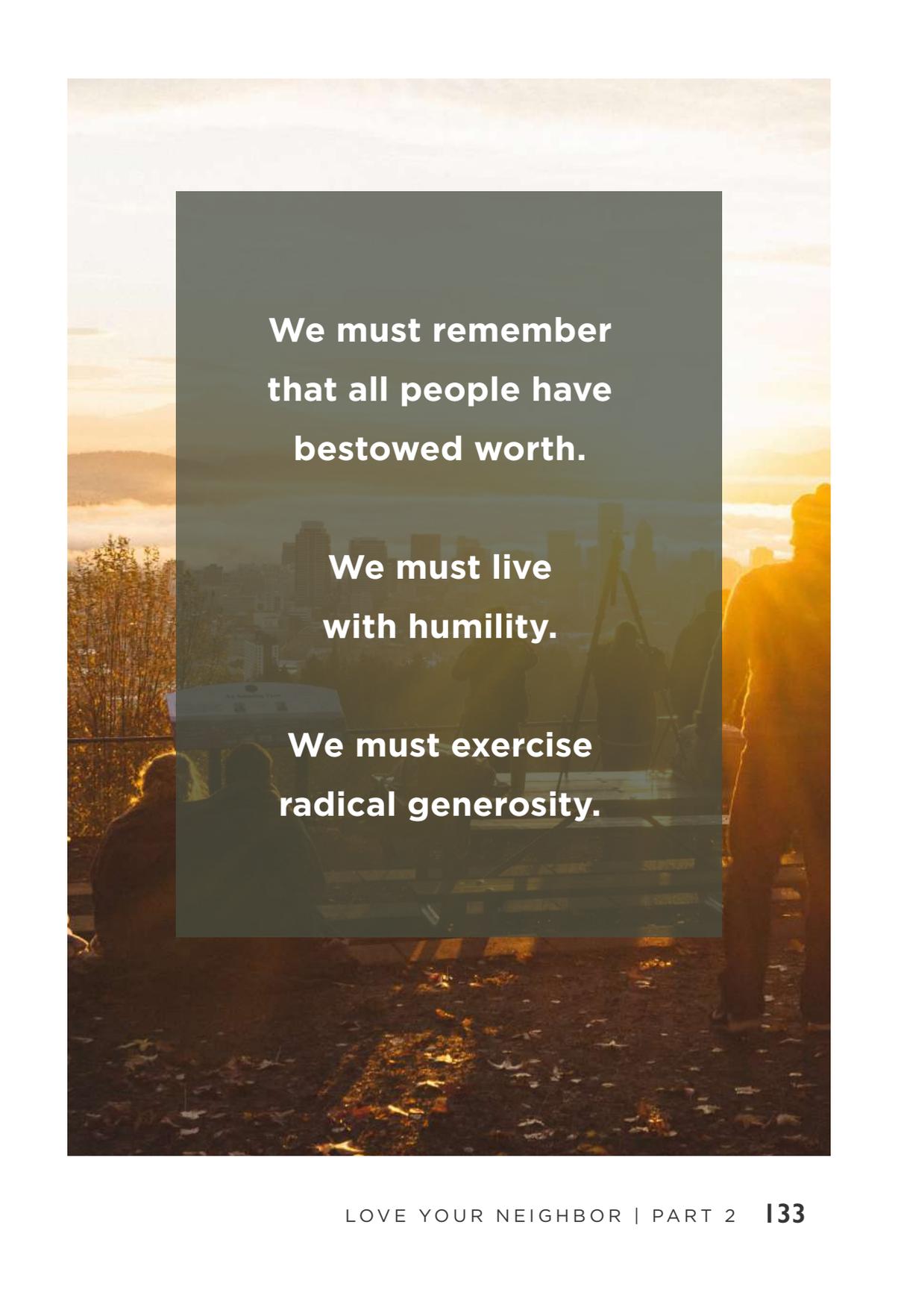
If I really do believe that everyone I meet is infinitely valuable and if I really do believe that God—in His grace—has given me all that I have, how can I not share with people less fortunate?

I do realize what WestGate has done, and I'm very grateful that our people have responded so generously. But here's the stark reality: nobody at WestGate is going without food because they're so generous. Very few people are even giving at a level where they're going without *anything*. I believe it's not really generosity unless it costs you.

One more thing. What if I learn about someone on the other side of the the world who looks just like my granddaughter—same height and weight, same need for love, same talents and dreams, same value in God's eyes—and who is going to starve this week? Well, I take out my wallet.

We too easily find ourselves distanced from that reality because it's all the way across the world, and we can't see it. But tens of thousands of people got clean, fresh drinking water this morning because someone like you and me—from the other side of the planet—shared.

How could you not join in? How could you not share? That's my heart.



**We must remember  
that all people have  
bestowed worth.**

**We must live  
with humility.**

**We must exercise  
radical generosity.**



# Digging Deeper:

**Question 1:**

*We must remember that all people have bestowed worth.* What would it look like, practically, for you to live out and embody the values found in this statement?

**Question 2:**

*We must live with humility.* What would it look like, practically, for you to live out and embody the values found in this statement?

**Question 3:**

*We must exercise radical generosity.* What would it look like, practically, for you to live out and embody the values found in this statement?

# Love One Another Part 1

## SIX40 DISCIPLESHIP

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**We must all learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we will all perish together as fools. We are... caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, and whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made. —Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” — John 13:34-35

## Michael

His name, given at birth, was Michael.

Not much is known about the kind of environment Michael grew up in for the first eight years of his life mainly because his biological parents themselves don't remember: both of them were crystal meth addicts. At times neither of them would sleep for days. Other times they crashed so hard that even the sounds of a crying infant wouldn't have awakened them.

Michael, however, wasn't held as a baby. He wasn't breastfed, or given eye contact while feeding, or touched really much at all. He spent most of his infancy isolated and alone for months on end. His cries were ignored. The police investigators are still unclear how Michael survived.

This neglect had a devastating effect on Michael's development because babies need to be held and touched and sung to.

Tragically, life got even worse for Michael. After all, a drug house filled with people addicted to crystal meth is no place for a child. At the age of eight, Michael was sexually assaulted by a guest at his parents' home. The abuse continued, and eventually Michael's parents began selling him to their friends.

This continued for months before the police were finally alerted. When they arrived at the house, they found Michael hiding like a feral animal in the back



room. Michael had learned to hold in his bowels, and if someone got close enough, Michael would spray his feces like a skunk, hoping to repel them. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it didn't.

The county psychologists said they had never seen a case quite this bad. Michael was diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder, the result of an infant or young child not establishing healthy attachments with parents or caregivers. Reactive Attachment Disorder may develop if a child's basic needs for comfort, affection, and nurturing aren't met and if loving, caring, stable attachments to people aren't established.

The State of California eventually tracked down Michael's closest living relative: his uncle, a man named Steven, who was married to Joy, and they had no kids of their own. When they heard what had been done to Michael, they couldn't stop weeping. Eventually, they decided to take Michael in.

"You realize what you're getting yourself into," the psychologist warned. "Michael cannot trust any living person. He has developed some violent coping mechanisms. And he won't be better in a month, or a year, or even two years. It might be five years before you see any change."

But Steven and Joy would not be dissuaded.

It took them seven years to break through to Michael, to begin to undo the damage from those first horrific years of his life. But Steven and Joy persevered. And Michael, now 17, is doing a lot better. He loves baseball—and he's good at it. He's the starting second baseman for his high school varsity team. He has a good sense of humor. He has good friends. And he has Steven and Joy, whom he calls "Dad" and "Mom."

What changed in Michael's life? You could point to a number of things, but the biggest—the most healing—thing that happened was pretty simple....

Michael got a family.

Michael was wounded by a family, but he was also, in part, healed in a family.

Because, God knows, a good family can change everything.

# Intimacy = Love One Another

*True intimacy comes when you are fully known and fully loved. Having experienced that kind of love from God, Christians attempt to create communities where that same love is embodied and lived out among them.*

## The Incredible Benefits of Family

As we talked about in the opening chapter, the human heart yearns for intimacy, for true connection with other people. Human beings are social creatures, and we need love and affection and intimacy as much as we need oxygen.

### Intimacy = Love One Another

True intimacy comes when you are fully known *and* fully loved. Having experienced that love from God, Christians attempt to create communities where that same love is embodied and lived out among them. At its most basic level, the human family provides that kind of community and love.

UNICEF, however, reports that more than 16.2 million double-orphans (children under the age of 5 who have lost both parents) and 132 million single-orphans (children who have lost one parent) live on this planet. A host of relief organizations are trying to help....

We all know instinctively that not having a family is a really bad thing. And we know, conversely, if someone has a family, they are significantly better off.

Think about some potential benefits to being a family: Physical safety and stability. Psychological well-being. Financial security. Food. Shelter. Decreased loneliness and isolation. Economic flexibility. A sense of belonging and personal identity. The list goes on.

The point is, a person benefits tremendously when he or she is part of a family, especially if that family is filled with people who are lovingly devoted to him or her.

After all—as God knows—a good family can change everything.

# Seeing Red

In the first four books of the New Testament, four men tell the story of Jesus' life. Sometimes the story moves at almost a breakneck pace. We go from place to place, and miracle to miracle, and confrontation to confrontation as if we're watching an action movie. At times (especially in Mark's gospel) you almost feel like you're listening to a seven-year-old talking about their first experience going to Disneyland ("Then this happened... and then *this* happened... And you're not going to believe it, but... Then we turned around because...."). After all, there is much to tell: as John put it near the end of his book, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.")



But the later chapters of the Gospel of John are different. In some ways, John's writing style is the most poetic. He's not simply recounting the important stories and teachings of Jesus. John is also trying to paint a picture of what it was like for the disciples to live with Jesus, to follow Him, to watch Him for three full years.

The final chapters of John encompass only a few hours in the life of Jesus, but the pace of the narrative slows way, way down. Jesus is soon to be arrested, beaten, tortured, and crucified. This is the last meal Jesus will share with His closest followers. This is the last formal teaching their rabbi will deliver. And last words are important.

Jesus knows He's going to be dying soon, so He gives His disciples some final instructions:

**John 13:33-35**

*"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

We are now going to unpack two giant and profound truths articulated by Jesus in these three verses.

**Big Truth 1:** *My children* God invites us to be a part of His family.

**Big Truth 2:** *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* This is how God wants His family to act.

# My Children

“A new command I give you”? This statement to “love one another” is not really new. Jesus had affirmed this idea dozens of times in both His life and His teachings. But now Jesus says that this command is “new.” That’s confusing because He already told everyone to love their neighbor as themselves. That’s the same thing, right? Wrong. Let’s look at how *Love one another* is different from *Love your neighbor*.

Jesus calls His disciples “My children.” The Greek word is *teknia*, a loving term of endearment usually reserved for little children in one’s care. Jesus doesn’t use this particular word any other time in the New Testament. He wasn’t being condescending. He was simply saying, “We’re family. And I want you to think about each other that way.” After all, in human relationships, the strongest love and bonds are found in family relationships.

**Immediate objection:** So does God want me to love my brother or sister differently than I love my neighbor? Are you saying that the amount of love, devotion, and sacrifice Jesus requires from Christians varies depending on whether or not the person being loved believes in Jesus?

No.

No, I am not saying that. After all, Jesus’ sacrificial death was the same act for both the Roman guards who scourged Him and His beloved disciples. But Jesus’ relational closeness with each group was absolutely not the same. Similarly, a firefighter might be called to give his life for a stranger or for his own family. The sacrifice is identical. But the relational interaction and closeness certainly is not the same.

So what is different about Jesus’ two commands?

*Loving Your Neighbor* = Jesus’ instructions on how you are to act toward others

*Loving One Another* = Jesus’ instructions on how we are to act as children in the family of God

## God's Family

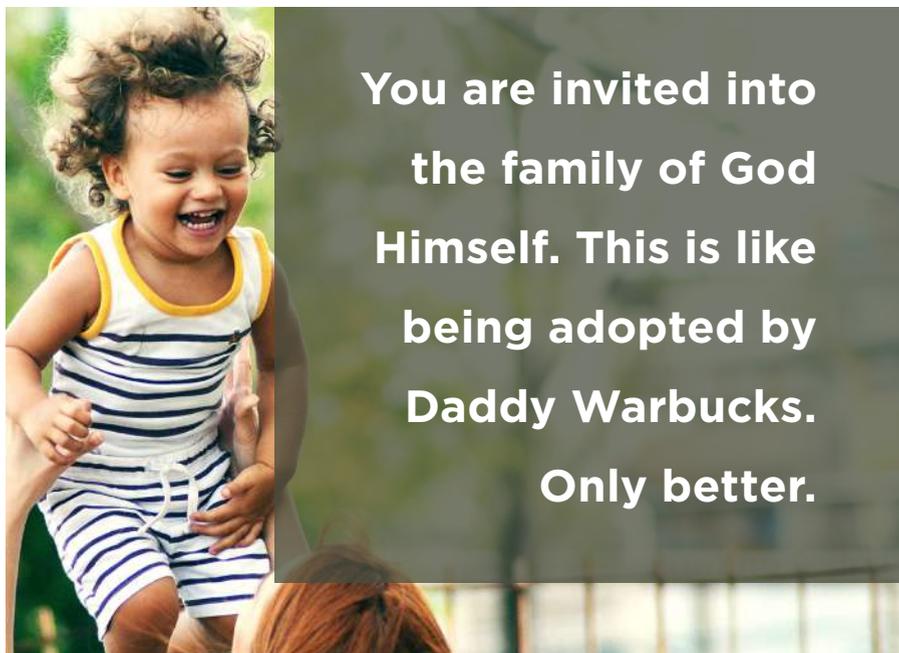
God's incredible invitation to be a part of His family doesn't appear only in the later chapters of John's gospel. John addressed this idea in the opening lines:

### **John 1:9-13**

*The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Everybody who believes that Jesus is God's Son, who died on the cross for our sins, is invited to be part of God's family. This offer is extended to everyone, but not everyone takes it. Like any invitation, you can say, "No, thanks." But once you say yes to this invitation, your life really can change.

Because, God knows, a good family can change everything.



## Little Orphan Annie

When I was a little kid, I was captivated by the movie *Annie*. Now before you beat me up and take away my man-card, I'd like to point out two things. First, Jay-Z sampled the music from this film, so it has some street cred. Second, like Annie, I was adopted.

So the idea of a billionaire, sweeping through the streets, finding this helpless child who was in a terrible situation, and then using his wealth and risking his fortune to find her after he lost her, all so he could show her a real love like a real father—that story struck deep chords in me.

It was years later—when I heard the story of the Bible explained to me—that I realized that Scripture told Annie's story and ours: all of us are orphaned and abandoned kids, destined for a life of loneliness and suffering. But like Annie, we have been rescued by an astonishing Father with infinite riches.

### **1 John 3:1**

*Behold! What kind of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

The apostle John can barely contain himself in this passage. He uses three exclamation marks, and even that doesn't fully capture his excitement. When John says, "What kind of love is this," the word he uses is *potapēn*, which means "From what foreign country, race, or tribe?" John is underscoring that this type of love is wildly uncommon. It is utterly foreign.

Jesus was not saying, "You're all part of the revolution." He wasn't saying, "You're all teammates." He wasn't saying, "You're all united under a common vision." All those statements were true, but they didn't capture what was most true. Jesus was saying, "You're family."

## Different House Rules

Do you remember when you were little, and you got to spend the night at your friend's house, and, during the course of the night, you soon realized that the rules at your friend's house were quite a bit different than the rules at your house? As you adjusted to these rules, you sort of realized inside your nine-year-old self, "Wow! Things are different here."

Now some of this stuff is simply arbitrary. Like “Oh my goodness, your mom lets you eat Pop Tarts? For breakfast? All I get is dry Cheerios.”

“Your mom cooks dinner? For the whole family? Like pot roast and all?”

But some of those changes reveal slightly different—or sometimes wildly different—core family values. The rules of the house were determined by the core values of the house. And some differences could be pretty glaring.

“Your parents yell an awful lot.”

“Your mom lets you watch *The Dukes of Hazzard*? I’m not allowed to watch that show.”

“You guys go to church? Like every Sunday?”

“What do you mean your family doesn’t drink soda?”

I’m not implying that any of those things are better or worse. I’m certainly not taking a judgmental stance toward parents who buy Cocoa Puffs for their kids. I’m just saying, sometimes you come in contact with something that makes you go, “Whoa! That is absolutely different from where I’m from.”

In essence, it’s a little like culture shock when you see that not everyone has the same house rules.

Back to Scripture... and God’s invitation to orphans like you and me.

1. God is inviting you into His family, a great honor that has massive benefits.
2. Not everyone accepts this invitation.
3. Being in God’s family comes with responsibilities and house rules. You don’t make the rules; God does.
4. These rules are designed to make sure God’s children act more and more like Him.
5. This is not easy work.

## God's One Big House Rule: Love One Another

### **John 13:33-35**

*"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.*

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Jesus teaches that the command to love one another is both foundational and binding for this group of men. Jesus is saying, "I'm going to die, and go away, and you're going to form a new Jesus community. The central law—the binding principle that will mark you as adherents to this new Jesus community—is simple: love one another."

## Oh Yeah? Why Should I?

Whenever someone makes a rule, the very next question anyone has is "Why should I follow your rule?" This is human nature. If you doubt this truth, then you've probably never had children: "Why?" is their favorite question. All they seem to do is ask, "Why?"

In this passage, Jesus states a clear command for this group of His disciples: Love one another. Then notice the brilliant way Jesus rhetorically answers the immediate objection "Why should I?"

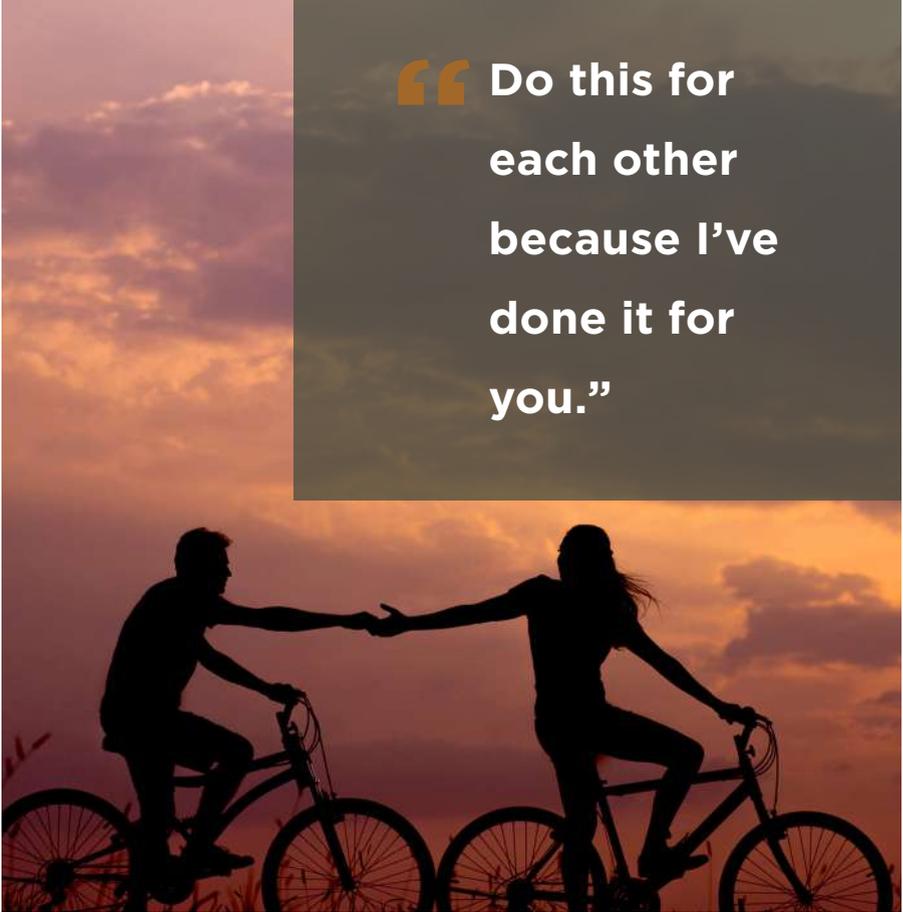
### **John 13:34**

*"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*

Why should the disciples love one another with unselfish devotion?

Jesus doesn't say, "Why should you do this? Umm, because I'm God and you're just some teenage Galilean kids from the first century. For Pete's sake, who cares what you think! Just do what I say. Don't you know who you're talking to?"

And Jesus doesn't say, "Because I said so, that's why!" He doesn't pull rank or flex His authority – as legitimate as all that is. Instead, Jesus simply says, "Do this for each other because I've done it for you."



“ Do this for  
each other  
because I’ve  
done it for  
you.”

He says, “Because you know how much I’ve loved you, and that kind of love deserves a response.”

There’s no way to love each other well unless we understand, first, the profound love Jesus had for His disciples and, second, that our sins nailed Him to the cross right after this meal.

Finally, showcased in this scene from Jesus’ life are not the Ten Commandments or rules or law. The focus is on the loving relationship each of the disciples had with this man Jesus.

# Life in Jesus' Day

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## What was the Christian community like in the first century?

One of the more famous passages about those early gatherings of Christians is found in the Book of Acts.

### **Acts 2:42-47**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

This beautiful picture of community life has inspired Christians for centuries. I want to focus on the phrase *sincere hearts*. The Greek word here is *sin-cera*.

When a batch of pots was fired in the kiln, some of them would crack. Now unable to hold liquids, these pots were less valuable. But unscrupulous potters would fill in the cracks with wax and then paint over the patched area.

A dealer with integrity would proudly advertise his wares as *sin cera*, “without wax.” This phrase became the word *sincere*, which Webster’s Unabridged defines as “being in reality what it appears to be; having a character which corresponds with the appearance; not falsely assumed; genuine; true; real.”

## As I've loved you...

Just minutes before Jesus said these words to His disciples, He had tangibly demonstrated for His friends His humble love and servant heart: Jesus had washed His disciples' dusty feet. The One—of every person ever born—who most deserved to have His feet washed was Jesus, yet He's the one doing the washing.

Paul wrote this about Christ's love:

### **Philippians 2:5-8**

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

God made Himself nothing.... God served.... God was brutally tortured....  
God died an excruciating death on a cross....

Why would Jesus endure that? The author of Hebrews puts it this way:

### **Hebrews 12:2**

*For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

"For the joy set before Him," Jesus endured the cross. What was that joy?

You.

Coming home.

To God the Father.

That's what Jesus' joy was about. And that's the kind of love that changes everything.

# An Invitation for You

I began this chapter with Michael's story on purpose. I didn't want to make it sound as though becoming the Family of God and Loving One Another as Christ loved us was ever going to be easy.

Living in community and loving each other well is not only rare, it's incredibly difficult. It was, in fact, a nightmare for Steven and Joy for seven years. They had to go to counseling both individually and as a couple. At one point, Michael's therapist said, "Michael might not ever make any breakthroughs. Even if you do everything right, you need to know that results are not guaranteed. Do you want to continue?"

And Steven and Joy responded instantly. "Yes," they said, "because Jesus has made it clear that we're supposed to do this. He has never given up on us, so we're not giving up on Michael."

That declaration was beautiful, but living it out was anything but easy. At one point, I saw Joy and asked her why she had bandages on her arm.

"Michael had a bad day and attacked me," she said, almost nonchalantly. "We're working through it with the counselors."

Life together in a family is not easy. Loving one another well is not easy.

But you are invited. Just so you know.

For centuries, a debate has been raging about whether or not mankind is inherently good or inherently evil. Left to ourselves, will we naturally care for one another, or will we revert back to some sort of Darwinian Jungle Animal Instincts where only the strong survive? That's the central theme of *Lord of the Flies*, which you were probably forced to read in high school. Ralph vs. Jack. Civilization vs. savagery. Will mankind tend toward compassion and

unity, or are we doomed to resort to primordial instincts of fear and power and cruelty?<sup>4</sup>

When asked if he believed in the biblical idea that mankind tends toward evil (original sin), the great Christian writer and humorist G. K. Chesterton, quipped, “Why yes. It’s the only Christian doctrine that can be empirically proven.”

Furthermore—and quite obviously—humanity isn’t getting progressively better. The 20th century brought with it some of the most unfathomable darkness and evil in the history of the world. The Bible is pretty clear about mankind’s condition if we are left to ourselves. We need a Savior.

In fact—and this is one of the residual effects of sin—we need God and the Holy Spirit’s supernatural intervention in our hearts to change us from being selfish to being people who are able to love. When we allow God to come into our lives, He wants to make us into a family.

Because, God knows, a good family can change everything.



<sup>4</sup> I totally plagiarized this line from SparkNotes.



## HEY, DANA!

You've said that the only way we're going to be able to love our family of believers well is to see how well we've been loved by God. What does that mean, from a personal standpoint? I know God loves everyone, but the idea that He loves "me" is tough to imagine.

I'm going to answer you the best way I know: by sharing a personal story. March 22, was the anniversary of the physical death of our youngest son, Clay. In 2012, he was 25 when he died very suddenly. When something that tragic happens to you, you don't even know what's going on around you for many, many days. The pain was just so, so deep. And I remember—in those first days—all I wanted was for the night to come. I wanted it to be night so I could sleep. Because sleeping meant an escape from the pain. And even though sleep might not come, at least I had a reason to totally disengage.

But at night, all I wanted was for the day to come. Just to see if I could get through it. I know we're supposed to live one day at a time, but none of us really do that until complete tragedy hits. Then, it's all you can do. I wanted to string together enough days in a row to know I could live through this—because at first, you're not really sure if you can. Let me tell you, each day—each 24 hours—was my enemy.

As I walked through the grief, everyone was very, very loving. Some people reminded me that God the Father understands the loss of a child because Jesus, His Son, died. That's a beautiful picture, one that's usually very comforting. But at the time, it just wasn't. In fact, it made me angry. Not angry at the people who were trying to help. Angry at God.

I was like, “Yes, God. But You cheated. You knew Your Son was going to die. You knew that You were only going to be separated from Him for three days. I don't even know the next time I'll see my son. I don't know the next time I'll see Clay.” And the pain was so deep.

But at that time—in the midst of my agony—I sensed God saying to me, “Dana, We love you so much that Jesus was willing to leave all eternity. Never having been bound by time, He left His throne where everything is done that He desires to have done. He was willing to come and live 24-hour days for you. One after another, after another, after another.”

I'd never really thought about that before. Sure, I'd thought about Jesus coming as a little baby and what that must have been like, but at this time in my life, when the hurt was so deep, God gave me a picture of His love that was exactly what I needed: a God of 24 hours. Jesus lived one day after another, after another, because of His love for me.

The thing is, I needed that picture. I needed that gift from God to help me through my pain. Because there is no way I was going to be able to love anybody else without understanding how well I have been loved by Jesus and by God.

# A Final Invitation

When I was seven, I was afraid of the high-dive at our local pool. I was also deathly afraid of roller coasters. I avoided any and all situations that involved either for a long time. I lived mostly out of fear.

But you will never know how good some things in life are until you just jump in. Until you taste and see.

Eventually, I jumped off that high-dive. And eventually I rode my first roller coaster. Admittedly, I did both because I succumbed to massive social pressure and because I wanted to impress girls. That's where this metaphor breaks down. But the truth is the same.

You have to take a risk on family. You have to take a risk on community. It's worth it.

# Digging Deeper:

## SOAP

NOTE: SOAP as the Spirit leads you, and when you do, try to address this question as well: What does this passage teach me about how the world will know that Jesus was sent from the Father?

### **Scripture**

Read John 17:20-23.

### **Observation**

Observe what the passage says and interpret what it means by asking the *Who, What, Where, When, How, Why* questions. Also consider what the passage meant to the original listeners/readers.

### **Application**

What does this passage mean to you today? What action(s) will you take in response to this passage?

### **Prayer**

Talk to God about what you plan to do in response to this passage and listen for His direction.

# Love One Another Part 2

## SIX40 DISCIPLESHIP

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**Our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don't have to compromise convictions to be compassionate.**

— *Rick Warren*

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ... The body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

— 1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-20

## Phitty

When I was in college, I had a friend named Phitty.

His real name was Matt, but he was on our college track team. Because he was so slow, everyone said that he wasn't worth phitty cents.

Over Christmas break his junior year, Phitty went to England to visit his brother. Not only had he also graduated from our college, but he was rumored to be one of the most brilliant minds to ever grace the halls of our campus. Phitty's brother was now applying his cosmic intellect as a medical researcher in a research hospital, analyzing viral protein budding sequences. Or something. Who knows.

When Phitty got off the plane, his brother took him around the town and then stopped by work to show him around the laboratory.

"Hey, are you hungry?" his brother asked while giving him the tour of the research wing. Well, that was a dumb question because Phitty could eat. For example, on his 21st birthday, a friend of ours said he'd pay Phitty \$200 if he ate 21 tacos from Taco Bell. Now, \$200 in college is a boatload of money.

Well, Phitty got up to 17 and had to stop. I think his pancreas shut down or something. I'm not a medical researcher. (Phitty's brother was the medical researcher, not me.)

"I could go for something," Phitty said.



“Well, there’s some food in the break room,” his brother said, pointing toward a door. “There’s a food service company we contract with, and they keep it fully stocked. One of the perks of working here. Help yourself to anything you want. I’m just going to grab some stuff from my work station.”

Well, Phitty got up and walked toward what he thought was the kitchen, but because he was jet-lagged he went down the wrong hallway and into the wrong room. But he didn’t realize it at first, because the room was lined with refrigerators. But these fridges weren’t stocked with sandwiches. They were stocked with tissue samples from cadavers.

Half a dozen arms and hands and feet, wrapped neatly in clear medical bags.

Phitty screamed. “What’s wrong?” his brother said, running in.

“There’s a human hand in the fridge,” Phitty said.

“Yeah, those are for marrow and tissue samples,” his brother said. “What’s the big deal?”

“I don’t think I’m hungry anymore,” Phitty said.

## **The Body Principle**

Why was Phitty so freaked out? I mean, his brother was right. It was just a hand. In fact, when you and I eat, we often bring two of them along. What was his problem? The problem was, it wasn’t a hand like any other. This hand wasn’t connected to a body.

And that’s what made it so disgusting.

There was a man named Paul who, in the Bible, talked about how people in the family of God are like parts of the body. Here’s what he wrote, and even today it’s one of the more memorable metaphors in the entire Bible. I call it The Body Principle. Here it is:

Paul said that just as the human body is a unit, even though it is made up of many parts, so it is with us, the members of God’s family. He said that God combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to every part, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another.

This is an idea we don't hear much in modern America. Modern America doesn't value the whole body. No, modern America values the individual parts—the abs, the biceps, the face, the hair, the thighs, the pecs. America has had a long-standing tradition of valuing the individual parts, but not the whole.

So, by extension, we Americans value the individual. And that's important. But maybe in valuing the individual, we went a little too far. Perhaps we have unintentionally come to believe the message that the individual is the only thing that matters. That may not be true at all.

A few years ago, the US Army had a recruiting slogan where they featured the face of a soldier and the tagline:

“The strength of the Army lies with me. I am an Army of One.”

Ridiculous! If the United States had an army of one person, it could be invaded by Qatar. The Army, though, was probably appealing to rugged American individualism, but it sad something it knows isn't factual. The strength of the US Army lies in its numbers, its collaboration, its unity, its common goal, its common purpose.

A lone wolf can't bring down a caribou, but a pack of wolves can. (Now, one Liam Neeson can bring down a pack of wolves, but there is no known force in the universe that can bring down a pack of Liam Neesons. Except perhaps a pack of Chuck Norrises.)

Paul is making a similar point: a hand connected to the body is priceless. It's useful. It has found its purpose, its intended place for meaningful action. But a hand without a body is just a hunk of dead flesh. Rotting meat, soon to be covered with flies.

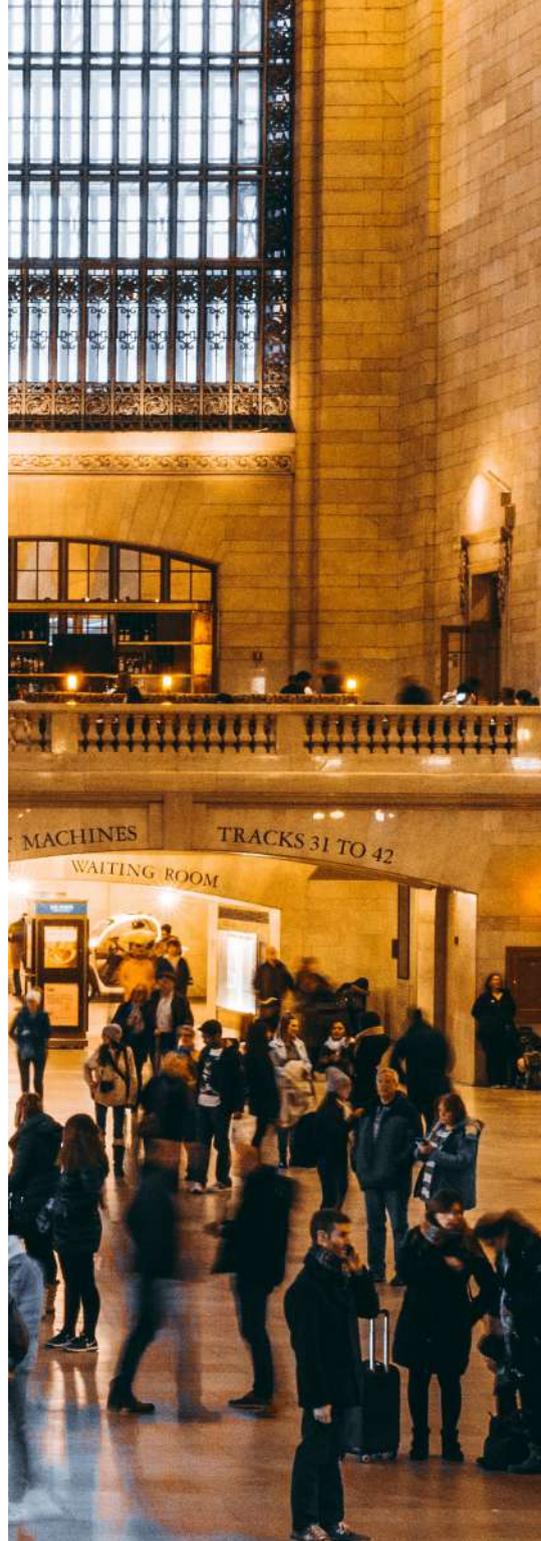
It's worthless.  
Lifeless.  
Dead.

Cut off from the body and therefore not serving the body or with the body, that hand is not worth anything. In fact, cut off from the body, no part is worth anything.

# 42 One Others

The idea that an individual can only really find their meaning as an integral part of a community is unpalatable for some people. But, as John Donne once wrote, “No man is an island.”

The apostle Paul made that same point: the way to find purpose and meaning in life is to recognize that life is not all about only you. We find purpose when we realize that God created us to help/serve/love one another. Every shortstop needs a team and, without one, can't really find much meaning or value in being a shortstop. Similarly, if you are a Christian, one of the main ways that you find meaning and purpose is through your local church, the family of God.



This idea of helping/serving/loving one another is all through Scripture. In fact, when writing to first-century believers, Paul, Peter, and James often addressed how to help, serve, and love “one another” well. It was important to them: the New Testament contains 42 “one another” statements. Here are a few:

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Live in harmony with one another. Stop passing judgment on one another. Accept one another. Instruct one another. Agree with one another. Bear one another’s burdens. Be patient with one another. Serve one another. Encourage one another daily. Love one another deeply, from the heart. Confess your sins to one another. Spur one another on toward good deeds.*

How many of those can you do by yourself? Exactly: none. We all have a part to play.

Every.Single.One.Of.Us. There is no such thing as an unessential family member. The family of God simply cannot function when any of its members live in isolation.

## **Loving one another is super-duper difficult.**

Now, before we go any further, I want to make sure you know that what Paul, Peter, and James were calling those first Christians to create is not easy. In fact, creating and even being a part of a radically inclusive and radically transformational community with Jesus at the center, driven by the Holy Spirit, is really, really, really difficult. Here are four big reasons why:

### **1. We are different from one another.**

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter says that the church is filled with people who are “living stones.” Stones. Not bricks. Community is difficult because you interact with people who are different from you. It’s easy to love someone who thinks like you and has the same opinions and interests as you. That’s easy. But we’re different. Uniquely shaped. And some people, let’s be honest, are shaped way differently than us. We might even call them weird. But Romans 7:15 says, “Accept one another, just as Christ has accepted you.”

(I have to tell you that Romans 7:15 totally reminds me of the Muppets—and I love the Muppets, mainly because they’re a bunch of weirdos and cast-offs with deep flaws and insecurities, but they are a family. There’s Fozzie, who is an addict to approval [“I’m trying so hard”]). And Animal, who has problems

with self-control. And Piggy, who is vaguely narcissistic and definitely emotionally needy. And Gonzo, who is a self-described “weirdo.” And yet the members of this motley crew shrug their shoulders over their differences, love each other, and stick by each other no matter what. It’s as if the only other option is to live life utterly alone and rejected, so they choose community and friendship and devotion. It’s actually quite inspiring if you think about it. Which I have, obviously. Perhaps too much.)

## **2. Life is hard.**

Jesus guarantees this in John 16:33 when He says, “In this life, you will have trouble.” He doesn’t say, “In this life, if you sin and mess up, then you will have trouble.” He doesn’t say, “In this life, bad people who sin will have trouble.” He says this to His disciples. Trouble is a part of life. Life is hard, and most people you meet are hurting more than you know and much more than they’ll ever show. The writer of Hebrews 3:13 says, “Encourage one another daily” perhaps because encouragement from one another is a one-a-day vitamin.

## **3. We are sinful.**

The third problem is that we are human and we blow it. We sin. We make mistakes. Actually, the sinning part is only part of the problem. The second part is that we don’t see and/or admit that we’ve sinned. So we begin justifying our actions. Or pretending they aren’t sinful. This approach to sin makes community nearly impossible. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” Confession allows the light and truth of God to begin working in our lives. Confession allows God’s grace to flow in, and it allows others to forgive you and restore you.

## **4. We’re afraid.**

Because of the brokenness of the world, we are desperately afraid that people will see us for who we are—different, broken, sinful—and that they will reject us. Just like Adam and Eve in the garden, we hide. Romans 12:10, however, calls us to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honor one another above yourselves.” The word Paul uses in the Greek is *philadelphia*, which means “brotherly love.” The solution to fear of rejection is family love. Family love is covenantal. It means, “You aren’t going anywhere and neither am I.” Think about your own family. There are likely people in your own family whom you would not purposely and willingly spend time with unless they were related to you. But you do. Why? Because they’re family. Creating a community based on that kind of love casts out fear because rejection is mitigated by that covenantal commitment.



## HEY, STEVE!

You really champion getting involved in a local church. But I'm a lot more cynical than you. I'm very suspect of organized religion. Why are you so gung-ho on community?

A few months back, Dana and I were working in the backyard and somehow—I still don't know how it happened—I accidentally shattered the glass top of a patio table. And it shattered into what looked like a million pieces.

So we began picking them up. Dana picked up the big pieces, and I started trying to find the little ones. And it definitely wasn't easy to pick them up, especially the ones that had flown into the dirt. As I did this thankless task, I thought about how grief is a bit like my cleanup job. Sometimes your life just shatters. Something happens, and you're left to pick up the pieces. You do the best you can, working your way through it.

March 22, 2012, is the date of the physical death of our youngest son, Clay. So for the past few years, Dana and I and our family have been trying to pick up the pieces of our lives. And each time I thought I was getting close to having all the pieces picked up, I'd move a piece of dirt and uncover three or four more pieces.

Now someone might say, "Just leave them." But you can't. My grandbabies play in that area, and I often walk around that area, and my dog goes out there. I can't just leave them.

During this season of grief, the people of WestGate truly loved Dana and me well. I don't know how I could have made it through that time without them. People allowed us to talk about our grief. They listened to us. They prayed for us. They sat with us. And they encouraged us with cards and texts and calls and voice messages. Hundreds of people encouraging us and loving us.

I'm sure Jesus would have brought us through that even if we didn't have this community to help us, but I don't know how we would have done it. It's a tough thing to go through, to wrestle through picking up all those pieces. And as time goes by, sometimes we feel like we've made some progress, but at other times I don't even know what progress means. We end up with a splinter in our hand, and then grief kind of pops back up. But each time our church family helped us, and certainly Jesus has helped us.

That's why I believe in loving one another. Because I've experienced its life-giving power.

One more thing. As I was on my hands and knees that morning picking up the shards of glass from that broken table, a strange thing happened. As the sun rose in the sky, it began to reveal the glass. The angle of the sun hit the glass just right, and made it glimmer in the black dirt so I could see it. The sunlight made picking up the pieces easier.

I feel like that's what the love of God has done as I've grieved. His love through His people has been that sunlight, making it a little easier for me to pick up the pieces.

In our church bulletin every week, you'll see this: "The Christian life is not only difficult to do alone, it's impossible."

I believe that to my core.

## **But I've Been Hurt**

Awhile ago, I met a young woman who told me part of her story. Her earthly father was an abusive and terrible person to the point that every time I spoke about God the Father, she cringed. The wounds she had received from her own father ran deep yet were so close to the surface at the same time. Her wounds made it tough for her to move forward.

And I know that when I write about belonging to the "family of God," this invitation is not appealing to some people. As we just explored, Christian community is really tough to live out. Perhaps you, too, have been deeply wounded. Maybe the only kind of church family you've ever seen is dysfunctional. Or, worse, abusive. Maybe you've only known rejection and judgment.

Years ago, my spiritual mentor gave me some advice about destructive and abusive spiritual communities. He said, “You don’t leave your house to robbers.”

I understood him to mean this: “The family of God is worth fighting for. And just because some people have done a terrible job living up to the ideals of Jesus doesn’t give you an excuse to give up. Fight for true community. Fight for true family. Fight for Jesus’ ideals.”

Years later, when I was talking with another mentor, I recounted some negative experiences I’d had with some Christians in a small group and indicated that I just “wanted to give up on this whole ‘community in the church’ thing.”

My mentor grew quite irritated with me. “Have you ever gotten food poisoning?” he asked, sharply. “You didn’t stop eating food, did you? Ever get a bad haircut? Did you give up on all haircuts?”

His point was this: “Don’t go throwing babies out with the bathwater”—and that is a totally bizarre expression!

I don’t know what kind of experiences you’ve had being in a local family of God. I hope they have been good. And I really hope you haven’t been deeply wounded. But if you have been, I am so completely sorry about that. Know, however, that just because you have awful parents doesn’t excuse you from trying to be the best parent you can be. And just because other people didn’t do a very good job at creating Christian family that helps/serves/ loves does not give us a reason to excuse ourselves from God’s people.

We can’t just say, “Oh, I think I’ll love God and love my neighbor, but that love one another? Ugh! That’s just too hard. Done it, tried it, I’m out!”

We can’t just say, “You know what, I think God and I are doing well. Those other Christians? No, thank you.”

Jesus didn’t leave that option open to us.

# The Heart of Jesus for His Family

If your Bible has the words of Jesus printed in red, John 13–17 are almost completely red. These words of Jesus are important because they are His last words.

In John 17, Jesus prayed for the family of God, for the community of believers who would carry on the teachings of Jesus Christ and strive to become more like Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **John 17:20-23**

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

Jesus prayed that His followers would “be one” and “be brought to complete unity.” He also emphasized His relationship with His Father: “you are in me and I am in you” (v. 21). The oneness of the community of believers is modeled after that relationship between the Father and the Son.

Now, *unity* is a oneness of heart and spirit, and that is far different from *uniformity*, when everybody is exactly alike. Not every believer has the same gifts, talents, or personality, but all believers can be united in love and devotion to one another, to God, and to expanding the His kingdom in this world.

The world is—and always has been—divided. This fragmented world desperately needs the unifying power of God’s love.

# Final Thought

Our hearts naturally drift toward personal comfort and gain. Rarely, if ever, do we daydream about toiling for the benefit of other people, laboring with radical love and significant self-sacrifice. Instead, in our daydreams, people serve us. Usually piña coladas. Usually on a beach. But this is not what Jesus modeled or prayed for, and it's not how He lived. Jesus was many things, but comfortable was never one of them.

Jesus is inviting you to help.

To serve.

To love.

And to help the family of God—to help you—look more like Him.

What's your role?

If Paul is correct and the local church is like a body, then the stakes are actually pretty high. Sure, a body can live with only one kidney or one arm or one eye. But it won't operate and live and move like it should. It will be handicapped. The same will happen if you don't jump in and use your uniqueness to help the Body.

But it's reciprocal. The body metaphor is perfect because it shows the interdependence of all the parts of the body. Not only does the body need each part, but the body actually feeds, helps, and protects each body part. What happens to an arm that's removed from the body? If not quickly reattached, it becomes a hunk of rotting flesh.

So what's your unique role in the family of God? Perhaps it starts with dreaming big. Sit down with God, with the Holy Spirit, and ask yourself some key questions:

- If you didn't have to work for money, what would you do?
- Besides ministering to your family, what is the number one thing you believe God wants to accomplish through you?
- What gifts make you unique? What do you do exceptionally well?
- What life experiences has God used to prepare you to minister to other people?
- What are your core values? What ideas and principles do you stand up for and get passionate about?
- If your closest friends were

to describe you, what three adjectives would they use?

- What kinds of things make you upset with a holy discontentment? What is one aspect of this broken world that, when you see it, touch it, get near it, you just can't stand?

Please. Don't just sit in the back of the church forever. It would be like going to Disneyland, entering the park through the turnstiles, and just standing there. Yes, you're technically in the park, but

you're not really experiencing all that the park has to offer.

Get plugged in. Get connected. Serve. Help. Love.

One more thing. God will always call you to do something you are incapable of doing. Why? Because if you could do it without God, you wouldn't need Him. God will get all the credit and all the glory.

What does God want to do *in* you and *through* you?



# Digging Deeper:

## **Instructions**

*Below are New Testament verses about the family of God and how we believers are to treat one another. Read this list of “one anothers” and then answer the questions that follow.*

## **John 13:35**

“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

## **Romans 12:10**

Love one another with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring one another.

## **Romans 12:16**

Live in harmony with one another. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

## **Romans 13:8**

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law.

## **Romans 14:13**

Stop condemning one another. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.

## **Romans 15:7**

Accept one another just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

## **Romans 15:14**

You know these things [truths of your faith] so well you can teach one another all about them.

**Romans 16:16**

Greet one another with a holy kiss.

**1 Corinthians 1:10**

Live in harmony with one another. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

**Galatians 5:13**

Use your freedom to serve one another in love.

**Galatians 6:2**

Share one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

**Ephesians 4:2**

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with one another, making allowance for one another's faults because of your love.

**Ephesians 4:32**

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

**Ephesians 5:19**

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,

**Ephesians 5:21**

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**Colossians 3:13**

Make allowance for one another's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

**Colossians 3:16**

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel one another with all the wisdom He gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Encourage one another and build one another up.

**Hebrews 3:13**

Warn one another [about the deceptions of Satan and sin] every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.

**Hebrews 10:24**

Think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

**Hebrews 10:25**

Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

**James 4:11**

Do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

**1 Peter 1:22**

Show sincere love to one another as brothers and sisters. Love one another deeply with all your heart.

**1 Peter 3:8**

Be of one mind. Sympathize with one another. Love one another as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

**1 Peter 4:9**

Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay without grumbling.

**1 Peter 5:5**

Serve one another in humility, for “God opposes the proud but favors the humble.”

**1 John 3:23**

Believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and... love one another.

**James 5:16**

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

**Question 1:**

After reading this list of “one anothers,” what observations do you have about the nature of Christian community?

**Question 2:**

Which of these “one anothers” greatly encourage you when you experience them?

**Question 3:**

Which of these “one anothers” do you personally find most difficult? Why?

**Question 4:**

Pray over this list of “one anothers.” Ask the Lord to reveal one to practice this week. Write it here. Then brainstorm a list of things you can do this week to make progress in this area.



it's True  
Genius!

Our greatest human needs are for **meaning, destiny, and intimacy.**

We find **meaning** in this life when we **know and love God** in a personal way.

What a privilege it is to be able to be in relationship with God, our Creator and King. This relationship with our holy God is possible thanks to Jesus, our Savior and Lord. And we are empowered in that relationship by the Holy Spirit, our Teacher and Guide.

We find **destiny or purpose for life** when we respond to God's command to **love our neighbor**—and, as Jesus taught, our neighbor is **anyone who is in need.**

We recognize our destiny when we see our greatest passion intersect with the needs of the people around us or in the world at large.

We find **intimacy** when we **love one another**, when we love our **brothers and sisters in Christ.**

True intimacy comes when we are fully known and fully loved. Having experienced that love from God, we Christians attempt to create communities where that same love is embodied and lived out.

Do you see more clearly now **the genius of Jesus?** When He commands us to love God, to love our neighbors, and to love one another, He is calling us to experience meaning, destiny, and intimacy. **He is calling us to what we most deeply want.**

