

# NO LONGER SLAVES

CONDEMNED  
SEARCHING  
ALONE  
BROKEN  
ENSLAVED



40 DAYS

2017

## INTRODUCTION

### WEEK 1 – FREE TO LIVE

MONDAY, MARCH 6 // DAY 1  
TUESDAY, MARCH 7 // DAY 2  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8 // DAY 3  
THURSDAY, MARCH 9 // DAY 4  
FRIDAY, MARCH 10 // DAY 5  
SATURDAY, MARCH 11 // DAY 6

### WEEK 2 – NO LONGER CONDEMNED

Sunday, March 12 // DAY 7  
Monday, March 13 // DAY 8  
Tuesday, March 14 // DAY 9  
Wednesday, March 15 // DAY 10  
Thursday, March 16 // DAY 11  
Friday, March 17 // DAY 12  
Saturday, March 18 // DAY 13

### WEEK 3 – NO LONGER SEARCHING

Sunday, March 19 // Day 14  
Monday, March 20 // DAY 15  
Tuesday, March 21 // DAY 16  
Wednesday, March 22 // DAY 17  
Thursday, March 23 // DAY 18  
Friday, March 24 // DAY 19  
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### WEEK 4 – NO LONGER ALONE

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## WEEK 5 – NO LONGER BROKEN

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Monday, April 3 // DAY 29  
Tuesday, April 4 // DAY 30  
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Friday, April 7 // DAY 33  
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## WEEK 6 – JESUS DIED TO CRUSH OUR ENEMIES

Sunday, April 9 // DAY 35  
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## CONCLUSION

### BONUS DAY

Saturday, April 15 // DAY 41

## REFERENCES

# INTRODUCTION

## Dear Beloved,

Following Christ will change your life. Although it is a challenge, it is a worthwhile process that stretches us and changes the way we view God and ourselves. But, when we take the time to focus on the Cross of Jesus Christ, we will be free from things that can hold us back from experiencing the abundant life He wants us to have. For the next 40 days allow God to begin the process of setting you free from the past and giving you a hope for the future.

Each day of the devotional will help us explore God's Word together. We will memorize and meditate on specific passages while considering the truth that we are no longer slaves to sin. The next 40 days also will prepare us to celebrate the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, with a renewed hope in the completed work of Christ.

Why 40 days? Though there is nothing magical about the number, the Bible reveals that God considers 40 days to be a spiritually significant time period in which people are transformed. In fact, in the Bible, any time God wanted to get His people ready to be used mightily for Him, He took 40 days to prepare them.

If you are a believer in Christ, you are truly no longer a slave. But, will you be willing to do what it takes to experience freedom in your daily life? The road to true freedom may be difficult, but it is the only way. Jesus said, "If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow Me" ([Luke 9:23](#)).

If you choose to allow God to transform you, there will be difficulties, but you will experience lasting freedom in Christ. Also know that God will reward you with joy and hope, and astonish you with His love in ways you have never experienced.

Take a step and use these devotions for the next 40 days. I guarantee that God will change your life.

I am asking for all those who call the Journey home to commit to the following:

1. **PARTICIPATE** in all six weekend worship experiences and Consume (Friday, April 14). Each week, the sermons will show how the work of Christ on the Cross will bring lasting freedom to your life. We will end the *40 Days* on Good Friday when we come together for Consume (April 14, at 6:30 pm) for a night of intense prayer and passionate worship.
2. **READ** the daily readings in the *40 Days* devotional. Set aside about fifteen minutes at the same time each day to read the text, think about the principles, and allow God to change you as you gain a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Christ. Every relationship takes time. Your relationship with Christ is no exception.
3. **JOIN** with others to discuss the week's teachings. True transformation never happens alone, but by challenging each other to seek hard after God. If you are not currently in a small group, you can join one of our 40 Days Short-Term Groups. In Orange City, groups begin March 6. In Sanford, groups begin March 9. Visit [theJourney.cc/groups](http://theJourney.cc/groups) to register.
4. **MEMORIZE** a simple Bible verse each week from the *40 Days* devotional that will help you focus on the freedom we have in Christ. Each week you will be given a weekly Bible memory verse to memorize that fits the theme of the session. Write this verse down and hang it someplace where you will constantly see it. This will help you memorize and meditate on the verse throughout the week. Memorizing scripture may seem like a challenge, but I encourage you to take this opportunity to grow deeper in your walk with God

through this key spiritual habit.

5. **SACRIFICE** just one thing over the next 40 days. As a statement to yourself and to God of your commitment to follow Him, make a decision to give up something, maybe a hobby or entertainment. Sacrifice helps you to clearly focus on God and allows Him the opportunity to really work in your life. This means that for 40 days, you will give up something from your everyday life that occupies your time in order to free you to spend that time with God.

It is my prayer that over the next 40 days, God will use His Holy Spirit, His Word, and these devotions to lead you to the freedom found only in Jesus Christ. For every one of us, this journey will be different, but the result will be the same. We all will know we are No Longer Slaves.

In Christ,

Pastor James Hilton

# WEEK 1 - FREE TO LIVE

## MEMORY VERSE

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11

Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again to pay the price for us to finally be free. Free to be forgiven, accepted and loved. Through Christ, we can truly live because we have finally been set free from sin, destruction, and death. We can live the way God designed and intended. When sin entered the world, we became enslaved in fear, shame, and death. We are all broken and enslaved in those areas. But through Christ we can live by faith, believing who we truly are in Him, which demolishes our shame. We will find hope to persevere in spite of the pain. We find complete acceptance in God's love, which casts out all fear. We find life that overcomes death as we live for Christ. Through the Cross, we can boldly proclaim in Christ, "Sin is not my master, I've been set free in Christ!"

# MONDAY, MARCH 6 // DAY 1

Jesus Died To Set You Free

Read – *Romans 6:1-14*

Nearly 2,000 years ago a poor, homeless, single man in his early 30s was executed by crucifixion like many common criminals. He never wrote a book, never traveled more than 200 miles from his home, never held a political office, never married or had children, and never ran a company. His name is Jesus Christ and history is divided into the periods before and after his life, Time magazine named him “Man of the Millennium,” and more songs have been sung to, books written about, and artwork painted of him than anyone who has ever lived. Moreover, a few billion people alive today worship Him as their only God and deeply love Him unlike anyone else who has ever lived.

Why? Because Jesus has done what no one else could do: taking away the power and penalty of sin by dying on a cross as a substitute in our place. In Christ, we are new creatures who are given a new life to live in the freedom in which God created us to live. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). Herein lies the problem for so many Christ-followers: we are often more drawn to what we can do for Jesus, rather than living in the new life of who we are in Jesus.

Through Jesus Christ we have been set free! We are no longer defined by our past mistakes, current struggles, addictions, failures, or sin. No, we are defined by being in Jesus Christ (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*). We are not ultimately defined by our ethnicity, sexuality, or family history. We don’t find long-lasting and enduring significance in our accomplishments, intelligence, or appearance (*Galatians 3:27-28*). We find eternal value, meaning, worth, hope, and life in who Jesus says we are in Him.

We’ve been set free from the hideous rule of sin and Satan. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (*Galatians 5:1*). Christ Himself set us free not our works, not the church, not ourselves. Only Jesus.

Jesus shattered all the shackles that bound us to defeat, sin, and death. Now we can follow Him, love Him, and live through Him. We live freely under the reign of grace and love through the rule of Christ.

Addictions, anger, pornography, depression, fear, pride, regret, and worry no longer control us. Jesus set us free from living in anything but God's love, acceptance, power, and grace. The solution to our guilt, condemnation, despair, and alienation from God is not to try harder, but to live with greater awareness of what Christ did for us through the Cross. The Cross is what sets us free to live as we become alive to God in Christ.

When we lose sight of the Cross, we proceed down a path of guilt, shame, defeat, and condemnation. We promise ourselves to clean up our life, do better, and live better. But then we fail again and feel totally defeated. We draw our assurance of God's love and acceptance from doing the right thing, going to church, or by not committing some "big" sin. In that moment, we start living enslaved once again, because we have stopped focusing on the freedom God has given us through the Cross.

When we lose sight of the Cross, we live in bondage, spiritual poverty and absence of life. We never see and experience the life and freedom in which Christ died for us to live. We miss the whole reason why Jesus died for us on the Cross. Through the Cross, Jesus Christ secured for us the love of God; and through that love, we can experience the life and freedom that God desires for us.

The moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior we are completely forgiven of every sin we have committed or ever will commit. We are now completely loved as God's sons and daughters. It's in that love that we are free to live!

The sad reality is that many Christ-followers today know very little of exactly what Christ did for them on the Cross, let alone understand its implications for their day-to-day lives. This is why they never experience the freedom that Jesus went to the Cross

for them to receive. So how do we begin to grasp a deeper understanding of what happened on the Cross? That is what these next 40 days are intended to address. We will climb the hill of Calvary, gaze on the Cross of Christ, and pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see how God, out of His great love for us, has set us free to really live.

If you are willing to journey with us over the next several weeks, you will discover how through the Cross you are set free to live life to the fullest. You will see the amazing love and unspeakable joy that is found in deep intimacy with God. No matter where you are or what you have done, no matter what you feel or think you need, the clouds of heaven are now bursting with the life giving rain that God desires to shower upon every area within you that is parched and dry. A deluge of deep delight in the God Who made you is ready to rain down upon you so that you flourish in abundant life.

*Prayer Time – Take some time to pray, asking God to give you the desire to experience the life He desires for you. Reflect on the love of God for you and what His love brings into your life. Commit to follow God over these 40 days so you can experience the life Christ died for you to live.*

## TUESDAY, MARCH 7 // DAY 2

The Love Of The Cross

Read – [Ephesians 1:1-10](#)

There is a problem we all face in following Christ. We start out strong with a passion to live for Christ because we sense God's love and presence giving us new life. But over time we tend to see following Christ more as a duty than an incredible delight. We keep living for God, serving God, and even showing up at church. But we are running on empty. We do what we morally need to do, but the joy of it, the satisfaction and love

of passionately pursuing Christ somehow turns into a kind of obligation. Joy leaves the building. Peace is nowhere to be found. Abundant life is more like a fortune cookie promise than a reality. God seems so far away.

The answer, we think, is simple. We just need to try harder, live better, and do more. So we try harder and harder. We get busier and busier. All the while, we continue to feel defeated, worn out and discouraged. Faith becomes work. Worship becomes dull. Love becomes a duty. Joy is no longer spontaneous. Life is anything but flourishing.

It seems that we are missing something that we expected to experience in this abundant life that Christ talks about. Life becomes more like a mundane walk on a treadmill than a new adventure of discovery. That is how I felt for a long time. From the outside I appeared to have it all together. If you took a look at my life, I would have met just about anyone's standard of an "authentic," committed Christian who had it all together. However, this religion of so-called grace often felt more to me like a test of my ability to keep getting better, to keep trying to impress God and not let Him down.

No matter how many rules I kept or how disciplined my life was, I walked around with an ever-present sense of guilt and the feeling that I was just not getting it. In the deepest part of my heart, I knew God was not really pleased with me, because there was always something I could be doing better. The really good Christians were always doing something that I wasn't and always seemed happier than I was. What did they understand that I was missing?

My service for God was fervent, but my passion for God was cold. I was tired, and while I would never have admitted it, I was starting to hate God. God was always there, waving judgment in my face and I felt as if He was saying, "If you want My approval and love, there's something else you must do." Yet, it seemed to me that He never would tell me exactly what to do in order to accomplish what He wanted. The more I tried to gain His

approval and love, the more He became, in my mind, the merciless taskmaster always standing over me yelling, “NOT ENOUGH! I want MORE! You failed...AGAIN!” His constant demands were driving me insane. The more I strove to walk in His ways, the less love I felt for Him. The more closely my feet followed Him, the more my heart ran away. The more my life looked like what God wanted on the outside, the more I felt like death was moving in on the inside.

Following Christ no longer felt freeing, but more like slavery. I was motivated to obey God primarily because I did not want Him to curse me, mess up my future dreams, or worse, send me to Hell. I just could not understand what I was doing wrong.

I think many Christians live the way I was living. It’s a sad pattern of trying hard, then falling, then trying harder, then falling again and then...well, you know the rest. It involves a lot of genuine but short-lived repentance, as well as plenty of self-condemnation for not trying hard enough. Yet, nowhere does Scripture tell us that freedom will come by simply trying harder to do good. No, it sends us to the power source. It tells us to fill our gaze with the Righteous One. We must look at the Cross to find the freedom to live.

This is exactly what happened to me, God brought me to the Cross. It was at the Cross that I began to see God’s immeasurable love for me. In Ephesians 1, Paul declares that God is “in love” with me and because of that love He accepts me, saves me, forgives me, redeems me, and establishes a relationship with me (see [Ephesians 1:4](#)). God opened my eyes to see that at the Cross, God was shouting His love for me.

The Cross revealed to me love that was beyond degree—the love of Jesus Christ dying for my sin, my evil, and my rebellion! As I awoke to that love, I found life and freedom in Christ! I discovered that God’s love for me was never based on what I could do, but on what Christ did for me through the Cross. When that clicked for me, my heart burst with incredible joy and freedom. I finally tasted the life God wanted me to live all along.

It is my prayer that you would see the Cross not only as the means by which you get into Heaven, but as the driving force behind every single moment of your life. I want to help, in some small way, your eyes to be opened (again) to the treasures and greatness of God's love. I want you to see how the love of God, through the Cross, can make you genuinely passionate for God, free you from captivity to sin, and move you to live passionately pursuing Christ. I want us both to experience more and more of what it means to live not trying to earn God's love, but living in abundance because we have full assurance of God's love.

*Prayer Time – Give thanks for God's love that doesn't depend on you. Receive the immeasurable greatness of His love, and don't shut off what God wants to pour into your life—you don't deserve it and can't earn it, but you must receive it.*

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8 // DAY 3

Transforming Love

Read – [Ephesians 3:14-21](#)

What does it look like to be totally free in Christ Jesus? What does it look like to live in the world, but be free from the constraints, demands, burdens, and even sin that makes us slaves to the world? The Cross proclaims to us a life more abundant, purposeful, and free. The Holy Spirit quietly but clearly beckons us to follow Christ and live in the freedom of Christ. God clearly has a plan for us far greater than anything we have yet experienced. He longs for today to be a day marked by the freedom of life that only comes through a transformational encounter with His presence, truth, and love. This freedom to finally live comes as we focus on what Jesus Christ did for us on the Cross. The more we see the freedom that was purchased for us on the Cross, the more we will passionately pursue God and remain faithful to Him.

The Gospel transforms us not by giving us more commands to follow, but by declaring to us what Christ has already accomplished for us. The Cross shouts, "It is done!" Freedom does not happen by working hard to get something we don't have. Rather, freedom occurs as the Spirit of God constantly opens our eyes to understand the love of God and what was done for us on the Cross. Our freedom to live the abundant life comes as the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual sight to see and understand what Christ did for us on the Cross.

That is why twice in the book of Ephesians Paul asks God to give the Ephesians spiritual sight. He says, "I pray...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might" (*Ephesians 1:17-19*).

Then Paul prays again, "that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend the love of Christ" (*Ephesians 3:16-19*).

Paul prays that we would see the beauty and glory of the grace of the Cross in order to be transformed by the Cross and the freedom the Cross brings for us to live. Christ suffered and died not because we presented to Him good works; He died "to purify for Himself a people...zealous for good works" (*Titus 2:14*). Christ died so that we could be free to live for God because we actually love God.

This is the meaning of grace. We cannot obtain a right standing with God because of our works; it must be a free gift. We can only receive the life God wants for us by faith, cherishing it as our great treasure. This is why the Bible says, "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing;

it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). Christ suffered and died so that good works would be the effect, not the cause, of our acceptance. Not surprisingly, then, the next sentence says, "For we are... created in Christ Jesus for good works" (*Ephesians 2:10*). That is, we are saved for good works, not by good works.

We no longer have to perform good works to keep God's approval. We are not slaves, but have been adopted as children of God through Christ. We can now rest in God's amazing grace. Through our faith in Christ there is NOTHING we can do to make God love us more and there is NOTHING we can do to make God love us less. We are loved and set free in and through Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul's prayer is so essential. If we do not see the power and assurance of God's love for us on the Cross, then our moral failures will constantly handcuff us to our past sins. Without seeing the freedom the Cross brings, we will not have the faith or courage to fight against sin.

What gives us the power to live more holy lives and pursue deeper intimacy with God is when we grow in our understanding that our relationship with God is based on Christ's performance for us, not our performance for Him. The Cross declares to us that God does not relate to us based on what we do for Jesus, but on Jesus' death for us. Big difference! Every day, we must remind ourselves of this truth. As we do, we will increasingly experience the amazing freedom, radical obedience, and abundant life that Jesus paid so dearly to secure on the Cross out of His great love for us. Through the Cross, we can proclaim, "Sin is not my master, I've been set free to live in Christ!"

***Prayer Time – Pray through grasping grace deep within you, as the most important way you relate to God. Pray to identify what your greatest treasure is, and how much you value what God has done for you.***

## THURSDAY, MARCH 9 // DAY 4

Sin is not my Master!

Read – [1 Corinthians 1:23-2:2](#)

Yes, through the Cross, we can proclaim “Sin is not my master, I’ve been set free to live in Christ!” But let’s be honest, many times that sounds more like a nice theory than a reality in our lives. In principle, we died with Jesus, sin is no longer our master, and grace rules. There’s only one problem with this: we still sin. And though we try not to, it happens a lot. While Paul assures us that sin is no longer our master, sin often seems so... well, masterful. Sin surely packs a heavy punch.

Why is that? Is this passage of the Bible wrong? Of course not, or as Paul is fond of saying, “By no means!” When the Bible declares us free from sin, it means that we are free from sin. This isn’t just the removal of some label. It isn’t just an imputed righteousness that means we are clean in God’s eyes but still filthy in our own. What this passage means is that sin has lost its power. Really!

This doesn’t mean that temptation isn’t real and powerful, or that the sin desiring part of us is completely gone. We face real temptation, and sin is incredibly deceptive and persuasive. But we can’t get away with implying to God that our sin was unavoidable. He won’t buy it. Jesus died to free us from sin.

How can we tap into that freedom? Only through the Cross. When God freed us from the law by fulfilling it for us, He freed us to find new life in Him. Instead of being preoccupied with cleaning up our life, we can be preoccupied with living life with Him. The key to living in victory over sin is that we come to adore God with such a great love that we gladly renounce everything and anything that keeps us from Him.

How, then, do we learn to love God with this type of intensity? This type of love can’t be merely commanded. True love grows as a response to loveliness, rather than only because of a command to do it. The first time I saw Shana, my wife, I was

attracted to her. As we spent more time together, I felt the beginnings of love for her. The more I have gotten to know her over the years, and the more I have seen of her beauty, the more I have grown to love her. My love is a response to her, not to a command to love her. Out of that love, I gladly turn from other lovers to pursue greater love with her.

It's the same with our relationship with God. Our love for God is a response to God's love, not just a command to love Him. The Cross is what gives us the power to be free from sin, because it creates love in our hearts for God. As our eyes are opened to see God's beauty and love revealed in the Cross of Jesus Christ, we gladly turn away from sin so that we can experience greater intimacy with God. The Spirit of God uses the beauty and love of the Cross to awaken in our hearts a desire, a deep, burning, passionate love for God. "We love Him," the Apostle John would say, "because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Love for Him grows out of seeing, knowing, and experiencing the love He has given.

We live for God because we love God and the power to love God comes through the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to see the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love for us. God desires a people who desire Him, who serve Him, not because they are forced to do it. God desires a people that passionately pursue and live for Him because they love Him.

Christ's death on the Cross has the power to produce this love for God in our hearts. It's that love that has the power to free us from the love of sin. Paul says that, "the message of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#)). Religion can tell us what to do—namely, to "love God with all your heart, soul and mind;" but the Cross alone gives us the power to do it. The Gospel produces not just obedience but a new kind of obedience—an obedience that is powered by desire and created out of love. It is a power that sets us free to live for God as we seek to love God.

*Prayer Time – Pray through your motives for doing what you do for God. Examine the depth of your love, the value you give to what God thinks of you and your decisions. Look at how much your love for God drives how you love Him and people.*

## FRIDAY, MARCH 10 // DAY 5

A Passionate Pursuit

Read – *Philippians 3:8-14*

Jesus went to the Cross to set us free, not that we would continue to live for ourselves and the world, but that we would experience the abundant life that comes from passionately pursuing God. The very essence of life is found in relation to God. This is why what Jesus calls for is an all-consuming passionate pursuit of God. A passion that wants to abide in Christ, seeks Christ, and lives for Him alone.

This is more than a feeling. Pursuing God is not pursuing some mystical experience—but actually desperately thirsting for more of God. When David says in *Psalms 42:1-2*, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God,” he is in pain. He’s crying, “Why can’t I get there? Why can’t I get more of you?” He does it again in *Psalms 27:4*: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple.”

Is this desperation something that typifies our lives today? Are we like Moses crying out, “I want to see You, Lord! I want to see your glory. I would rather stay in the desert for my whole life and have you than live in paradise without you. You are my life.” (*Exodus 33:18*)? Does our life reflect an all-encompassing yearning for God?

This is the heart of Paul as he was writing to the Christ-followers

in Philippi. He wanted them to see that nothing compares to the Lord. Everything else is indeed rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of having Jesus and finding our life in Him. Paul shares that the reason for you to violently and passionately pursue Christ at all costs is to have more of Christ. If you clean up your life and somehow manage never to struggle ever again, but you never get Jesus, you've totally lost. You've actually attained a whole lot of nothing. In the end, if you look great and sound great and act great, but you don't know Jesus, it matters not.

Therefore, Paul says, "Every gain I got I considered as loss for the sake of Christ." In comparison to the infinite gain of Jesus, Paul considers everything else negotiable; everything else can be let go. Why? Because Paul knew that nothing else compared to the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." (*Philippians 3:8-11*)

He uses the word rubbish, which could be read as garbage, as dung, as excrement. Only this sort of extreme could approach the level of excellence there is to be had in Jesus. The best of our best, without Jesus, looks like a pile of crap compared to Him. Don't let looking good or being better be your goal. The goal is to know more and more of Christ. Since Christ is infinite, there will always be more of Him to be had. Even if you live to be 210, you will not have even begun to unpack the fullness of who He is. There's always more of Him to be had. So Paul pleads, "Hey, don't get led astray and don't get caught up in secondary pursuits. Find your very life in Christ."

All the persecution, all the suffering, all the pain, all the daily

dying to self, and all the wasting away in the flesh is worth it compared to the joy of knowing Jesus, being with Jesus, and becoming like Jesus. When Paul shouts, "...to live is Christ, and to die is gain", he means it (Philippians 1:21). Paul is passionate in asserting that life flourishes in Christ. If you want to kill me, he indicated, I will be more than fine: I will get to be with Jesus. My death will be filled with Christ. And if you want to let me live, I will press on in my mission. My life will be filled with Christ. If you want to torture me or imprison me or mock me, I will trust in God. My suffering will make me like Christ. I will see it as a sharing of Christ's own suffering. There's angst here in Paul's pursuit. There's a yearning that can only find its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

This is why we need to constantly examine our lives and ask ourselves: What moves me toward Jesus? What stirs my affections for Him? What is it that stirs you up to know Him, to love Him, to worship Him, to passionately pursue Him? It will probably look differently for different people. It will have to involve the Scriptures, because that's how God speaks to us. It will involve prayer, because that's how we speak to God. It involves worship, but we have to remember that worship is bigger and more expansive than singing songs in church. What is it that incorporates the Word and prayer into your life and ultimately builds your heart in worship?

If you pay attention to that which stirs your affections for Jesus and His gospel, you will also be able to identify that which robs your affections for Him. What I have found is that it's not the so-called "big things" that take us away from passionately pursuing Christ. Many times, it's the morally neutral temptations that are far more apt to rob me of my affections for Jesus Christ. I can easily justify sinfully indulging in things that are non-sins because they appear to be little things that stifle my affections to finding my life in Christ. I find that I can't watch too much television. I'm not an anti-TV guy, but if I watch too much of it, here's what happens to me: I somehow unplug from holy things. Before I know it, things the Lord calls wicked are entertaining me. Here's

another one: even something as simple as sleeping in too long will make me get up in a rush, not center myself on God, not think about Him at all, and begin a day by running through tasks rather than by connecting with God. Those are some things that rob my affections. What moves you? And what dampens your fervor for Christ?

As *Hebrews 12:1* says, "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely." This means getting rid of the baggage and other things that distract us from Him alone. When we do that, we can run so much faster after Jesus. He has broken the bonds that held us back. He has set us free. He has given us life. He has given us the empowering Spirit. So run! Make a break for it. Pursue Him and Him alone, with force, oomph, and passion.

Why? So you may really know Him. What stirs your affections for Jesus? What robs you of those affections for Christ? Answering those two questions is serious business, and there is joy to be had once you answer them!

*Prayer Time – Pray, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what stirs your affections for Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what robs your affections for Christ. Take time to confess those things to God and commit to live more fully in those things that stir your affection for Christ.*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 11 // DAY 6

Rules!

Read – *Romans 6:15-23*

I have to confess something...I hate rules. They're constraining. When I want to drive fast, I want to drive fast! But because of rules, the fear of a ticket keeps me from my NASCAR loving

ways. Rules set a standard and give us a line we can't cross. Rules seem so constrictive and seem to cut the fun out of life. Rules seem like a prison that keeps us from living in freedom. But what if God has a different view of rules?

On the face of it, it is in a sense true that rules constrict us. But this viewpoint also ignores an ironic, but essential truth: Rules define the boundaries that give us the ability to operate in freedom. This is obvious enough in real life. Awhile back we put a fence in our backyard for our kids. The rule was that our children could play wherever they wanted, if they stayed inside the fence. They had a whole backyard to explore and have fun in. The purpose of the rule wasn't to keep them in. It was actually intended to keep everything that could harm them out. Did the fence set a boundary they couldn't go past? Yes. But it also gave them the freedom to play in the yard and enjoy what was theirs.

In the same way, God's rules are the boundaries that give us the ability to enjoy His blessings in our lives. Many times, we think that God puts rules in place in order to keep us captive. The big lie is that God just wants to limit our happiness in life. But the reality is His rules give us the ability to enjoy what He has given us. He is actually trying to put us in a position where we can really live the abundant life He intended.

When Paul penned his letter to the Romans, his desire was to make it crystal clear that in no way could anyone, anywhere, at any time, ever be right with God by "keeping the rules." We are utterly unable to obey God perfectly and attain the righteousness we need. We can only be made right with God by faith in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. Period. That's it. However, Paul also makes it very plain that God's righteous rules are not something we are "free" from or can toss to the side because we are now under grace.

Grace means that our status before God is not dependent upon how well we keep all the rules. Our status before God is based upon the finished work of Christ alone. But good legal standing with God is not the end of the gospel story! The Holy Spirit

has been unleashed from Heaven and poured into the hearts of all who are justified by grace. God creates desire in us and therefore enables us to walk in the commands of God. Through Christ we no longer live under the requirements of the law; instead, we live under the freedom of God's grace that gives us power to live within God's rules (*Romans 6:14*).

By our faith we don't flee from God's rules, but we uphold them (*Romans 3:31*) and they are not burdensome to us (*1 John 5:2-3*). God doesn't dish out rules because He is some tyrannical maniac who finds satisfaction in exercising control over us. He is our builder and designer and understands us more deeply than we understand ourselves. He knows, better than anyone else, what is best for us and what is bad for us. He knows in what situations we will thrive and in what situations we will bring harm and destruction to ourselves.

God gives His rules to us because He loves us and wants to lead us into abundant life. God knows that the love of money, the desire for power, gossip, covetousness, self-centeredness, sexual immorality, and all other works of the flesh sow seeds of death into our lives and the lives of those we love. This is why He demands that we flee from these things and, by the power of the Spirit, embrace His rules. His rules show us the way to bring joy, peace, and sanity to our lives. God gives us rules, not to take away our life, but so we are free to enjoy life.

I think the reason we have a problem living within the boundary of God's rules is that our operating mindset is, "How far can I go?" rather than, "How free can I be?" The first mindset has its eyes on getting as close to the border of God's blessings as possible. The second mindset has its eyes on actually enjoying His blessings fully. We claim we want freedom, but we don't. Freedom isn't having the ability to do anything you want. Freedom is being able to enjoy what you have.

God has already given us everything we need to experience the abundant life that He desires for us. God gives us His rules so we can enjoy the life He desires for us to the fullest. The

Cross of Jesus Christ gives us the power to live according to God's rules and walk in them. The Cross of Christ both forgives and empowers us to really live for God. Not only are our slates forever clean and our souls forever wrapped in the righteousness of Christ, but our hearts have been made new and are filled with the power to live an increasingly righteous life.

The rules God gives us to live our lives, do our work, handle our money, and interact in our relationships are the best ways. They will result in our peace and happiness and flourishing in life. So let's walk in them! Let's plug our ears to the lies of Satan and the whispering seductions of our flesh and, for our own good, obey the life-giving rules of God. Let's stop focusing on and resenting the rules that God has given. Instead of seeing them as restrictions that hold us back, through the cross, let's see them as His divine directions for living the life God intended for us all along. Through faith in Christ, following God's instructions are not meant to hold us back, but instead to lead us into the greatest life we could ever live.

*Prayer Time – Give thanks for God's rules that reveal how we can experience peace and happiness and flourishing in life. Confess where you have been tempted to think, "How far can I go?" rather than, "How free can I be?"*

# WEEK 2 - NO LONGER CONDEMNED

## MEMORY VERSE

There is therefore now no condemnation  
for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

The biggest dilemma we face is that apart from Christ, we are rebels against an all-powerful God and utterly unable to escape the condemnation that rests over us. But, Jesus came to turn the tables...at his own expense. Rather than letting all of humanity suffer for their refusal to love and obey God, Jesus loaded our sin upon Himself and let His Father crush Him.

Through Christ's work on the Cross, God takes our condemnation and declares us holy, just, and righteous. All that condemned us is now taken away. Every sin is now forgiven. Every evil deed is wiped away. Every immoral action is covered. There is no condemnation! Before the just and holy Judge, we have nothing to condemn us. Before the pure and righteous God, we have nothing to be accused of. Not only are we set free from sin, but also we are free from our sins.

# Sunday, March 12 // DAY 7

Justification – The Guilty Made Holy

Read – *Romans 8:1-3*

No matter what you've ever done, there is no condemnation for those who have turned to trust in Christ. God's heart is that you will no longer be a slave to fear and guilt as you walk in the freedom of His forgiveness. Christ came, died, and rose again that we might no longer be enslaved to condemnation and shame. As we trust in Christ, He sets us free to experience the fullness of forgiveness and love that is found in God.

God began the work to bring you back into His presence long before you were born. God knows you can't make the journey home on your own, so while you were still helpless, Christ died for you (*Romans 5:6*). Jesus offers mercy, not condemnation. His objective is to forgive your sins so that He can bring you back into intimacy with the Father. He's not interested in making you jump through hoops to prove yourself worthy or to earn back God's love.

All throughout Scripture, God takes those whom the world deemed the lowest, the hopeless, and the helpless and showers His love on them. You are not beyond the love of God. God longs to break off that which inhibits you from experiencing fullness of life. He longs to heal you, deliver you, and set you free. But for that to happen, you must confess something that is extremely difficult...you can't save yourself.

The problem is that God is holy and we are not. He is perfect and as sinners, we define imperfection. Every one of us deserves the wrath of God because of our open rebellion against God. No one is good...no, not even your sweet grandma. We have all loved our own selfish desires far more than God. God is very clear that He demands perfection and the penalty for our sin is death.

God warned Adam in the garden that if he chooses to sin, he will "surely die" (*Genesis 2:17*). Paul confirms that those who sin,

“deserve to die” ([Romans 1:32](#)). Sin demands justice and the just consequence for sin is death—emotional, physical, relational, spiritual death. As the ultimate judge, God deserves and will have justice; and as lawbreakers, we deserve and will receive justice. The entire human race—both those that are religious and those that hate God—are without hope, because we have all have sinned and have rebelled against God. Because of our sinful condition and ensuing sinful actions, our impending day in God’s proverbial courtroom seems utterly hopeless. We all have earned a guilty verdict and have all been sentenced to eternity in the torments of hell for what we have done.

In light of our obvious guilt, if God were to declare us anything but guilty, He would cease to be a just and a good God. God Himself says that He “will not acquit the wicked” ([Exodus 23:7](#)). As the Moral Judge of the universe, God cannot merely excuse sin but must judge and punish it. This presents a dilemma in that God must not only forgive our sins, but He must do it righteously without violating His justice. We would prefer that God simply overlook our rebellion and sinful offenses against Him. To do so, however, would by definition render God unjust, unholy, and unrighteous—which is impossible, because He is, by nature, just, holy and righteous.

Clearly, God does not owe us anything. If we were to spend forever in the torments of hell as guilty and condemned sinners, we would have simply gotten what we deserved. Pondering this same point, Job asked, “But how can a man be in the right before God?” ([Job 25:4](#)). The dilemma is this: How could God forgive us, love us, and justify us and remain just?

The amazing truth is that God Himself, Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, paid our debt of death in our place through the Cross. This is how God makes us “just” or “righteous” we are made right with God through the Cross of Jesus Christ. God has graciously given all true believers the perfect record of His Son. He placed our imperfect record on Christ and then executed His just wrath as Christ hung in our place on the Cross.

Because of this exchange, we can't be more righteous than He already has made us.

In the Bible, this is called justification. It is how sinful people like us can have a relationship with God, who is holy. It is how all our sins are completely forgiven by God. There is absolutely nothing we can do to contribute to our justification. When Jesus on the Cross said, "It is finished," He was declaring that all that needed to be done for us to be completely loved, forgiven, accepted, and set free was completed in Him. This is why we can say with Paul, "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (*Romans 8:1*).

*Prayer Time – Pray about God's perfect love and your imperfect love for Him. Pray about His faithfulness and your failures and unfaithfulness. Pray about the richness of God's forgiveness and the power of the Blood of Christ to take away your sins and to bring you closer to God. Pray about developing the grace of forgiveness in every relationship you have.*

## **Monday, March 13 // DAY 8**

Healing Power

Read – *Mark 1:40-42*

When Jesus walked the earth, He came healing the sick and proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. He was effectively ushering in a new creation that started with him and was established through him. As if through a crack in a dungeon wall, light from the new heaven and new earth poured into the world through Jesus. The Gospels are filled with stories of His healing the sick and demonstrating His authority as Creator and God to overcome sin and its effects and to restore God's peace, both spiritually and physically, in our lives (e.g., Mark 1:40-45; 5:1-43; John 11:1-44).

In one healing scene in particular, Jesus demonstrated not

only His authority to heal but also to forgive sins. A crowd had gathered and was pressing in close to Jesus while He preached. A paralytic's friends tried to bring him to Jesus for healing, but the dense crowd made it impossible to get through. So they removed the roof over Jesus' head and lowered the man down before Jesus. At this point, we might expect Jesus to touch the man and heal him immediately. But what Jesus does instead comes as a surprise to us and to everyone there. He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (*Mark 2:1-5*).

If you're like me, you may be tempted at this point to think Jesus withheld His healing power by "merely" forgiving him. But that is probably because we underestimate the power of that forgiveness. Those who were present saw the situation more clearly. They knew that a claim to forgive sin was a claim to be God. (In fact, it was because of this that they accused Jesus of blasphemy; *Mark 2:7*) You see, far from withholding His power from the paralytic, Jesus demonstrated His greatest power FIRST. The point is that if Jesus has the power to forgive, then He is God; and if He is God, then He also heals. Jesus explained all this and then said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And the man was also healed (*Mark 2:11-12*). Imagine how that man's life was changed. That day, he WALKED away from an old life of guilt, paralysis, and condemnation into a new life made possible by Jesus.

In another story, a leper dropped to his knees before Jesus and implored him, "If you will, you can make me clean" (*Mark 1:40-42*). This man's disease made him unclean and forced him to live on the fringe of society, a life of isolation, shame, and constant condemnation. He would have been avoided and he would have avoided others. But Jesus loved this leper. He TOUCHED him, healed him, and made him clean. This one touch from Jesus ended the leper's old life of shame and isolation and began a new one. The leper would no longer live "outside the camp," outside the city, outside of society, and at a distance from God's presence represented by the temple. The leper's life of shame had ended; Jesus had healed him and made him belong once again.

There are two things for us to learn from those who were healed by Jesus: (1) they knew their desperate need, and (2) they put all their hope in Jesus.

THEY KNEW THEIR DESPERATE NEED. Too often, we masquerade as though we have everything under control. We'd like to think we aren't broken and in need of healing. To let on that we still ache from past wounds might seem weak or embarrassing. To admit that we still feel vulnerable after a long season of habitual sin might seem shameful. Sometimes, we are simply unwilling to admit we are really broken. Inside, the pain, guilt, and shame of what we have done is killing us. Yet, we pretend to be strong. We try to cover our wounds and pretend we are okay.

But Jesus said it's the poor in spirit who inherit the kingdom of heaven, those who know their desperate need and don't try to hide it ([Matthew 5:3](#)). The paralytic and his friends and the leper each represent a physical portrait of what "poor in spirit" looks like. They are reminders that you don't have to pretend or make excuses, because He heals the broken. Each of their cries was simple: "I'm broken. Please heal me!"

THEY PUT ALL THEIR HOPE IN JESUS. They also knew they had one shot at healing and that it could only come from Jesus. The leper was doomed to a life of shame apart from some miraculous healing that he knew only Jesus could provide. He believed, put all his hope in Jesus, threw caution to the wind, and pressed in as closely as he could.

This is how we escape the power of shame and condemnation. You have to entrust yourself to God without reservation. Cling to no other hope for freedom other than Jesus Christ. Your only true hope for lasting healing that shields you from shameful condemnation is Jesus. When you are in Christ, the old has ALREADY passed away, and the new has ALREADY begun ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). You are NOW a new creation in Christ. He has already touched you with His forgiveness and His healing power. Like the leper, He has already taken away your shame,

adopting you into his family where you now belong with no more condemnation.

What's more, He has sent His Spirit to live in you to complete the restoration. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead has been sent to give you new life and reverse sin's effects, remaking you from the inside out (*Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17; Colossians 3:9-10*). The Holy Spirit will not stop until you are perfected. In the end, you will be fully redeemed, fully healed, body and soul—not merely returned to "normal" (whatever that is), but made glorious, fit for a new heaven and a new earth in God's kingdom (*Romans 8:23; Philippians 1:6; 1 John 3:2-3*). You are no longer condemned in Christ!

*Prayer – Take time to confess areas of your life where you are desperate for God to heal. Give each of those areas over to God. Trust that He has forgiven you. You no longer must bear the weight of shame and guilt. Praise God that you are no longer condemned!*

## **Tuesday, March 14 // DAY 9**

Justification – When God Forgets

Read – *Hebrews 10:12-18*

Whom do we talk to the most? Ourselves, of course! What do we talk to ourselves about the most? Ourselves, of course! What is the main topic of the conversation we are having with ourselves? Ourselves! Much of the time, we think about how well we are doing in life based on our performance and others' opinions of us. The problem is that we take this same approach with God. We believe: The more I do for God, the more God loves me. The better I perform for God, the more God accepts me.

When we equate God's love and acceptance of us based on our moral performance and actions, we are judging ourselves based

on a satanic formula designed to enslave us in sin and guilt. Thankfully, God has canceled this equation altogether! God has totally accepted us completely apart from our ability to perform well for Him. We have been justified and placed in right standing before God through Christ's death on the Cross, which paid for our sins. But God did not stop with our forgiveness; He also granted us the very righteousness of Christ (see [2 Corinthians 5:21](#))!

Visualize two ledgers: On one is a list of all our sins; on the other, the righteousness of Christ. Now when we by faith trust in what Christ did for us on the Cross we exchanged our ledger for Christ's ledger. This exemplifies justification—transferring our sin to Christ and His righteousness to us.

Justification carries no guilt with it and has no memory of past transgressions. Christ paid for all of our sins at the Cross—past, present and future. [Hebrews 10:17](#) says, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." We are completely forgiven by God!

As marvelous as it is, justification means more than forgiveness of sins. In the same act of love through which God forgave our sins, He also provided for our righteousness, the worthiness to stand in His presence. By imputing righteousness to us, God attributes Christ's worth to us. The moment we accept Christ, God declares that we are no longer condemned sinners. Instead, we are completely forgiven, we receive Christ's righteousness, and we are creatures who are fully pleasing to Him. God intended that Adam and his descendants be righteous people, fully experiencing His love and eternal purposes. Sin short-circuited that relationship, but Jesus' perfect payment for sin has since satisfied the righteous wrath of God, enabling us again to have that status of righteousness and to delight in knowing and honoring God.

God desires for those of us who have been justified to experience the realities of His Justification. We are forgiven and righteous because of Christ's sacrifice; therefore, we are pleasing to God

in spite of our failures. This reality can replace our fear of failure with peace, hope, and joy. Our past failures no longer need to be a millstone around our necks. Neither success nor failure is the basis of our acceptance before God. Christ alone is the source of our acceptance and forgiveness, freedom, and joy.

God works by fiat, meaning that He can create something from nothing simply by declaring it into existence. God spoke, and the world was formed. He said, "Let there be light," and light appeared. The earth was no longer void, because God's sovereignty created its abundance. In the same way, we were condemned, but now we are declared righteous! *Romans 5:1* refers to us as having been "justified by faith." The moment we placed our faith in Christ, God spoke our righteousness into existence. Where there was only sin, shame, and death in our lives. God spoke forgiveness, righteousness, and new creation into our lives. Therefore, if you have trusted in Christ for your salvation, you can say with certainty, "I am completely forgiven and am fully pleasing to God."

I know that might sound strange because many times you might not feel completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God. It's difficult thinking of ourselves as being declared holy and righteous before God, but that is why we have to trust by faith. We can never achieve perfection on this earth; even our best efforts at self-righteousness are as filthy rags to God (*Isaiah 64:6*). Yet God loves us so much that He appointed His Son to pay for our sins and to give us His own righteousness, His perfect status before the Father.

It is Christ who accomplished the work of justification by dying on the Cross. He is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (*Hebrews 12:2*). *First Peter 1:21* adds to this, "Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because He raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great glory." Our hope is never in us, but always in Jesus Christ.

*Prayer Time – Pray over the distance that God must bring you if*

*you are to come into His presence. Pray considering the penalty Christ paid so that you could be forgiven by God. Pray about how you are living in the shadow of the Cross, in the comfort of God's love, and in the certainty of life with Him forever in Heaven. How should you live?*

## **Wednesday, March 15 // DAY 10**

Saved from What?

Read – [Romans 3:9-18](#)

The only reason that the Cross becomes our greatest treasure is that we realize what the Cross reveals. The Cross shows not merely the love of God, but it also reveals very clearly God's wrath against sin. We are so sinful, lost, and helpless that only the very Son of God coming in the flesh and dying in our place can allow our sins to be forgiven. Jesus is the only One who has the power to set us free from sin's condemnation because He is the one who took the punishment of God for our sins.

Without Christ, we are slaves to sin and dead in our sins—thoroughly dead. We were, as Paul tells us, without hope in this world, completely helpless; our path was a one-way street to ruin and misery ([Romans 3:16](#)). Paul's assessment of the human condition is nothing like the "I'm okay, you're okay" philosophies of our culture's gospel of tolerance. In fact, he's terribly blunt in his political incorrectness: we were compatible with the spirits of disobedience, living in our lusts and deserving of God's wrath. We were destined for judgment if God had not intervened.

We may not like to admit it, but all of us are completely, utterly lost without Christ. The human condition cannot be sugarcoated. One does not observe the agony of Jesus, interpret it as a payment for sin, and then minimize the sin. If a bloody, beaten Savior hanging from a crude, splintery stake is a picture of judgment, the sin under judgment must have been

enormous, catastrophic, and deadly. Why is that important to know? Because we don't understand God's love and grace until we understand sin and the price that was paid to set us free.

Jesus offers this invitation to anyone who desires to come to Him. However, we must respond. We must call upon Him. Paul writes, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (*Romans 10:13*). In order to be saved, we need to understand and we need to believe in what Jesus Christ did for us by dying on the Cross. We must believe that He provided the payment for our sins, so that we can be forgiven and reconciled to God. We must believe that Jesus Christ lived the life we should have lived in perfect obedience to the Father and that then He died the death we should have died.

Break the power of sin's promises by faith in the superior satisfaction of Jesus Christ. Ask God to change your heart so you can personally affirm for your own life the words of *Galatians 6:14*, "Far be it from me to boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Perhaps you have felt God calling you to surrender your life to Him and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior. A person accepts the Gospel by declaring to God through prayer that they are turning from their sin and trusting in Christ's redemptive work on the Cross. If you would like to, you might pray a prayer something like this:

*Dear God, I admit that I don't understand everything about this, but I do believe these two things: I need help, and You want to help me. I confess that I have pretty much ignored You my whole life, except when I was in trouble or just wanted to feel good about myself. I believe in light of your Word that I have sinned against you and I cannot save myself. I need you in my life now and for all eternity. I believe that Jesus is Lord and that He died on the Cross, that you raised Him on the third day so that I may be forgiven of my sins and be raised to new life in Him. I now see that I am more flawed and sinful than I ever dared to believe, but that I am also more loved and accepted than I ever hoped to be through Jesus Christ. I repent of my*

*sins and rest solely in what Jesus did for me on the Cross for the forgiveness of my sins. I give my life to you and ask that you would make me yours. Thank you for hearing my prayer and for giving me the wonderful gift of eternal life. I am no longer a slave to sin and death, but I'm alive and free through your Son Jesus Christ in whose name I pray. Amen.*

If you prayed this prayer, would you please let us know at [pastorjameshilton@theJourney.cc](mailto:pastorjameshilton@theJourney.cc), so we can to encourage you, help you, and pray for you.

## Thursday, March 16 // DAY 11

Do You Want God to be Fair?

Read – [Romans 8:33-34](#)

At times when I talk to people, I hear a subtle bitterness that they think somehow God is not being fair with them. God didn't give them the job they wanted; instead it went to the jerk that was just hired a month ago. Or God allowed a sickness to happen in their family, when another family has never had a difficult time in life. The idea is that God is not being fair because they think they deserve something better from God. But let's be real for a second do we want God to be fair? Do we really want God to give us what we deserve? Think of this: In the justice of God not ONE SIN is overlooked. No failures or mistakes are disregarded.

When Jesus was asked to pick the greatest commandment, He actually offered two commandments from two Old Testament scriptures and then fused them together into a one-two punch of how we are required to live. He said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)). Jesus revealed that God's standard is incredibly high. God requires us to love Him with all our strength, all our heart, all our

passions, and every second of the day. We are also commanded to love others with the same intensity and joy as we love ourselves. That is the standard upon which God will judge us.

Let's be honest. It does not take very long for us to realize that none of us have lived and loved this way. We have all failed God by loving other things more than God as well as neglecting to love others as God has commanded us. This is why no one wants God to give us what we deserve, because what we deserve is His eternal punishment for the sins that we have committed.

This is what makes what Christ did for us on the Cross jaw dropping, over-the-top, scandalously gracious. God deals with our sins by rescuing us from the curse and punishment that we rightly deserve for not following God's commands. Paul writes, "Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When He was hung on the Cross, He took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" ([Galatians 3:13](#)). God's law commands us what to do and God enforces it. Sin is punished. But the punishment and curse was placed on Christ in His death for us.

God is just, but His justice was not poured out on us. His justice was poured out on Jesus Christ. This is redeeming justice; justice that does not overlook sin. This justice cannot ignore our lies, our anger, our pride, our lust, our impurity—God must punish it with the penalty that is just and sufficient to satisfy His holiness and wrath. He could not be a moral God and forget about sins against Himself. He could not be a holy God and forget about His hatred of sin. He must act against every sin ever committed.

There is real justice for sin and punishment for evil. Our sins are punished in Jesus Christ. The justice of God was satisfied as the wrath of God fell on Christ. God poured out real punishment on Christ. "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). He made Him to "be sin who knew no sin."

Christ was not deserving of death; He was not guilty of sin. He

lived a perfect life “without sin” (see [Hebrews 4:15](#)). On the Cross, Jesus Christ took our place, so that God chose to put our sins on Jesus Christ, to punish our sin on him instead of us. Now the perfection, righteousness, holiness of Christ is credited to everyone who by faith trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. God sees us as people, whose sins have been punished, not in us, but in Jesus Christ. And we are credited, declared to be sinless, by the perfections and moral purity of Jesus Christ. He, who had no sin, became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God by faith, not by works.

We can now approach God, who is Holy, and we can stand before Him unafraid, without shame, because Jesus died for our sins. We have nothing to fear from the justice of God. No charge can be brought against God’s children. God sees us as holy because of redeeming justice. Listen to the amazing words of Paul, “who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” ([Romans 8:33](#)). The justified person is acquitted from all guilt of sin and is declared holy, righteous, and blameless.

Once again Paul is shouting the Good News that if we have trusted in Christ’s death on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins, God has declared us to be perfect in His sight! If we were anything less than that, we would not be pleasing enough to Him to be His companions for Eternity. This is why no one...not you, not your past, not your memories, not even Satan, can bring a charge against us for something sinful we have done and condemn us before God. The living God has seen our helplessness and has extended justification to us through Christ’s death on the Cross. Christ received what we deserved from God, so that God could forever accept us.

*Prayer Time – Pray through the justice that God would bring on you, if it were not for Christ’s redemption. Claim your freedom from sin, from bondage, from traps, and from deep, miry pools of sin and sorrow. God has redeemed you from your sins, your terror of God’s wrath and your fear of God. God is your loving Father, your best friend. Speak with Him as your dearest Friend.*

## Friday, March 17 // DAY 12

Justification – Saving Faith

Read – *Hebrews 11:1-2*

Throughout this week we have talked about how we are no longer condemned, because through Jesus Christ we are justified, declared right with God, by our faith. God accomplishes justification through faith. But why faith and what exactly is faith? The word “faith” is used a lot, but it is given many different meanings. Sometimes it is used in the sense of trust. Other times, it has more to do with hope. Perhaps most often, it is used to mean belief in something that we can’t explain or physically support.

Since faith is central to the Christian life, we must have a clear understanding of how the Bible defines the word and the concept. The Bible’s foundational definition for faith is found in Hebrews: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation” (*Hebrews 11:1-2*).

The writer of Hebrews makes a distinction between faith and hope. These ideas are intimately connected, but they are distinct nonetheless. The word hope functions somewhat differently in the New Testament than it does today. When we use the word hope, we are usually referring to having a desire that something would happen in the future, but we are not sure it will come to pass. We may hope that the Dolphins win the Super Bowl or that we get that dream job one day. But that hope may never materialize (please, no jokes about the Dolphins).

When the Bible speaks of hope, the word is used entirely differently. Hope is not a wish or desire that a future outcome might happen, but rather a deep desire for a future outcome that is absolutely certain to occur. It is an absolute certainty that what is hoped for will actually become a reality in the future. Based on our trust in the promises of God, we can be fully confident how things will play out in the future. When God

gives His people a promise for the future, nothing can stop God from accomplishing what He promises. We can hold on to God's promises with certainty because He will always do what He says He will do. That is the reason hope is said to be a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (*Hebrews 6:19*). The promises of God are the anchor for believers today that keep them from drifting away. It is what gives us endurance to walk in the freedom that is ours in Jesus Christ because we know that God is accomplishing everything He has promised.

This is why when the Bible says, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for" (*Hebrews 11:1*), it is speaking of something that has weight or significance—something of extreme value. The implication is that faith communicates the essence of hope. In a real sense, hope is faith looking forward. The word faith carries a strong element of trust. If our hope is based on something God has said will happen in the future, the hope we have for that future promise finds its substance in the One making the promise. We can have hope because we have faith that God is always in control, always working out His good plan, and has the power to do the impossible. Because we can trust every promise of God, there is substance to our hope. Our hope is not just a fantasy or a wish based on idle dreams. Rather, it is based on the reality of God.

God has an amazing track record—He is infallible and never lies. If God tells us that something is going to happen tomorrow, we can live with absolute conviction and hope that it will happen even though we have not seen it yet. That is not being gullible or irrational. On the contrary, it is irrational not to believe something that God says regarding some future event.

The whole point of Hebrews is that we need to place our faith in Jesus Christ because He is in control of the future. Faith in Christ has a definite content to it.

This is why the writer of Hebrews reveals to us that Jesus is the One who is:

- Giving Himself once for all as a final sacrifice for our sins (9:14).
- Perfecting us for all time by a single offering (10:14).
- Giving us a clean conscience by His own blood (9:14; 10:22).
- Being our sympathetic High Priest before God (4:14-16).
- Interceding for us day after day in Heaven (7:25).
- Putting His laws in our minds and writing them on our hearts (8:10).
- Being our God and making us His beloved people (8:10).
- Remembering our sins no more (8:12).
- Promising never to leave us or forsake us (13:5-6).

Hebrews reveals that by faith we must believe Jesus is who He said He is, that we require salvation or we are forever lost, that on the Cross He secured salvation for all who believe, and that He rose from the dead to prove His work was finished. This is what is incredible about the Christian faith. Our faith and hope in Jesus Christ is not placed in some irrational, fairytale story that no one has seen or experienced. It is based on the testimony of eyewitnesses who report in Scripture about what they saw and encountered. Faith in Jesus Christ is not based on blind faith or fantasy, but on historical, accurate accounts of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ given in the testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James and the apostle Paul. These were real people, who saw with their eyes all that happened and wrote it down so that we would place our faith and hope in Christ.

The faith that changes our lives and connects us to God is trusting in Jesus Christ Himself. Imagine you are on a high cliff

and you lose your footing and begin to fall. Just beside you as you fall is a branch sticking out of the very edge of the cliff. It is your only hope and it is more than strong enough to support your weight. How can it save you? If your mind is filled with intellectual certainty that the branch can support you, but you do not actually reach out and grab it, you are lost. If your mind is instead filled with doubts and uncertainty that the branch can hold you, but you reach out and grab it anyway, you will be saved. Why? It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you.

Our hope and faith to live no longer as slaves, but to live free and forgiven by God is not just in something, but also in someone—Jesus Christ. It is in Christ, through Christ, and because of Christ we can live with absolute certainty that everything we need to be declared righteous and completely forgiven was already accomplished. The question is will you place your faith in what you can do, or in what Christ has already done for you?

*Prayer Time – Pray through your failure to trust in God fully; to trust in other things that bring you pleasure or reward. Pray so you can establish your dependency on God to save you because you cannot save yourself. Pray about the condition and the direction your faith is heading, and whether you desire to become stronger, more settled, mature and useful to the Father. Confess how you are prone to wander to other “gods” and seek help and victory to break away from anything that you put alongside or in the place of God. Claim the promise that God will finish His work in you. Thank Him that He will.*

## Saturday, March 18 // DAY 13

Justification – The Benefits of Trusting God

Read – *Hebrews 11:13-16*

Broken Promises. Temptation is a false promise—a promise that does not and cannot deliver. When we give into temptation, we believe a lie. In the moment that we are being tempted to do something, say something, or believe something, there is a deeper temptation happening under the surface. This may come as a surprise, but temptation has more to do with belief than it does behavior. Every temptation to sin (going all the way back to the Garden of Eden) is, at its root, a temptation to disbelieve that God is enough.

When we are being tempted, we are being enticed to purchase something we think we need in order to escape the judgment of emptiness—something that will finally satisfy us. On the surface, the bait might be lust, anger, greed, self-pity, defensiveness, entitlement, revenge, having to win, and so on. But the reason we take the bait is because we think it will satisfy our deeper hunger for meaning, freedom, validation, respect, empowerment, affection, pleasure, a sense of identity, worth, and so on.

The reality is that our sin (the fruit of the problem) and our unbelief (the root of the problem) are grimly connected. When we fail to lay aside “the sin that so easily entangles” (*Hebrews 12:1 NIV*), we are refusing to believe in the rich provisional resources that are already ours in Christ. We do not believe that everything we need and long for, we already possess in Jesus Christ.

Doing vs. Believing. By faith believing that God is enough is the hardest thing in life. It means believing that, because of what Christ did for us on the Cross, everything we need to be eternally satisfied and experience the indescribable joy of God is already ours. If that is true, we do not need anything more.

Jesus calls us not to perform, but to believe. Not to do something, but to trust in someone—Him. Jesus is doing all the work for us.

To be convinced in our hearts that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone is the hardest thing. Why? Because underneath all sin is the lie that we cannot trust the love and grace of Jesus. The great lie is that we must take matters into our own hands instead of believing in Him. Our thought is that God is not enough. Jesus' work on the Cross is not enough. Therefore, it is up to us to do something.

Trusting Is Having Faith. Everything about our relationship with God is about trusting Him. When we are unsure about our faith we ask, "Do I trust that what God did is enough?" When we wonder if we are forgiven of a sin, we ask, "Do I trust God to forgive me or should I do more?" Every choice we make to walk closer to God asks, "Can you trust God; is He enough?"

Failing to trust God and be satisfied in the riches of the Cross leads to slavery because it leaves finding peace, joy, pleasure, and meaning up to us. We are on our own. This is why we give into temptation—we are desperately looking under every rock and behind every tree, searching for something to make ourselves happy; someone to save us; something to set us free; someone to justify us.

The Gospel declares that we cannot save ourselves, defend ourselves, legitimize ourselves, justify ourselves, free ourselves, or in any other way ensure that the ultimate verdict on our lives is passing and not failure. The riches of the Cross free us from the obsessive pressure to avoid the judgment of joylessness and the enslaving demand to find happiness. Faith in God is simply trusting God and believing what He says.

Five Ways to Trust God. There are benefits to trusting God. Let us look at five primary ways that we can trust God.

1. Trusting God brings us close to God. We can get close to God and we can approach Him. *Ephesians 3:12* says, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him." Every barrier has been removed for us to approach God

and get close to Him with freedom and confidence. Our forgiveness does not just wipe out the record of our sins; it changes our relationship with God. It makes it possible for us to come close to God.

2. Trusting God brings God's power into our lives. (see *Matthew 17:20, 21:21-22; John 14:12-14*). Jesus' promised power comes into our life by the Spirit. Trusting in God allows us to attempt great things for God. Prayer works through faith, and it is powerful in us when we trust in God and believe His power is at work in us.
3. Trusting God brings forgiveness and justification into our lives. (see *Romans 3:21-30, 5:1; Philippians 3:8-9*). *Psalm 34:22* states, "The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned." *Romans 4:5* states, "And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." *Romans 10:4* states, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Trusting God brings us refuge, safety in God, righteousness by faith, and forgiveness. Faith declares that we cannot get these things on our own. They come from God alone.
4. Trusting God brings us peace. *Romans 15:13* says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing (trusting in God), so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (parentheses added).
5. God not only forgives our sins but pours His power into our lives. God makes peace with us (see *Romans 5:1-2*). We have peace in any situation. His peace means that God can be trusted in every situation that comes into our lives.
6. Trusting God assures us of a full and sure salvation. (see *Isaiah 28:16; John 3:4,16 , 11:25; 1 Timothy*

1:16, 6:12; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 1 John 5:13). "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *that you may know that you have eternal life*" (Emphasis added). Assurance comes to us when we know with certainty that we have been redeemed, saved by the Gospel. Assurance gives us confidence when life is painful. It comforts us when we are ill or facing death. Faith applies the grace of God to our lives. We know that we are forgiven now and live with God in this life, and that we are going to be with Christ in Heaven forever.

*Prayer Time – Confess your unbelief, your lack of trust, your failings to surrender to God. Pray through why you don't trust God; how foolish it is to doubt His word. Pray about the peace and power that comes into your life as you trust Him. Pray about how God wants to grow your faith so you can trust Him and love Him more.*

# WEEK 3 – NO LONGER SEARCHING

## MEMORY VERSE

You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him  
Colossians 1:21-22

Every person in the world wants to know what will make him or her happy. We're all desperately seeking for the person, place, or thing that will meet our expectations, needs, and wants. What will truly satisfy the desires of our heart? There is a search within all of us to satisfy a thirst that grows in our hearts for meaning and ultimate rest. Yet, the more we search for satisfaction, significance, and joy we are left discontented.

There is a single thing that people are searching for, although they may describe it differently. They are seeking the peace that is missing from their lives that will make them whole. In the midst of our searching, God offers us Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus exceeds our expectations, provides for our needs, and fulfills our desires. Christ alone can provide the satisfaction and joy we so desperately seek.

## Sunday, March 19 // Day 14

Reconciliation – God Making Things Right with Us

Read – *Colossians 1:21-22*

From the beginning, we know something is off. That's what creates this desire, this search to be happy, to find joy. As children, we thought it might be that bag of candy we begged our parents for at the store or that new bike, video game, or toy we wanted for Christmas. We thought these things would make us happy. But they didn't. As teenagers, we sought satisfaction in good grades, athletic accomplishments, a car, more friends, popularity, or even the love of a significant other. But all of it left us discontent. As adults, we think that more money, better sex, a great marriage, a bigger house, more (or less) children, or a better job will quench our thirst. But we're still left wanting more.

We were designed for more than the trivial pursuit of pleasure. The hard truth is that we will never find relief if we continue to seek it through possessions or through people. Seeking satisfaction in the things of this world is like chasing the wind. Once you're finally exhausted and weary from your pursuit, you're left empty-handed and disappointed. You've wasted valuable time chasing nothing when you could have been living life experiencing true joy and peace.

The problem is that our hearts are black holes of discontentment, devouring relationships and possessions, all the while screaming, "I need more." We're always eating, yet remain famished. We are always drinking, but never satisfied. In the midst of our constant searching, we are continuously dissatisfied.

Dissatisfaction in life is near the root of all kinds of sin. Why do people cheat on their spouse, abuse drugs and alcohol, mindlessly binge-watch ridiculous amounts of television, scroll endlessly on Facebook and Twitter, steal, or commit suicide? All of these things and more happen because, to quote Bono, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for!"

At the root of our dissatisfaction is a never-ending thirst that nothing in this world can satisfy. We've been duped into thinking that more popularity, a better job, more money, cooler friends, a better lover, another spouse, or a new life is really what we need. And if we can't obtain any of these things, or when they leave us dissatisfied, we resort to drug abuse, eating more ice cream, or senseless entertainment.

It's only when you come to realize that there is Someone greater than people or possessions that can truly satisfy that you are finally getting nearer to what you've actually been seeking. God offers us Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus exceeds our expectations, provides for our needs, and fulfills our desires. Christ alone can provide the satisfaction and joy we so desperately seek. That is why Jesus went to the cross.

Jesus died to bring us to God and satisfy our lives with what we have been searching for all along. The Bible describes this as reconciliation. Reconciliation is what we so desperately need because through our sin we are separated from God—"having no hope and without God in the world," Paul writes in Ephesians 2:12. The good news is that God out of His great love for us pursues us to be reconciled to Him. God is always the Reconciler. Out of incredible love for us, God pursues us in our searching. It's God who makes the first move and changes a relationship of hostility to one of friendship, and this is accomplished through Christ, through His death on the Cross.

Our ultimate problem, the reason we search in the first place, is that we are alienated from God through our own sin. It is not God who turned His back on us and severed our loving relationship. We are the ones who sinned and turned our backs on God. We deserve nothing but the wrath of God because of what we have done. But here is the good news; God pursues us so that we don't have to search anymore.

What is so amazing about God is that He is not content with allowing us to remain slaves to the brokenness of sin, always searching, but always dissatisfied. Instead, God sent His own

Son to die on the Cross in order to absorb His wrath and bear the curse for all who trust Him so that we might be reconciled to God. "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled..." (*Colossians 1:21-22*).

On the Cross, Christ suffered the full wrath of God for our sin. Jesus Christ traded places with us, living the perfect life we should have lived, and dying the death we had been condemned to die. *Second Corinthians 5:21* says that He actually became our sin so that we could literally become His righteousness. Jesus took the record of all our sin, stapled to His chest, died as if He had committed them, and now offers us His perfect record in return. This means that we are totally accepted, approved, and reconciled to God.

Christ's salvation is 100% complete, and 100% the possession of those who have received it in repentance and faith, and that means they are 100% reconciled to God. Because of the Cross of Jesus Christ, there is nothing we can do that would make God love us more, and nothing we have done that makes God love us less. Just let that sink in for a moment. Right now, if we are in Christ, when God looks at us—He sees the righteousness of Christ. There is no longer any barrier to fellowship between man and God! If we really grasped this incredible truth—not only with our heads but also with our hearts—it would change everything in our lives. You could finally rest from searching.

*Prayer Time – Pray through taking your spiritual temperature. Are you warm or cold? Where are you? When things go wrong with you and God, who messed up? Pray about your responsibility. Pray about how much Christ sought to make peace with you. Is there anything else He could have done to bring you to Him?*

# Monday, March 20 // DAY 15

Jesus Died to Bring Us to God

*Read – 2 Corinthians 5:18-19*

Stopping the “To Dos.” When we talk about becoming intimate with God and drawing close to God, our minds very quickly jump to things we must do. We perceive that there is this huge list of stuff that must be accomplished: attend church, go to Life Group, read the Bible, things to say and not say, and on and on. The whole idea is that we get busy for God, hoping that He will love us and accept us. We act a certain way. We give money. We go to Haiti or serve in 2C. We look for anything we think will please God and make Him love us.

I’m not suggesting these things are bad. But if the extent of our Christianity is achieving the right behavioral standard, we are setting ourselves up for disaster. We are laying a list of moral commands onto a heart that loves other things. And, whether we ever say it out loud or not, we will resent God for holding us captive to doing things we would not otherwise be doing, if He were not constantly threatening to send us to Hell or mess our lives up.

What’s wrong with us? Fixing something that is broken requires some knowledge of its purpose and design. We can’t fix a watch to tell the right time until we understand that the whole purpose of the watch is to tell time. Likewise, any attempt to address what is really wrong with us requires some understanding of what it means to be human. We have to discover the core of who we are and what is really wrong with us. This means we must go all the way back to our original sin in the Garden of Eden.

In the Garden, we discover that our original sin was idolatry. We may have a hard time seeing that or we may think, “Idolatry? I don’t see Adam and Eve bowing down or praying to a golden monkey.” That is because we sometimes fail to grasp what idolatry and worship really are. We worship whatever it is we deem most essential and important for life and happiness. For

Adam and Eve, it was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Its fruit was so important; they were willing to disobey God to get it. For us, it may be money, the praise of others, a good marriage and healthy family, achieving a certain status at work, or experiencing some sensual pleasure. When something or someone becomes so important to us that it drives our behavior and commands our emotions, we are worshiping it. We are willing to say “no” to God in order to get it.

An idol can be almost anything—even one of the good gifts of God. Family, friends, dreams, even church—these are all good things, of course. But they become idols when we assign them the same or more weight than God and turn to them to give us our identity. We worship them. Ultimately, when you sift it all down: Idolatry is the foundation for every sin.

Everybody Worships Someone. All people, religious or not, have gods, because all people are worshipers. Many people feel like they are not worshipers because they are not actively religious. We can no more turn off our desire for worship by not being religious than we could turn off our desire for water by staying thirsty. The first sensation Adam and Eve had after the thrill of eating the forbidden fruit was a sense of their own nakedness. Were they naked before eating the fruit? Yes. But only after they had eaten the fruit did their nakedness bother them. What had changed?

Prior to their sin, Adam and Eve had been “clothed” in the love and acceptance of a deep relationship with God, so their nakedness did not bother them. Now, having stripped themselves of God’s love and acceptance by being separated from Him, they were left with a sense of exposure, fear, guilt, and shame.

So what did Adam and Eve do about that sense of nakedness? The same thing any of us do when we feel naked—they looked for something to put on! If we had a problem sleepwalking and suddenly woke up one night standing in Publix, buck-naked, we probably would not use that opportunity to pick up a few things

for breakfast. Instead, we would immediately look for something to cover ourselves and hope that no one we know had seen us.

The Cover-Up. Adam and Eve did essentially the same thing. They made themselves “coverings of fig leaves” and hid from God. Their clothes made them feel more acceptable. We have all been on the same quest ever since. We try to cover the shame of our nakedness by attempting to establish our worthiness in some way. We find something that sets us apart from others: we are smarter; we go to a certain kind of school; we have a good job and make lots of money; we are a good parent; we are more faithful in our religion. We will use just about anything to establish our worth. But, the things we use to establish our worthiness are simply “functional saviors.”

When Adam and Eve were “busted” for their sin, the exposure of their nakedness implanted in them a deep sense of fear. They sensed that they were not acceptable as they were (which was true), so out of fear they felt driven to do something to make themselves more acceptable to God. That fear has been passed down to us. We constantly turn to other things to make us approved by God and force Him to accept us. But whatever we think makes us better or we feel proud about only leads us into more sin.

On the other hand, of course, when we do not feel as if we measure up, we deal with despair. Our sense of nakedness and fear of rejection grows. This leads only to more fervent attempts to distinguish ourselves from others, along with jealousy and hatred of those around us. Our despair creates a void and we often turn to the lusts of the flesh to fill us. Despair over our soul of “nakedness” drives us to crave food, toys, drugs, alcohol, sex, creature comforts, etc. It turns us into workaholics, porn addicts, serial romantics, obsessive parents, and compulsive shoppers.

This is why the Cross becomes rich to us. Through Jesus Christ’s work on the Cross, we are forgiven, accepted, loved, and reconciled to God. While performance-based acceptance thrusts us into a cycle of pride and despair, acceptance through

the Cross of Jesus Christ produces exactly the opposite fruit. The assurance of God's presence and approval takes away our sense of nakedness and our craving for others' approval. We are complete in Him. When we experience the ultimate joy of the love and acceptance that is found when we are brought back to a deep relationship with God, the Cross of Jesus Christ becomes immeasurably rich.

*Prayer Time – Pray about getting over the need to “do something” to be reconciled to God. You can't do anything to win God's pleasure or His love for you. Pray about the richness of the Cross and how it impacts every friendship and family member. How would the Cross change a difficult friendship? How could reconciliation work in you and through you today?*

## **Tuesday, March 21 // DAY 16**

Reconciliation – The Blessings of God in Your Life

*Read – [Ephesians 2:11-18](#)*

Blessings Come from Somewhere. Have you ever really stopped to think of how much God blesses us? Today, none of us worried about whether the sun would fall from the sky, if there would be enough oxygen on the earth for us to breathe, or if gravity would continue to do its job and hold us to this spinning rock called Earth. Every day we are confronted with the riches of God's love and the gifts that He so graciously gives us. But what is God's greatest gift to us?

If today God could grant any of us one wish, one desire, what would it be? Our minds can very easily run with amazing thoughts—a trip to Bora Bora, a long healthy life, a million dollars, somebody to love, the ability to fly, the list goes on. But would any of these things give us the joy, pleasure, hope, and security that would ultimately satisfy us?

King David understood that there was only one thing that could

ultimately satisfy him, so he made this one request to God, “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” (*Psalm 27:4*). David realized that the greatest gift that God can give is God! The Bible teaches that the best and final gift of God’s love is the enjoyment of God. This means that the greatest treasure and supreme gift of the Cross is that we gain Christ. This is why Paul wrote, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...” (*Philippians 3:8*).

In place of this, however, we have turned the love of God and the Gospel of Christ into a divine endorsement of our delight in many lesser things, especially the delight we feel when we are elevated in someone else’s (or our own) eyes. From the first sin in the Garden of Eden until the final sin when Christ returns, human beings will have the tendency to continue to embrace the love of God as the gift of everything but Himself.

This radically self-centered view of God’s love permeates our culture and our churches. From the time they can move, we teach our children that being loved means feeling made much of. We have built whole educational philosophies around this view of love—curricula, parenting skills, motivational strategies, therapeutic models, and sales techniques. Most modern people can scarcely imagine an alternative understanding to feeling loved other than feeling made much of. Our belief is, “If you don’t make much of me, you do not love me.”

We are willing to boast in the Cross, as long as the Cross gets us a date, a better marriage, well-behaved kids, good health, job promotions, more money, and nicer houses. This is often how we define the blessings of God. What, then, are we really after? What are we really searching for to satisfy us? It’s not God, but the stuff God can give us.

This path to happiness and the attainment of worldly riches is an

illusion. The Cross of Jesus Christ reveals what really satisfies our hearts and lives. The saving love of God is God's commitment to do everything necessary to enthrall us with what is most deeply and durably satisfying, namely Himself. We have constantly forsaken, rebelled, and cheated on God and have no right to be in an intimate relationship with Him. It is God's love that enacted a plan to reconcile, bringing us back to Him.

In order for the Gospel to be Good News, it must provide an all-satisfying and eternal gift that undeserving sinners can receive and enjoy. The gift must be God Himself, above all His other gifts. That is why Christ's work of reconciliation on the Cross makes us no longer slaves, because we no longer have to keep searching for something to ultimately satisfy us.

The whole *40 Days* devotional is focused on living in the freedom that we are no longer slaves, because through the Cross of Christ, we are set free to be reconciled to God. Stop right now and read *Ephesians 2:13*. See how Paul describes the greatest gift of God's love as being brought back to God through the Cross of Jesus Christ. Don't be distracted by all the gifts that we gain in Christ. Focus on the richest, the highest gift, which is Christ Himself. Now that we are reconciled through the Cross, we can see God, fellowship with God, love God because we have the everlasting joy of being "brought near by the blood of Christ" (*Ephesians 2:13*).

The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If we could have Heaven with no sickness, and with all the friends we ever had on earth, and all the food we ever liked, and all the fun activities we ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties we ever saw, and all the physical pleasures we ever tasted, and with no human conflict or any natural disasters, and all the riches that the world could give us, but Christ was not there, could we be satisfied with Heaven? Can we really say Christ Himself, not His gifts, will be the supreme pleasure of our lives and our life in Heaven? Until the Road to Calvary leads us to behold and embrace God Himself as our highest joy, we will

always be searching for more and always ending up dissatisfied.

*Prayer Time – Pray through how much you desire all that God wants to give you. Do you desire His Presence? Do you want more of Him? Are you ready for what God can do within your life? Pray about the Gospel as the vessel by which His blessings flow into your life. Pray about receiving not only God’s gifts, but God Himself as your most valued treasure.*

## **Wednesday, March 22 // DAY 17**

Reconciliation – We Are Now Brought Close to God

Read – *Ephesians 2:13*

We have discovered that reconciliation, by definition, assumes a previous state of alienation and hostility caused by the offensive actions of someone. In regard to our relationship with God, it is our sin that has separated us from God (*Isaiah 59:2*). It is our sinful state that has caused us to be “God’s enemies” (see *Romans 5:10*)—that is, those hated by God. “Those hated by God?” we ask. Does God actually hate people? Yes, the psalmist wrote, “You hate all evildoers” (*Psalms 5:5*). So when Paul describes us as God’s enemies, he was not describing our sinful hatred of God, but rather His righteous hatred of us because of our sin.

Because of the sinful implications we always associate with human hatred, it is difficult for us to conceive of God’s holy hatred toward people. But God’s hatred is simply His just and holy revulsion against sin and His holy resentment toward those who rebel against Him. Sin is a personal offense against the Creator. It is a dreadful act of rebellion against the love and glory of God. It unravels and corrupts God’s creation. It belittles God.

It is for this reason that God’s act of reconciling us to Himself through the death of Christ is so amazing. We were powerless to do anything on our own in trying to reconcile our relationship with God (see *Romans 5:6*). As Paul wrote in *Romans 8:7*, “For

the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God....” In our natural state, not one of us would want to be reconciled to God.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God Himself took the initiative by sending His Son to die in our place to satisfy His justice and absorb His wrath. Many times, we wait to be reconciled to someone who has offended us until we see that they have had a change of heart. But God did not wait for a change of heart on our part. He made the first move. Indeed, He did more than that. He did all that was necessary to secure our reconciliation, including our change of heart. Even though He is the One offended by our sin, He is the One who makes amends to Himself through the death of Christ. As Paul wrote in *2 Corinthians 5:19*, “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them.”

God, the offended party, sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself; He provided the justification for His own wrath by having Christ take our penalty in our place. He did all that was required to remove every barrier that separated us from Him. As Paul wrote in *Romans 5:10*, “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

Now we have to understand that this historical, objective work of reconciliation by Christ has to be personally received by each of us. That is why Paul wrote, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (*2 Corinthians 5:18-20*).

This is a most amazing passage of Scripture. Having done everything to secure our reconciliation, Christ now appeals to us through His Gospel messengers to “be reconciled to God”—that is, to receive His work of reconciliation. Think about the meaning of that. We ourselves should have been on our faces before God, imploring Him to be reconciled to us. We are the ones that have rebelled against God. We are the ones that have run from God, cursed God, betrayed God, and rejected God.

But instead of leaving us separated from Him, we see God reconciling us to Himself through the death of His Son, and then appealing to us, tenderly calling us, imploring us to receive that reconciliation. What a pure act of grace, love, and mercy on God's part!

To add to our amazement, we know that, left to ourselves, we would never even want to be reconciled to God. According to Paul, we are so blinded by Satan that we cannot even see the Light of the Gospel and receive it (see [2 Corinthians 4:4](#)). Therefore, God sends His Holy Spirit to open our hearts to understand and receive the message of reconciliation (see [Acts 16:14](#)).

What is even more amazing is that our reconciliation to God is permanent and eternal. Though we continue, even as believers, to do things that deserve God's displeasure and wrath, we can never again be separated from God. For the sake of Christ, God will always accept us; He will never leave us. No matter what we do, how far we run, God is always loving us and pursuing us. Even when God deems it necessary to discipline us for persistent disobedience, He always does so out of love, to restore us to the way of obedience so that we can experience deeper intimacy with Him (see [Hebrews 12:4-11](#)).

In the midst of God's work and our struggle with indwelling sin, we must always keep in mind that our status of favor and friendship with God is always based on what Christ did for us on the Cross. We are forever reconciled to God through the death of His Son. This is where freedom is found and our searching ends.

*Prayer Time – Consider someone you are alienated from. How can God's work of reconciliation give you examples of what you should do to win them over, to win them back? Guard your heart from thinking that you can restore yourself to God. Pray through how lost you are apart from Christ, and let that recognition soar into praise for all He has done for you.*

## Thursday, March 23 // DAY 18

Reconciliation – Grace and Peace from God Are Yours

Read – *Ephesians 2:17-18*

As Paul writes to Christ followers in Ephesus, he begins his letter by proclaiming, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Ephesians 1:2*). Paul will spend the next two chapters unpacking exactly how, through the Cross of Jesus Christ, we can experience God’s grace and peace that comes from being reconciled to God. The grand climax of this mighty truth comes in *Ephesians 2:17-18*. There is nothing beyond this; this is the very top, the pinnacle!

Paul has carefully taken us step-by-step, higher and higher until we have reached the top. We are standing on the summit, we have arrived at the grand plateau, and we are just looking, gazing, with astonishment and amazement at the great truth Paul is about to share with us. With great passion Paul declares, “He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (*Ephesians 2:17-18*).

This statement is not only amazingly rich; it is staggering to comprehend. “Through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” If we were to grasp the wonder of this statement, it would revolutionize our lives. If we were to understand this, we would be lost in wonder, love and praise. So many people think that Christianity is merely following a list of rules and regulations. They view the Cross essentially as a means to save them from Hell. But for Paul, the greatness of the Cross was that now there was direct access to God.

Father, Son and Spirit desiring all our love and our Life. What really stands out on the surface of this verse is that we are brought face to face with the mystery of the Trinity. Through Him (the Son, Jesus Christ) we now have access by one Spirit (the Holy Spirit) to the Father (God the Father). This means that each Person in the Trinity is interested in us, passionately pursuing us

with love, and is actively engaged together in reconciliation. The glorious work of reconciling us back to God has been divided up among the three Persons. How are they engaged in our salvation? That is what Paul has been writing about throughout his letter to the Ephesians.

The Father. God the Father thought of our salvation, planned our salvation, and initiated our salvation. He thought it out, He purposed it, He decided on it, and He determined it. The everlasting and eternal God the Father loved us with a love that began before time and desired to live eternally as our ultimate Father! It was and is His plan and purpose. The Father is the One who conceives and initiates and sets into motion this great and glorious plan; reconciling us back to Him.

The Son. What makes this even more stunning is that the Son gladly and willingly accepted the task that was laid before Him. Let us remind ourselves constantly of what it involved for the Son, who left the joy of Heaven and came out of Eternity to die for our sins. In the beginning He was with God, nothing was made without Him, but He leaves that glory. Even though He was “equal with God” and “counted it not robbery to be equal with God,” He “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” and “humbled himself” (*Philippians 2:6-9*). He suffered the hatred of sinners, the betrayal of close friends, the mocking of people, and the nailing to a Cross. But above and beyond it all, He took upon Himself our sin, suffered by being made sin (by the Father) for us, though He Himself knew no sin. He was forsaken by His Father as if He had committed all our evil acts and then died in our place. He lived the moral life we should have lived; then died the wrathful, hideous death that we all deserve to die. The Prince, the Author of Life, died and was buried in a grave out of His great desire to graciously bring us back to Him because we were His joy. Wow—what a Savior!

The Spirit. Then there is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is He who works out the salvation in us, one by one. The Spirit comes and

He applies the work of what Christ did to our lives. The Spirit opens our eyes so we can see who Christ is and what He has done for us. He helps us understand the Bible when we read it. He shows us how to turn faith into obedience, trust into love. The Spirit confirms us as the sons and daughters of God, deep within our souls, He writes “ACCEPTED,” “FORGIVEN” and “GREATLY LOVED” on our hearts. He allows us to experience God’s joy, peace, hope, and love. He creates desires and passions in us that lead us to follow Christ and turn from sin. He directs and leads us in the ways of God.

All three Persons of the Trinity are actively involved in lovingly bringing us into a deeper, more loving relationship with God. All three Persons are interested in us and are concerned about our salvation, and have worked to bring everything that is needed to bring us back to God. Reconciliation involves the active work of all three Persons; nothing less could do it. God the Father has His eye on us; He knows us, and He is interested in us. God the Son has so loved us that He has given Himself for us. And God the Holy Spirit so loves us that He comes into us to apply all that is necessary to bring us back to God. Now we can rest assured that God loves us because all three persons of the Trinity have taken an active part in our reconciliation. This is how we know we are free and walk in the new life given to us by God.

*Prayer Time – Give praise and worship to each member of the Trinity as they worked to accomplish your salvation. If any part of God’s nature had not been involved in your reconciliation, you would not be saved. But pray through how strong is your rescue, how complete is your salvation because of what God has done for you. All persons of the Trinity have labored to save you—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By faith, you are truly and completely saved!*

## Friday, March 24 // DAY 19

Reconciliation – No Longer Strangers and Foreigners to God

Read – *Ephesians 2:19*

We crave love, fellowship, and intimacy in our life. It's the way we were created. It's the reason most of our efforts and time are spent trying to get these desires filled by others. As if in answer to these desires, the world we live in is filled with people who demand that we please them in exchange for their approval and acceptance. This sets us up for basing our whole identity on being loved by people; and usually our biggest fear is their rejection of us.

We toil and strive, wanting people to like us, doing everything we can to win their respect so that they will love and accept us more and yet, after all our hard work, it takes only one unappreciative word from someone to ruin our sense of significance. One harsh word, a disapproving look or a simple brush-off and our world crumbles: we have been rejected. Such demands lead us directly to the belief that we must meet some performance level in order to gain love and acceptance in a relationship.

The real problem is that we take this belief in performance-based love and constantly apply it to God. Our thought process is: The more morally good stuff we do, the more God loves us. Or, the more we mess up morally, the more God dislikes us. If we really believe this is how God works, we are in trouble.

God's solution to break down the hostility between us is based on Christ's work on the Cross. Through His payment, we find complete forgiveness, true acceptance, and unconditional love. Reconciliation means that those who were enemies have become great friends. Paul described our transformation from enmity to friendship with God by saying: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (*Ephesians 2:19*).

Many Christ-followers do not understand nor live in the freedom that is found in reconciliation. We are no longer strangers and

aliens to God. We are accepted, forgiven, cared for, and loved by God as part of God's family. This is hard for us to grasp. I remember counseling a lady that had gone through an abortion to get back at her cheating husband. Although she had confessed her sin to God and to her husband and had been forgiven, guilt continued to plague her. She found that it was difficult for her to feel accepted by God. She still could not forgive herself for what she had done.

Sitting in my office, we explored her reluctance to accept God's forgiveness. "It sounds as though you believe that God can't forgive the sin you committed," I said. "That's right," she replied. "I don't think He ever will." I revealed that through Christ's work on the Cross, our sins are forgiven. God does not base His love and acceptance of us on our performance, but on what Christ performed for us. If any sin is so filthy and vile that it makes us less acceptable to God, then Christ's work on the Cross is insufficient—not enough. If the Cross is not sufficient for all sin, then the Bible is in error when it says that He forgave all our sins (see [Colossians 2:13,15](#)). God took all our sins and canceled them by nailing them to the Cross. In this way, God also took away Satan's power to condemn us for sin. This means that nothing we ever did or will ever do can nullify our reconciliation and make us unacceptable to God.

Our unconditional acceptance in Christ is a profound, life-changing truth. Salvation is not simply a ticket to Heaven. It is the beginning of a dynamic new relationship with God. We add nothing to our salvation. It is God who seeks us out, convicts us of sin, and reveals Himself to us. It is God who gives us the very faith with which to accept Him. Our faith is simply our response to what He has done for us. God did everything to reconcile us to Him.

Our worth rests in the fact that Christ's blood has paid for our sins; therefore, we are reconciled to God. Our acceptance and worth are not dependent on others' acceptance of us. Our relationships with one another are very important to God, so

much so that He has placed unity among the brethren as a priority in our relationship with Him (see Matthew 5:23-24). However, these relationships are not what we base our approval and worth on. We need to pray that God will guide us to relationships that will encourage us to be honest, practice the truth of His Word, affirm us, and thereby help us develop an appropriate love and compel us to focus on Him as the gracious Provider of all our needs. Eventually, our gratitude will motivate us to live for Him, rather than other people.

*Prayer Time – Pray through your value to God. What did He see in you? Does reconciliation not tell us more about God than about us? Does God love you for what you've done? Certainly not! But do we love Him for what He's done for us? Pray about your forgetfulness to thank Him for all He has done for us. Offer God thanks and praise for reconciling us to Himself. Celebrate the peace you have with God.*

## **Saturday, March 25 // DAY 20**

Reconciliation – Confidence to Draw Near to God

Read – [Hebrews 4:14-16](#)

Breaking Free. My walk with Christ over the years has at times been filled with regret and shame. I can easily generate a depressing list of things that I should have done, should have said, and never should have thought. It is dark and ugly, and it flat out depresses me because it leads me to doubt that God could ever really love me. I have been far more aware of my sin than I am of what Jesus accomplished at the Cross on my behalf.

We all carry around a list of regrets. It's the weight on the heart of the businessman who is rarely home while his kids are growing up. It is the up-surg-ing wave of grief and mental self-torture within the woman who had an abortion twelve years ago. It is the nagging conscience when we mutter a crude insult at reckless

drivers, only to realize our kids are listening. It is the lingering sense of regret over the lack of a prayer life. It is the hateful words shouted in anger. It is all the “what ifs” that plague us.

Some of us have been carrying so much, for so long, that we think it is normal to go through life weighed down by regret and guilt. And the truth is, apart from the Cross, regret is normal. But, do you know who loves to remind you of your regrets after you have come to faith in Christ? It is our enemy, Satan. Satan loves to accuse us of our sins. That is one of his names—“the accuser of our brothers” (see [Revelation 12:10](#)). One of Satan’s most effective weapons is making us forget that we are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ Jesus.

A lot of times when we think about spiritual warfare, we think of it in terms of strange, paranormal phenomena—people levitating, their eyes rolling in the back of their heads and foaming at the mouth. Can Satan do things like this? It would not be beneath him. But that is likely not his main strategy. His primary tactic is to attack our identity in the Gospel, make us question the extent of what Christ did for us through His work on the Cross, then heap huge clumps of regret on us as we fall to the ground in shame.

Our enemy will correctly point out our failures, but he never shows us our forgiveness. This is the difference between condemnation and conviction. Both Satan and the Holy Spirit will point out our sin. But they do so in entirely different ways and for entirely different purposes. Satan starts with what we did, and tears down who we are. The Holy Spirit starts with what Christ has declared over us, and helps us rebuild who He desires us to be.

Satan beats us down with our failures. Our Savior fights back by reminding us who He is, and who we are in Him. We are purchased by His grace. He is making us more and more into the likeness of Himself. Christ is pouring out His power into our lives, and we are being kept, helped, and healed by His great, conquering power in the Cross.

Each day Jesus says to us, "You are My beloved child. I am well pleased in you. You are no longer a slave; live free!" Satan, on the other hand, says, "Look at you. Look at the condition of your circumstances. Look at how poorly you're living. There is no way you are God's beloved child. You will always be a slave to that sin." Which voice are we going to believe? There is an eternity of difference between them.

Satan has tricked so many of us into believing his voice is actually the voice of the Holy Spirit. We have grown accustomed to the voice of regret and condemnation. We think the only thing the Holy Spirit ever says to us is, "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! What's wrong with you? You're a terrible failure!"

But the truth is, He speaks altogether differently. His words of comfort and love are like this: "I have made you; you, My dearly-loved child. I have taken away all your sin; you keep none of your sins. I could not approve of you more than I do right now. Now, get up, and live in the truth of the Cross."

Think of what Jesus said to the woman caught in the act of adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" ([John 8:11](#)). What is most significant about His statement is its order: promise first; command second. "Neither do I condemn you" precedes "go and from now on sin no more." It is deep within our sinful and broken natures to reverse those wonderful words and turn them into the opposite of Good News: By our sin nature, we turn His words into Bad News; words that sound like these familiar and terrible words: "If you can manage to go and sin no more, then God will accept you." Do you see how corrupt and enslaving those words are?

Many people cannot shake some failure that stains their past. Perhaps there is a voice inside that whispers to our soul, "See? That proves it. Look at what you did. You are a failure. You are no good." That is the voice of our enemy. What must we do? Embrace our identity in the Cross. In Christ, God could not love us any more than He does right now.

Maybe you are not as successful as you always thought you would be. Maybe you feel like you let your parents, your family, or yourself down. Maybe you sense a general spirit of disapproval over your life—from coworkers, your friends, your spouse, your parents, and from God. In a thousand different ways they tell you, “You’re not good enough. You’re a disappointment.” You must tell yourself that because of Jesus, there is no condemnation and you have the absolute approval of the only One whose opinion really matters.

Take your regret and confess your sin to God. Then believe in Him. Exercise the gift of faith that God has given you to believe that Jesus died on the Cross for the very sins you are being condemned for. The punishment He received was for you. His resurrection is proof that God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice. The sins of your past and the sin you just committed were all atoned for; you need carry their weight no more. You can’t do it. That’s why Jesus did it for you.

Admit that you are the worst sinner you know. Admit you are unworthy and deserve to be condemned. But do not stop there! Move on to rejoicing in the Savior who came to save the worst of sinners. Take your list of condemnation and do what Paul tells you to do with it—allow Jesus to take your “record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” and put it away by “nailing it to the Cross” (*Colossians 2:14*). Lay down the list of condemnations and kneel down in worship at the feet of Him who bore your sins. Draw near to God with confidence. Cry tears of amazement at the riches of the Cross!

*Prayer Time – Pray over where you’ve failed. Confess to God and give all your failures to Him. Claim the completely amazing forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Cross for yourself. Defend yourself against accusations and assaults. Prepare yourself for the war. Run back again and again to the Savior and to His Cross where you take your stand. Nothing can defeat you. When your sinful self turns Gospel into bad news, preach the Gospel to yourself; pray the Gospel to your heart again.*

# WEEK 4 – NO LONGER ALONE

## MEMORY VERSE

But to all who did receive him, who believed  
in his name, he gave the right to become  
children of God.

John 1:12

It is one thing to be forgiven, made new and empowered. Those are great. But it is very different to find such love and acceptance that you never have to be alone ever again. One of the most amazing, liberating truths that the Cross of Christ declares is that God not only forgives us but He adopts us into His family. Jesus died to make us the children of God. God is truly, now, our Father and we are His beloved children!

# Sunday, March 26 // DAY 21

Children of God

Read – [John 1:12-13](#)

Many people grab hold of a lie that somehow God wants to care, love, and do good things for others, but not for ourselves. He might care for the world in some general way, but He does not specifically care for me and my issues, worries, or concerns. This sort of thinking creates an imaginary god that is nothing like the way Jesus taught us to see God. Jesus invites us to see and relate to God as our good and loving Father.

Jesus was never discreet about why He came to die on the Cross. His mission was to restore our relationship with God in such a way that we can come to God as Father. Through Christ, we have a new identity as an adopted child of God. [Romans 8:15](#) says, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" [Galatians 4:7](#) says, "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Unfortunately, the word "father" contains a lot of baggage and invokes up all sorts of images for people. For some, "father" is associated with warm memories, laughter, family trips or long conversations on a front porch. For others, the word is associated with absence, rejection, hurt, or pain. At times, our earthly fathers have greatly distorted what the role of a father was intended to be. This is why it's so important to see God the way Jesus saw and taught about God as Father. Jesus never merely portrayed God as some ruling, hard-nosed dad. Jesus went to great lengths to show us that God is a good, loving, incredible Father.

Think about how Jesus described God as our Father and what this says about His character:

- He embraces the prodigal son, and the older brother—He is loving, accepting and patient (*Luke 15*).
- He takes care of the sparrows but says He cares much more for His children than the sparrows—He provides and is attuned to our every need (*Matthew 10*).
- He goes after every single lost sheep until it is found—He pursues a relationship with us and doesn't ever get tired of looking after the lost (*Luke 15*).

Through Christ you are God's child and God is a good, loving Father. These two truths are life-changers. They have the most transformative power in your life if you can live in them and through them. You are a child of God and God loves being your Father. This is who you are, and it's who God is.

This is what makes the Cross of Christ so liberating. Through the Cross of Jesus Christ, God adopts us and we have a new personal, family connection with Him. The greatest status that you can have in the entire world is not the status of most popular, billionaire, Miss America, President, CEO—it is being declared a child of God!

God is now our Father and we have become part of God's family. John writes, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (*John 1:12-13*).

None of us were born into God's family (even if your parents were Christians). When we come to faith in Christ, we are adopted as God's sons and daughters. We are given all the rights and

privileges to bear God's name. We are heirs of all He has. We even have a whole new family; all those that have believed in Him are our family members.

*Prayer Time – Pray about your new family, your new Father, and all the blessings of being adopted by God into His family and home. Pray about your future in Heaven, your right of inheritance, and your standing before God as His child, your privilege before Him in prayer, your pleas that are heard for Jesus' sake and answered according to the pleasure of the Father.*

## Monday, March 27 // DAY 22

God Our Father

Read – [Galatians 4:4-7](#)

There is a desire in all of us to love and be loved by our father. When that desire is not satisfied, we struggle in life. This is why some of the greatest pain that people carry with them and struggle deeply with are issues related to their father. Many struggle with issues of acceptance and security because of a missing relationship. Others carry bitterness because of painful comments spoken decades before.

The pain created by absentee fathers points to the longing of all humanity for a relationship with a father. The bitterness over broken relationships with dads reveals the need for intimacy with a father. But the need points deeper. There is a desire in all of us to love and be loved and be accepted.

This desire comes out in our need to connect with and be loved by our earthly fathers. This is a God-given desire and a reflection of our longing for our ultimate and perfect Father, God. Just as the absence of an earthly father creates a void, the absence of God as their Heavenly Father leaves people empty. Our hearts find no peace until we rest in the love, acceptance, and care of our Heavenly Father.

God desires for us to relate to Him as a Father. The greatest command of the Bible is not to obey God like a boss, but to love God like a Father. In the famous Sermon on the Mount—Jesus’ first sermon to the masses—Jesus refers to God as Father more than any other title. Why does Jesus emphasize God as a Father? Many times people focus on one attribute of God to the exclusion of other attributes, which leads to an inaccurate view of God. But the image of God as a Father encompasses all of His attributes.

God as a Father encompasses His holiness, because He demands respect and authentic worship (see [Malachi 1:6](#)). God as a Father incorporates His great love (see [1 John 3:1](#)), His goodness and generosity (see [Matthew 7:11](#)), and His kindness as a Daddy (see [Romans 8:15](#)). God as a Father includes His sovereignty, as He is the authority over all things (see [Ephesians 4:6](#)), and His knowledge and wisdom (see [1 Peter 1:2](#)). And God as Father embodies His justice as He disciplines His own (see [Hebrews 12:7](#)).

Maybe you think you don’t want another father. Been there, done that. And you would rather do without. Yet God insists on calling Himself our Father. God is not the reflection of your earthly father. He is the perfection of your earthly Father. God is not the super-sized version of your dad. God is not your dad amplified in high definition and surround sound. Regardless of your earthly father’s example, God is the perfect Father. He is your supreme and ultimate Father.

As you follow Jesus to the Cross, you discover the real heartbeat of why He is going to die. So that we may come to know God as Father! In one of His last prayers, Jesus prays, “O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent me. I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them” ([John 17:25-26](#)). Jesus is saying that He came and will die so that we may know God as Father, call Him Father, and experience

the love and acceptance of God as a Father.

If you have trusted Christ with your life and received Him as your Lord, He gave you the right to be His child (see [John 1:12-13](#)). Regardless of how you grew up, whether you had a great dad or a lousy, deadbeat, absentee father, whether you call someone on Father's Day or not, God is your perfect Father. You are His child. You belong to Him.

Yet so many times we are prone to forget this incredible fact that we are God's children. We are prone to revert to slave mindset, trying to gain God's approval by our good works rather than believing that we already have it in Christ. Living as slaves instead of children of God leaves us to wallow in a joyless, dutiful obedience. God becomes a master we must follow instead of the Father we love to serve. This is what breaks the heart of God.

God the Father desires sons and daughters. God does not want a bunch of slaves trying to earn his acceptance. He doesn't want what's even worse—a slave trying to avoid some cosmic punishment because of what they have done. God doesn't blackmail you over your past sins, He doesn't try and make you feel guilty.

Live in this great truth—in Christ, God deeply loves you and accepts you completely. You can't do anything more to make your Father love you more. You can't do anything less to make your Father love you less. You are united with Jesus! When God looks at you, He sees His Beloved Child, in whom He is well pleased! Jesus' righteousness has been credited to you (see [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)), so that God treats you as if you had lived the life Jesus lived and are therefore loved as Jesus was loved. You are no longer a slave; you are a child of God!

*Prayer Time – Give honor and thanks to God for bringing you into His heart, and into His family. The tender gift of adoption could give you confidence in your prayers, peace in trials, and comfort in sickness, and hope at death's door. There is a sweet connection with God's children to the Father, and tender love between all His children.*

## Tuesday, March 28 // DAY 23

The Father's Love

Read – *Psalm 103:13-14*

When you think of God's, how do you picture Him responding to you? Do you picture God as: Disappointed? Angry? Indifferent? Does His face say, "Get your act together!" or "Straighten up or I will get you!" Do you imagine God constantly saying, "If only you could do a little more for Me I would love you more"? If you imagine God is anything but head over heels in love with you, you are living like a slave and not a son or daughter. The relationship that God desires to have with you is one that is defined by love. The reason Jesus died on the Cross is that God desires for you to call Him Father!

The Father accepts you, wants you, approves of you, and loves us. Not because you are good or did the right thing, but because you are His children through Christ's work for you on the Cross. God doesn't save us and then put up with us the rest of our lives. He forgives us, saves us and then adopts us as His children (*Galatians 4:4-7*). In the gospel, the Father-Judge declares us not guilty, and then He turns to us and says, "I want you to come and live with me. I love you, welcome home."

I will never forget when Shana and I discovered she was pregnant with our first child. Some people seem to get pregnant right away, but not us. We tried for years to have a child and were told by doctors that if Shana ever did get pregnant, she would have a very high-risk pregnancy. But God continued to give us the desire, so we prayed and begged Him to intervene. And He did!

One morning Shana woke me up early to tell me a pregnancy test indicated a "positive." After confirmation from our doctor, we called our parents to celebrate with them. I carried pictures of the ultrasound in my wallet. We shared the news with anyone who would listen. I was pumped about the privilege of becoming a father. I thanked God constantly for hearing our prayers. I put a baby countdown on my calendar and longed for the day when the child would arrive.

When we discovered we were having a boy, we knew immediately that we were going to name him "Josiah," like the godly king of Israel who brought revival to the people of God. I could not stop thinking of Josiah. I would do anything to protect him and care for him. I would even place my ear on Shana's belly to hear him move.

Before he was even born, I loved him. While he was still in the womb, I was proud to be his dad. Before he took his first step, said his first word, went to school, got married, started his first full-time job, or anything else that he would accomplish—I already loved him. I set my heart on him and tied my joy with his joy. This was my son!

This is what blows my mind...can you believe that this is how your Heavenly Father loves you! Your Father has always loved you. His love for you is eternal. Before the world was even created, God knew you as His child. Your Father has always loved you and always will because He permanently fixed His love on you from the beginning of time (see [Ephesians 1:4](#)). He knew that you would commit to follow Him by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and be born again into His family because of His purpose and grace (see [2 Timothy 1:9](#)).

Nothing will ever separate you from His love and care ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). No tragedy will ever separate you from Him. You will not come home from school one day to learn He has left. He is not going anywhere. His love for you as His child is fixed and secure. Your Father not only loves you; He also likes you. He enjoys you. He delights in you. He even rejoices over you with singing (see [Zephaniah 3:17](#)). He did more than say He loved you. He proved His love by sacrificially dying for you to erase your sins and establish a Father/child relationship with you (see [Romans 5:8](#)).

While we often speak in terms of "falling in love" with someone, God did not fall in love with you. His love for you did not catch Him off guard or by surprise. He did not just happen to notice you one day and fall "head over heels in love with you." His love

for you was intentional, as He has chosen to set His great love on you. This means that God will never “fall out of love” with you. God is not infatuated with you, He is in love with you.

You were not a “surprise” or an “accidental” birth to God. He was not disappointed or overwhelmed when you were born into His family. God was fully prepared to be your Father because He adopted you. Your Heavenly Father knew all that you would do, could do, and even should not do—yet out of His great love He still adopted you as His child. How great is the love the Father has lavished on you!

*Prayer Time – Pray that the Father’s daily leading and His constant provision will always be enough for you. Pray that you would know the promises of God toward you, His child: His promises to provide, to protect, and to sustain you, no matter what you are living through. Pray that the glory of the Father would be known to you, and that His adoption would bring you before Him as the child who is welcomed home.*

## **Wednesday, March 29 // DAY 24**

The Father’s Unconditional Love

*Read – [Luke 15:11-24](#)*

The people of Jesus’ day, much like our day, had a hard time understanding Jesus’ message that God desires to love them as a Father. To help them understand the radical nature of this love and how the Father draws us to repentance, Jesus would share stories. One of the most famous of these stories is found in [Luke 15](#). The story is about a son who goes to his dad and wants to cash out his inheritance. The son has some nerve asking for his inheritance while his father is still alive, but the dad chooses to give his son his portion. The son leaves with the money and moves away to party.

Eventually the money runs out, and the son finds a job feeding

pigs. In the Jewish culture, working with pigs was undignified and vulgar. The son is so broke and hungry that he desires to eat the pigs' food. He is utterly miserable. One day the son finally comes to his senses. He realizes that the servants in his father's household live better than the way he is living.

The son has finally had enough, so he decides to go back home, repent of his wrongs, and say, "Father, I know I don't have a right to come back into the family. So, I have decided that I will find a job and earn some money to start paying off my debt that I owe you." The religious teachers of Jesus' day taught that if you had disrespected your family in the midst of the community an apology was not sufficient; you also had to pay for the rebellion. The son in the story was following the religious customs of the day. He was going to live as a servant to his father until he did enough to pay the father back for all that he had done wrong. He intended to cut the grass, feed the animals, wash the dishes, and live in the servants' quarters. Sounded like a great plan, so he humbly begins the journey home.

As the son gets closer to the house, Jesus reveals that the father is home. However, not only is the father home, he has never stopped looking and hoping his son would appear. As the son's silhouette becomes visible from a long way off, his father sees him and runs—runs to him!

The father runs to his son and, showing his emotions openly, falls upon him and kisses him. The son is not expecting this. He has hurt the father, mistreated the father's love, and given the entire family a bad name. He is expecting a slap on the face, not a kiss. The son pushes the father away and tries to roll out his business plan to pay his father back for his sin. But the father will not allow him to go on. He interrupts him. "Quick!" he says to his servants. "Bring the best robe and put it on him!"

The best robe in the house would have been the father's own robe, the unmistakable sign of restored standing in the family. Do you hear what the father is saying? He is not telling the son that he is not going to wait until the son has paid off the debt.

Instead, the father is shouting, "You are not going to earn your way back into the family; I am going to simply take you back. I will cover your brokenness, poverty, and rags with the robes of my office and honor." Out of love and pure grace the father welcomes the son back. He even throws him an epic party.

What a scene and what a story! Don't miss what Jesus is trying to tell us – this is how the Father treats us. This is what happens when we mess up, repent, and turn back to our Father: God's love and forgiveness can pardon and restore any and every kind of sin or wrongdoing. It does not matter who you are or what you have done. It doesn't matter if you've deliberately oppressed or even murdered people, or how much you've abused yourself. The son knew that in his father's house there was abundant "food to spare," but he also discovered that there was grace to spare and love was abundant. There is no evil that the Father's love cannot pardon and cover; there is no sin that is a match for His amazing grace.

Jesus shows the father pouncing on his son in love, not only before the son has a chance to clean up his life and evidence a change of heart, but also before he can recite his repentance speech. Jesus wants us to know that we cannot pay God back for all the wrong that we have done. That is the difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world. All other religions say that we have to follow certain rules to earn God's approval and pay off the debt we owe Him. But the message of the Gospel is that there is nothing we can do to pay God back. Why? It's because God alone has paid the price for us.

Forgiveness always comes at a cost to the one granting the forgiveness. This is where Jesus comes in; He is the one who is willing to pay any cost to seek and save that which is lost in order to bring us back to the Father. Jesus was willing to pay the infinite cost of His own life to bring us into God's family. We all have rebelled against the Father; we are all lost. We deserve alienation, isolation, and rejection. However, because of what Jesus did on the Cross, we are always accepted by the Father.

Jesus paid our debt in our place so we could return home and be loved by the Father. We can live as children, not servants who are trying to pay our father back.

*Prayer Time – The love of God is tender and gentle. Pray through the discipline that love brings into your life. Pray that you may experience His inescapable love and rest in it. Pray for the assurance that God’s love brings you to know with certainty whose child you are. Praise God for His Unconditional Love that accepts you.*

## Thursday, March 30 // DAY 25

The Loving Provision of the Father

Read – [Matthew 6:25-26](#)

While establishing God as a Father in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of your Heavenly Father’s providing love for you. Your Father is an able and generous provider. He owns the entire world and everything is under His control. As your Father, He promises to meet all of your needs according to His riches (see [Philippians 4:19](#)). And anything good in your life ultimately comes from Him (see [James 1:17](#)). Just as earthly fathers seek to be generous to their children; your Father is generous to you. Jesus continued describing the Father’s heart for you: “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” ([Matthew 7:9-11](#)).

God’s loving generosity was demonstrated in the gift of His one and only Son for you (see [John 3:16](#)). God gave His only child so you could become His child. God orchestrated the cruel and sacrificial death of His only Son so you could live forever. And His generosity continues. Not only are your sins forgiven through

the death of Christ, but your Father has also declared you an heir to His inheritance: “You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (*Romans 8:15-17*).

God understands our weaknesses. He knows when we fail. He is connected to our lives. He pays attention to us and provides for us. God will take care of His children. God can be depended upon to provide for our lives, our needs, and our futures. There is nothing that God does not own. There is no one who is beyond the power and control of God. There is no situation that is too great for God. There is no problem that is so severe that God can’t handle it.

This is why Jesus invites us in every situation to call out to God through prayer. Through prayer we approach God as our Father. Prayer can be difficult when we believe we are praying to a God who doesn’t care about us. But when you capture the joy of our adoption, the closeness that we have in coming to God our Father, and the incredible love our Father has for us, prayer comes alive.

Prayer is no longer trying to get God to pay attention to our needs. Rather, it is more like running to your loving Father in Heaven and pouring out your heart to Him, taking as much time as you need, seeking His advice, telling Him about your failures, and confessing everything to Him. There is nothing you can’t ask God about; nothing you can’t ask God for. Because of the Father’s love for you, you can come boldly before the Throne of Grace (see *Hebrews 4:6*). You have confidence in prayer because you know that you will receive what you need from your Father who loves you so much.

***Prayer Time – Pray as a child pleading with his/her loving Father. Cast your burdens and cares on Him. Trust that God is a good dad. Rest in whatever He gives you out of His love for you.***

## Friday, March 31 // DAY 26

Adoption – Because of Love

Read – *Ephesians 5:1-2*

In Ephesians 5, Paul shares a remarkable truth, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (*Ephesians 5:1-2*). Think about what Paul just wrote and let me ask you a question or two.

Without rereading the verse above, what do you recall about it? Are you more aware of what the verse is commanding you to do—to imitate God and to walk in love? Or are you more aware of what the verse says about who you are, a beloved child, or what Christ has done, loving you and giving Himself up as an offering and sacrifice to God to make you His child?

My guess is that for most of us, the focus would fall on the command: we’re to imitate God; we are to walk in love. And although these commands are valid and binding, that’s not all the verse says. No, very significantly, we are told we are God’s beloved children. We are not God’s slaves or unwanted foster kids. No, we are His very dear children.

This speaks to our natural propensity to focus exclusively on commands of God instead of the riches of God that were lavished on us through the Cross of Jesus Christ. Through the Cross, God declares that you are His beloved child. You are very dear to Him; He cherishes you. You are His adorable kid, and He will faithfully block every move you try to make away from Him. He loves you with the same intensity and purity of love that He has for His Son (see *John 17:23*). Jesus is His beloved child and so are you.

Think for a moment about the person you love the most in this world. Do you believe that the Father’s love for you has outshined this precious love to the highest degree? Our natural unbelief will always cast doubt on His love for us. It is the awareness of His love that will equip us to wage war against sin. Until we

grasp how much our Father loves us, we will never be able to imitate Him. We will not come near to Him if we are afraid of His judgment. We will not repent and pursue godliness if we do not believe that our sin does not faze His love for us one bit. We will not want to be like Him if we believe that His love is small, stingy, censorious, or severe. And we will never be filled with His fullness until we begin to grasp the extent of His love (see [Ephesians 3:19](#)). As a member of His family, you are the apple of His eye, the child He loves to bless. You are His darling, beloved, treasured child.

Are you uncomfortable with this kind of language? Would you prefer to see God as transcendent, exalted, far away, untouchable? Many serious minded believers do not have a problem seeing God as their sovereign King. But they struggle with seeing God as their loving Daddy.

How do we know that the Father has this kind of love for us? How can our hearts be assured before Him? Because God so loved the world that He gave His one and only dear Son for us so that we could be with Him for eternity (see [John 3:16](#)). He provided the sacrifice for sin that we needed so we could be adopted as children of God. If God didn't spare His own Son, but gave His beloved Son up for us, how can we ever doubt His love again? What a glorious love this is!

It is out of our Father's love for us that we are to imitate God. When Paul instructs us to be imitators of God, He is not commanding us to be omnipresent or omniscient. Paul's courage in bidding that we imitate God is based on one fact: we're part of His family. We are His beloved children. The family resemblance is already there. The Holy Spirit is indwelling. The seed will ultimately grow to fruition. It will bear fruit. These realities are our only hope, but they are not weak. They are sure, strong, settled. We will be able to grow in our imitation of Him because we are born of Him, filled with Him, joined to Him. He is our Father.

What does this family resemblance look like? Is it primarily seen in the ability to perform great miracles? Does it make us

geniuses, sages, or powerful kings? On the contrary, His life within us is seen as we live a life of love, laying down our lives for others. The family characteristic that should be most evident in us is summed up in these words: "Walk in love." People who are loved the way we are loved should have lives marked by extreme thanksgiving and laughter and love for others because of the mercy and generosity of our loving Heavenly Father.

Notice the connection that Paul makes: first, we see and experience the love of God as our Father; then, we are able to imitate that love. The more we see and experience the love of the Father, the more we will show that love to others.

*Prayer Time – Pray for help to take the first steps to love like God. Ask God to show you His love so you in turn can become more like Him in your heart and character. Pray that God will place one person in your life today that you can show this love to.*

## **Saturday, April 1 // DAY 27**

Adoption – The Purifying Love of Your Father

Read – *Hebrews 12:7-11*

Your Father's greatest desire for you is that you would be like Him, that you would love like Him and be holy like Him. He desires to conform you to the image of Christ. He will use every situation and circumstance to purify you, shape you, and make you into the person He created you to be. In other words, your Father invented tough love.

The adoption of children as the sons and daughters of God brings with it the expectation that God will treat you as His children. This means that God will bring the necessary discipline into your life to correct you, to train you, to guide you to become more like Him. The discipline of any parent is hard for

the child to endure. It is painful and embarrassing. To the one being disciplined, it seems unnecessary. But it is necessary. Out of love, every good parent disciplines because they want what will best for the child. They want the child to thrive, enjoy life, and wisely avoid destructive decisions.

You do not discipline someone else's child. You may want to clap your hand over the mouth of the screaming eight-year-old in the grocery store, but you don't dare do it. That's his parent's job. Think about this: God only disciplines people in this life that are His children. Discipline is not brought to us in spite of our following Christ; it is done because we are following Christ.

Through your faith in Christ, God does not punish you, because all your sin was paid for on the Cross. God doesn't have to punish you, because Jesus took that punishment. But He does discipline those He calls His children. There's a big difference between punishment and discipline. The purpose of punishment is to inflict penalty. The purpose of discipline is to promote growth. The focus of punishment is on the past—what you've done wrong. The focus of discipline is on the future—what you can be. The attitude behind punishment is anger. The attitude behind discipline is always love.

Your Father loves you and wants the best for you. His love is always for your good. Which means His discipline is always working to help you and purify your faith. He has high hopes for you, and He has the ability to use any situation for your good (see [Romans 8:28](#)). Without discipline, we would never take steps to be rid of the sin that clings to us so closely and wants to enslave us.

There are times God will leave us feeling miserable and desperate for relief. Why? Because God is a short fused tyrant who delights in inflicting pain on his creatures, as many critics of the Christian faith suppose? No—it is because "the Lord disciplines the one He loves" ([Hebrews 12:6](#)). It is not God's hatred that comes against you; it is God's love. Knowing the destructive nature of sin, God will not allow His children to continue down a path that

would lead to either great temporal suffering (at best) or even prolonged destruction (at worst). When God sees His beloved children veering away from the Springs of Eternal Life and sipping the poison of broken cisterns ([Jeremiah 2:13](#)), He will allow His disciplinary love to jolt His slumbering children awake. It's in those moments that we examine our lives, repent of our sin, and run back to our Father's open arms.

*Prayer Time – Pray that God would allow you to see his loving hand of discipline on your life. Pray that God would give you courage and strength to endure suffering and persecution for His name's sake. Pray for God to train you to reflect Him so much that the world would see God living in you.*

# WEEK 5 – NO LONGER BROKEN

## MEMORY VERSE

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.  
Romans 3:23-24

You don't have to look very hard to realize that something is not right with the world around us. Something is wrong with all of us. Deep down we all sense this. What's the cause of every broken promise, broken relationship, and broken lives? The answer is sin!

Sin is not just the breaking of some Sunday school do's and don'ts. Sin is not the violation of some impersonal cosmic code of morality. Sin is a personal offense against the Creator God. The story of how God begins to put everything that is broken back together is the story of redemption. Through the Cross of Jesus Christ, God in his great love has come to heal our brokenness.

## Sunday, April 2 // DAY 28

Out of Brokenness and into Life

Read – *Romans 3:23-24*

The word *redeem* carries with it the idea to buy something back, to recover something that is of value, to restore what was broken. In the time Scripture was written, the term was also used specifically in reference to the purchase of a slave's freedom. The application of this term to Christ's death on the cross is incredibly liberating. If we are "redeemed," then our prior condition was one of slavery and brokenness. Yet, the God of incredible love has purchased our freedom and restoration. We are no longer in bondage to sin, the Old Testament law, or brokenness. Christ Himself has bought us and commits all his love, energy, and power to restoring everything that is broken in us and around us.

But what does that look like in real life with real people who are broken, wounded, or addicted? We are all searching for answers, explanations, and stories to make meaning out of all the brokenness and hurt that happens in life. What we need is not some fairy tale story that makes us feel better, but real life truth that allows us to make sense of life. We need a personal Redeemer who offers hope for real redemption in a broken world full of broken people. The great news is that is why Christ came and died on the cross.

The reason that the world, us, our relationships, everything is broken is because of sin. Sin is not the violation of some impersonal cosmic code of morality. Sin is a personal offense against the Creator. Sin is what unravels and corrupts God's creation. Sin brings destruction, decay and ruin—brokenness!

When Christ stepped out of heaven to pursue us, His passion was to bring glory to God by restoring everything that broken because of sin. Through Christ's work on the cross, He is redeeming everything. His redemption heals all our brokenness. It forgives every one of our sins. It takes away every ounce of

our guilt. But what we discover is that redemption is not just a concept; redemption is actually a person—Jesus Christ (see [1 Corinthians 1:30](#); [Romans 3:23-24](#); [Galatians 4:4-5](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Hebrews 9:12](#)).

Redemption is not some self-help advice on how we can begin to make life better. It's not doing this or not doing that. Redemption is not a series of steps we practice or rules we follow. No human effort can accomplish redemption. Nothing we do can fix what is broken in us, in others, and in our world. We need a Redeemer, and that is why Christ came.

Hearing the truth that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer might sound like good news, but I think we miss how powerful it really is. When real evil overwhelms and sin brings more brokenness to our lives or the lives of those we love, the power of redemption seems more like a future dream than a present-day reality. If we really are redeemed, then why do we still live in such hurt and brokenness? At times, the redeemer power of Christ just doesn't seem to work.

When we reach these moments of defeat, the great temptation is to grow cynical and run from God. Our hearts go in search of another solution to fix the brokenness of our life. We want something to take away the heartache we experience. We run from God thinking that He can't help worse, does not want to help. But in our running, we end up searching for healing in things that actually create more damage in the long run. We stray from our true hope at just the time when we most need it.

It's in the middle of the messes we have made that God always calls with the promise of redemption. God does not want you to stay living in hurt, defeat, addiction, or destruction any longer. Even when you find yourself in situations caused by your very own disobedience, God is working to redeem you. God's faithfulness isn't dependent on yours. God is able to redeem anything and everything that we face or endure. Anything! No matter what you've been through, no matter the secrets you've been hiding or accusations you've been listening to, God is able

to redeem you. This is what God does. He takes our messes and brings redemption and beauty. Even when we're quick to fall, God is still willing to rescue us. The question is, are you ready for Him to redeem you—His way?

*Prayer Time – Pray about what you were enslaved by in the past and ask God to reveal what you are still struggling to break free from. What relationship or situation is still causing brokenness in your life or the life of someone you love? Ask God to help you embrace the way He wants to redeem you from these difficulties and accept His redemption.*

## Monday, April 3 // DAY 29

Return to the Lord

Read – [Hosea 6:1-3](#)

God loves to take our struggles, messes, and hurts and redeem them for our good and His glory. Even when we're quick to fall, God is still willing to rescue us and redeem us. Listen to this amazing assurance given by the prophet Hosea: "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth ([Hosea 6:1-3](#)).

Notice the invitation, "Come." You don't have to stay where you are. It's a tenderhearted pleading; you don't have to live the life that you're living. You don't have to experience the sorrow and heartbreak that you're feeling. You can return to the Lord. You can leave where you are and return. It's not too late. God is waiting now with open arms; return to Him! Redemption is here and it's found in Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew term translated "return" is used more than a

thousand times in the Old Testament. It is used more frequently than almost any term describing what God desires for us. It is a picture of God confronting us where we are and calling us to come back to Him. It's turning off the current path we are on and going back to the One that died for us, that loves us, that promises us joy, pleasure, and hope in His presence. The problems in your life and in my life began when we turned away from God, so let's turn back; let's return.

Returning is a decision made at a particular point in time. The tender call of God is open if we will just listen. Let's return by igniting a fresh godly passion within us by deciding to follow God with our whole heart. Are you ready to make that choice right now? You can go through this 40 Days and gain no benefit if you don't begin by turning to Him and calling out to Him to change you. What should you do?

First, think about your life. The call to return to the Lord begins by recognizing that some things have to go. The things that have to go are the ones about which you can say—"This is wrong or harmful to me and those I love. This is taking away my passion for God and I'm returning to the Lord." You've got to see some things differently. You've got to let God shine His light on your activities inside and out, so that what used to be attractive is recognized for the sin it really is. No more. I don't want that. You must look at your life and see what needs to be removed because it's a barrier to the returning you really need.

Second, repent of these things. When you see what got you where you are, you don't want it anymore. You are ready for some total honesty. You confess, "I'm wrong, God. I'm sorry for what I've done. You deserve better than this. I have no excuse for acting and choosing as I have. I'm unworthy. I'm undeserving, but I'm returning." Broken confession and repenting are so important that we are going to spend a week on each of these, but know for now that there is no deep intimacy with God without returning and there is no returning without confession and repentance.

Finally, actually take steps to return back to God. if you want to experience the deep intimacy with God, you have to come back to the place where you were obeying God and centering your life on the Cross of Christ. This is not just an emotional response and a change of your mind; it's also an exertion of your will to get moving again in the right direction. It is stating, "I'm leaving this sin behind. I don't want this anymore. I don't want the opportunity to sin anymore. I'm not hanging around that temptation; I'm killing it at the heart, I'm shutting it off and I'm moving away. I'm returning to the Lord. I want what God has for me. I want God!"

When Hosea says, "Let us press on to know the Lord," he is talking about a passionate pursuit of the Lord. The words "press on" call for our enthusiastic effort. Hosea is not casually saying, "Let us know God." He is crying out for urgency, "Let us press on with every fiber of our being, every ounce of strength we can muster, so we may know the Lord." It's like he stops midsentence and says, "Let us know...wait, we need more than everyday energy in the matter of knowing eternal God. Let us press on to know God."

The phrase "press on" is a military term that describes the way a victorious warrior conquered, and then vanquished, his foe. It's intentionality and intensity all rolled into one. I'm going after this myself. I am going to pursue it with the greatest passion that I have and with all my effort. I'm not going to just sit back. I'm going after it! I'm going to pursue it! I'm going to put some intensity into this!

Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. Let's give ourselves to this. It's intense. It takes effort. It takes energy. It takes enthusiasm. So often as a pastor, I want to say to people, "If Jesus is who He says He is, then quit being so passive. Don't be so lazy and sluggish about your faith. This is worth more than you're giving it. Get fired up about it." Pressing on to know the Lord means waking up and giving that pursuit everything you have. God's invitation goes out to all of us to stop being lazy and

give our relationship with Him all that it deserves. Why? Because as we will discover next week, He is holy and glorious and worthy of our pursuit.

When was the last time God revealed some areas in your life that need to change? What is God convicting you about that you need to turn from? When was the last time God brought you to your knees with the weight of all the junk that is still in your heart? When was the last time you really praised God because you have been redeemed? When was the last time you gave Him all your hurts, guilt, shame, and past to accept the simple invitation to allow Him to redeem what is broken? Once again, hear the invitation: Come; let us return to the LORD that He may heal us!

*Prayer Time – Pray about your desire to pursue God. Are you passionate about Him? Ask Him to reveal anything in your life that is wrong and leading you away from a devoted relationship with Him. Ask Him to give you the strength to turn away from what’s wrong and turn to Him. God rewards us for seeking Him. When we seek Him, we will find Him when we seek with all our heart.*

## **Tuesday, April 4 // DAY 30**

Redeemed Out of Brokenness

Read – [1 Peter 1:18-19](#)

About 750 years before Jesus was born, there was an Israelite prophet named Hosea. In that culture, a prophet was someone who heard from God and then shared God’s message with the people. Hosea had a lot to say about the nature of love, especially God’s redeeming love.

One day, God comes to Hosea and tells him that instead of a message, He has an assignment for him. Hosea is going to be

an object lesson, and his personal life is about to become very public. The story is found in the first chapter of the book named after Hosea.

God says, “Hosea, I’ve got a job for you. Are you ready?”

Hosea is like, “Sure, God! You and me working together—this is going to be fun.”

God tells him, “Marry a prostitute.” You can imagine the exchange.

“I’m sorry, Lord; what was that? I could have sworn I heard you say —”

“Marry a prostitute.”

“Um, wow. That’s what I thought you said. No offense, but that’s not what I expected. That’s not really a good move for a man of God. The tabloids and stuff, they’re going to be all over that. Now my PR guy says that I should—”

“Hosea, you’re going to marry a prostitute. And you’re going to have kids.”

Hosea’s faith is incredible at this point. He stops arguing with God and marries a prostitute with the odd-sounding name of Gomer. This is probably the craziest command that God has ever given. But, God was up to something that was bigger than creating a dysfunctional marriage. God was going to demonstrate to His people what His redeeming love looked like.

As Hosea and Gomer settle in together, things go pretty well at first. They have one kid, then another, then another. They’ve been married awhile now, but one day Hosea wakes up and Gomer is gone. She’s abandoned the family. She has found a new lover and returned to prostitution.

Hosea is now carrying the weight of being the spiritual leader of Israel as a single dad with three kids and the shame of having a wife that is now a prostitute once again. Talk about hurt, betrayal,

and brokenness. In the midst of this, God says to Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery.” He is referring to Gomer. Hosea responded as we would. “What? Are you crazy, God?” But then God makes one of the most amazing statements ever. He tells Hosea to love Gomer “just like the love of the Lord” for His people (*Hosea 3:1*).

God wants us to know that His love is not like ours. He loves when our common sense doesn't. In contrast to our human ideas about justice and commitment, God's love redeems. God's redeeming love never quits, gives up, stops seeking to restore and recover what is broken.

How heart wrenching is this process for Hosea? He has to go look for his wife, a former prostitute, who is now back in prostitution. Finding Gomer is not comfortable. It's not neat or tidy. Hosea walks down streets and goes into buildings that good people avoid. A man of God should never be seen there; everyone knows that. But there goes Hosea, looking for his wife. This is illogical. This is unfair. This is extravagant. He should never have to do this.

It gets more unbelievable, as Hosea actually buys his wife back for “fifteen shekels of silver” (*Hosea 3:2*). Wait! What? She was his wife. Why is he paying for her? Somehow, Gomer has become trapped in the sex slave industry. Evidently she left Hosea voluntarily, but now she finds herself captive.

Hosea walks in and finds Gomer on some pedestal somewhere, chained and shackled, beaten, on sale to the highest bidder. Gomer's decisions have led to her being enslaved and broken. Yet, out of redeeming love, Hosea sees his wife, the mother of their three children, and he tells her seller, “Excuse me, sir, that's my wife and I will pay whatever it takes to have her back.” Hosea pays the money and receives his wife. Can you imagine that exchange? When Hosea looks into the eyes of his wife?

No doubt she hangs her head in embarrassment. She expects

rejection. She expects rebuke. Gomer knows what it is like to be purchased by men who want to use her. That has been the story of her life. It is what she thinks she deserves. But Hosea doesn't buy her to use her. He buys her to heal her.

She has to wonder: He's found me—and now he's buying me? I abandoned him. I abandoned our three kids. And yet he insists on buying me back? What kind of a man is this? Scripture tells us what Hosea says to his wife next. This blows my mind, because I can't imagine myself saying this if I were him. "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man; and I will behave the same way toward you" (*Hosea 3:1*).

What is he doing? He is renewing their vows. He is restoring their relationship. He is redeeming his wife. She probably can't even look up, but he is making their marriage as if she had never wronged him.

Interestingly, the name Hosea means "salvation" in Hebrew, and the name Gomer means "completion." I don't think that's a coincidence. God is preaching the story of redemption 750 years before Jesus came to purchase our redemption. He is telling His people that in the middle of their rebellion, brokenness, and stubborn sin, he will complete their salvation. No matter how far they have strayed, he will take the initiative to find them, heal them, and love them. He will be their Redeemer.

The reality is God told this story so that we could get a picture of who He is and who we are. Hosea is a picture of God and—no offense—Gomer is a picture of you and me. God created humankind. We are His. But we left Him and pursued our own wants, desires, and passions. Humanity turned its back on God and insisted on going its own way. What we thought would bring us freedom, brought us slavery, shame, hurt, and brokenness.

This is what makes the cross so amazing. Two thousand years ago, God paid a dear price to redeem us from sin. He paid for what was already His, and His Son, Jesus, spilled His blood

to buy us back. Our Hosea has come. Salvation has come. He found you and He found me. He purchased us and committed to redeem us. "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life...it was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

*Prayer Time – Pray about what God has redeemed you from; what imprisoned you; what held you captive; what stole your freedom. Praise God for what Christ did to redeem you; how He bought you, changed your life; how He showed you by His actions that He loves you!*

## Wednesday, April 5 // DAY 31

Redemption as Ransom

Read – [Mark 10:45](#)

The whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation is the story of how God has moved and worked to become our Redeemer. But if there is one book that highlights God as a redeemer, it is the book of Exodus. If we had asked a devout Israelite in the Old Testament period, "Are you redeemed?" the answer would have been a most definite yes. And if we had asked "How do you know?" we would have been taken aside to sit down somewhere while the friend recounted a long and exciting story—the story of redemption in the exodus. For indeed it is the exodus that provided the primary model of God's idea of redemption, not just in the Old Testament but even in the New Testament, where it is used as one of the keys to seeing how we can live in the freedom and healing found in Christ.

In the book of Exodus, God's people were enslaved to a king named Pharaoh who ruled over the most powerful nation on the earth, Egypt. He was worshiped as a god and brutally mistreated the people whom he enslaved. God raised up a man named Moses to speak on His behalf to the pharaoh, demanding that

the slaves be set free. Pharaoh, however, would not listen. He became hardhearted under God's provocation, just as God said he would, and he refused to release the people from their brutal slavery. In response to Pharaoh's rebellion, God sent a terrible series of judgments upon the entire nation giving Pharaoh multiple opportunities to repent and do what God demanded.

God gave Pharaoh one more opportunity to repent and obey, but this time if he did not, God said He would bring His holy judgment on Egypt by taking the lives of every firstborn. Their firstborns' lives were forfeit, because of the sins of the families and the nation. Why the firstborn? This sounds incredibly strange to us in our modern culture. But in ancient culture the firstborn represented the family.

God was saying in the most vivid way possible in those cultures that every family and person on earth owed a debt and deserved punishment because they had rebelled against God and offended His holiness. God's judgment for sin was coming not just on Egypt, but also upon all the people that lived in Egypt that night.

The only households that would be spared from the death of their firstborn were those families who, in faith, took a young, healthy lamb without blemish or defect and slaughtered it as a substitute. They then would take its blood and were to cover the doorposts around the entry to their home with it. Those who trusted in God's grace would not experience God's judgment. The wrath of God would pass over everyone that trusted God because of the blood of the lamb. That night was judgment night. Either the wrath of God would fall on the Passover Lamb or it would fall on his firstborn because everyone had sinned.

A price had to be paid for everyone that had disobeyed God. A ransom was demanded for everyone that had rebelled. That night judgment was coming not just to the Egyptians, but also to the Israelites. Everyone had sinned. God was providing a way out. God was giving everyone an opportunity for redemption through trusting him by the giving of a lamb. But how in the

world could one of Mary's little lambs save a people from sin? How could a lamb free them from slavery? How is a lamb a ransom?

God was teaching us that redemption always has a price. Everyone is born into bondage, the slavery of sin. What can free us from the power of sin? Many times, we think it's our good intentions, religious observances, sacrificial acts, self-justification, excuses, blaming, or earnest efforts. But that is not the price of our redemption. What is the ransom God paid to purchase our freedom and allow us to be free from eternal judgment? It is the high price of His Son's death on the Cross.

Many years later, the judgment of God would once again come upon the face of the world as God sought to redeem His people. On this day, another firstborn Son would die because all of us have debt we owe God. All of us have fallen short of God's holy standard. There is a little pharaoh in us all. We deserve punishment because we have not obeyed God. Someone has to pay the debt for our sins.

But on this day, God did not send us a Passover lamb to be killed as a ransom for our sins. The firstborn Son of God was the lamb. The very Son of God was dying in our place as the ultimate Passover lamb as a ransom for our sins. Paul understood the true meaning of the Exodus story when he deliberately applied its language to Jesus: "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him, graciously give us all things?" ([Romans 8:32](#)).

[Mark 10:45](#) tells us that Jesus came "to give his life as a ransom for many." This was a term that everyone reading Mark's letter would understand. But to say that Christ gave His life "a ransom for many" changes everything. The picture is that we were imprisoned. Our chains were chains of sin. We were without freedom, broke and broken, unable to help or set ourselves free. We were guilty. But now Christ, the Lamb of God, comes to redeem us.

The Cross is where the debt of your sin was paid through the sacrificial ransom of Jesus Christ. It was on the Cross where Christ paid for your sins, many of which you had no clue about. There His sacrifice and righteousness were accounted to your life. The result is that you now can face your sin with new freedom, more joy, greater confidence, and no longer broken as you approach God's perfect nature and glory. The blood of Jesus Christ has ransomed you. What more is there to pay for your redemption? Go and live free. You are no longer a slave!

*Prayer Time – Pray about what price was paid for your salvation. How much did you cost God? Your “exodus” brought you into a “Land of Promise” just like the Israelites. What land of Promise can you claim by faith because you are ransomed and set free?*

## Thursday, April 6 // DAY 32

Redeeming Grace

Read – *Exodus 19:4-8*

The first thing God did when He redeemed the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt was introduce Himself as a Redeemer. God wanted to open their eyes to see who He is and experience the healing that is found in Him. *Exodus 19* says that God descended upon Mount Sinai, wrapping it in smoke and thick darkness. Lightning and thunder filled the skies. A sound like a trumpet pierced the air, growing louder and louder until it was almost unbearable. The people God had redeemed were about to meet Him.

God gave Moses strict instructions that no one on that day could touch that mountain—no one, not even an animal. If anyone so much as crossed the perimeter set around the mountain, they would be struck dead. Meeting the real God was a big deal. We hear people often speak casually about “seeing God.” If God ripped the roof off the place where we were sitting right now

and we saw His face, we would immediately respond the way they responded...with fear!

As the Israelites trembled in fear before God's awesome size and absolute holiness, a voice spoke to them from the mountain. God's words were not harsh. God reminded them that they were a treasured possession to Him, and that He had carried them on "eagles' wings" out of slavery unto Himself. Why would God do this? Because He saw them as a "treasured possession...I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." What God is saying is, "I am your Redeemer, I saw your suffering and I heard your cries. I picked you up, tenderly, like a father rescuing his child from danger and brought you to Myself. You are my treasured possession" (see *Exodus 19:4-5, 20:2*).

God calls them His "treasured" possession. To treasure something means that we give up just about everything for it. If we found out our children had contracted some rare disease, and their only hope was an expensive medicine that insurance would not pay for, we would sell everything we had to get that medicine for them. Why? We treasure them and do not want to lose them. The mighty God of the universe, the God who has everything and lacks nothing, calls a helpless, guilty people, broken people His "treasure."

God revealed Himself to His people as their Redeemer. He hears our cries, enters our pain, and redeems us so that we can be His people. Words fail us when we try to describe a God so absolutely perfect that one sin in His presence leads to immediate annihilation, yet He is so tender in His compassion that He enters into our pain to redeem us.

The redemption from Egypt and the mountain in Exodus 19, as impressive as it was, was just a dim shadow of a later redemption where God's glory and grace would be revealed—Mount Calvary. More than 1,400 years after God redeemed His people and appeared on Mount Sinai, Jesus would climb up another mountain to put God's glory on display by graciously delivering the ultimate redemption. Just like Sinai, Calvary was

now covered by a thick cloud of darkness as God turned His face away. On the Cross, Jesus would endure the thunder of God's judgment and absorb the lightning of His wrath into His body. The fire of God's holiness would burn through the Body of Christ until it completely consumed Him. We transgressed the lines of God's holiness, and Jesus was struck dead for it. When Jesus died, the earth literally shook, and the last thing Jesus did from the Cross was to yell, with a voice like a trumpet, "It is finished!"

In the Cross we see the magnanimity of God's redeeming grace. God did more than carry us on eagles' wings from danger; He rescued us out of the jaws of death by substituting Himself in our place. When Jesus died on the Cross, He stood between us and the rushing river of God's righteous wrath. He swallowed up every ounce into Himself, so that not a drop remains for us. He drank the cup of God's wrath, turned it over and said, "It is finished." He did that for us so that we could be redeemed from the slavery of sin and brought to Him. He did it all through His redeeming grace.

Make no mistake about it: Without the Cross, there would be no grace. Through the redeeming grace of the Cross, we are adopted into God's family, our sins are forgiven, we have the right of access to the Presence of God, every great and precious promise of God is ours, we have the promise of the Holy Spirit, we know the love of Christ, we have the assurance of the Father's delight, are held by the Father's strong hands, are protected by the power of God, and much more than could be listed here. The redeeming grace of God is his highest glory, our greatest treasure, and the gift of our loving Savior.

It is with the Cross in mind that Peter calls us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" ([2 Peter 3:18](#)). The life-long quest of a Christ-follower is to grow to understand grace more, and to know Christ better. It is time to enjoy redeeming grace anew. Not the decaffeinated redeeming grace that pats us on the hand, ignores our deepest rebellions, and doesn't change us, but the high-octane grace that takes

our conscience by the scruff of the neck and breathes new life into us with a pardon so scandalous that we cannot help but be changed. It's time to blow aside the hazy cloud of condemnation that hangs over us throughout the day with the strong wind of redeeming grace. "You are not under law but under grace" (*Romans 6:14*). Jesus is real, redeeming grace is defiant, and in his love we find redemption.

*Prayer Time – Spend time today praising God for redeeming you. Praise God for His greatness. Pray that you would see God's redeeming love and that it would create a desire to treasure God above all other things.*

## Friday, April 7 // DAY 33

Perfect Peace

Read – *Ephesians 1:7*

Try to imagine a world where everything is good. Imagine our planet in perfect peace. I know it sounds like a fairy tale, but the reality is there was a time when our world was like that. Humanity's story begins with Adam and Eve, created in God's image from the dust of the ground, crowned with glory and honor as the pinnacle of creation. They lived in a perfect world with absolute peace.

The first man and woman never contemplated all the brokenness that we experience every day in our current lives. Nothing in their world was dead or dying around them. Nothing was threatening or unsafe. God was perfect, creation was perfect, they were perfect and everything else was perfect. And life was just there to be lived within the unbroken freedom and shame-free fellowship that existed between mankind and God.

That's how it was. That's how He created it. The original man and woman needed God, yes, but not because they were fallen and sinful. They needed Him simply because they were human. He

created us from the very beginning to live in a loving, dependent relationship with Him. That was the plan. Perfect peace. But then...something went terribly wrong.

The first humans disobeyed God. In that act of rebellion a curse of brokenness fell on all of creation. But before you blame everything on Adam and Eve, you have to realize that we all have followed their decisions by disobeying and share in that fall. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

This is why whenever we feel the absence of peace it's a reminder of that decision we made to rebel. Whenever our unmet longing for joy expresses itself as anxiety, or depression, or fear, or anger, or enslavement to any number of defeating sin patterns or addictions—the emptiness we're feeling and trying to fill is for what our relationship with God was always meant to be. Our souls, in other words, possess a dim memory of the perfect peace of *Genesis 1 and 2*. And we miss it. We crave it. We need it. The desire for relating in authentic Garden of Eden transparency and openness with God is what causes such dark shadows of disappointment to lengthen behind everything else we touch, taste, attempt, and take on in desperate attempts to try getting it back.

What we "groan" for, whether we realize it or not—along with all the rest of our now fallen world—is for the Genesis ideal, the "revealing of the sons of God," living in peace, perfection, and pure harmony with our Creator (*Romans. 8:19*). We want to go back to a time when nothing was broken. We want Creation restored. We want life to be what we know it can be—and we want it yesterday. That's where the nagging dissatisfaction of our heart comes from. We're not what we should be. We're not what we long to be. We're not what mankind truly was in the beginning with God.

For centuries, our ancestors limped along in broken sinfulness—fallen and falling, hoping, at best, for some revolutionary intervention from God. The decisive turn came when God Himself, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, dwelt among us, as

one of us, and pioneered humanity's way into the very presence of God. In his perfect God-glorifying human life, sacrificial human death, and victorious human resurrection, Jesus has come to bring us fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore in redeeming our life (*Psalm 16:11*). In Jesus, the healing has its start. God is restoring us bit by bit to humanity's original perfect peace as we are "conformed to the image of his Son" (*Romans 8:29*).

God wants to heal every broken area of our life and world. Not by enrolling us in a program. Not by giving us more rules to follow. Not by impersonally, insensitively telling us to clean up our act—to think better thoughts, to choose better behaviors, to channel better emotions, to tap into some inner power of healing. God accomplishes redemption simply by an act of His loving will, by introducing us to the relationship we need with Him.

For what's broken in us—what's aching for healing—is beyond our ability to fix. And from the moment it broke, all attempts to redeem it by us are doomed to futility and failure. We need God, or else. Not just once, but forever. We will never get over needing Him for everything. It's in Him that we can finally live free from all the brokenness that is in us and around us.

*Prayer Time – Ask God to reveal what area of your life makes you the most anxious, worried, or fearful. Whenever we feel the absence of peace in an area it is a reminder that we need God to work in that area of our life. Confess your need for God to move and work so that you can experience His peace. Take time to surrender that area of your life over to God's control.*

## Saturday, April 8 // DAY 34

Living by His Resurrection Power

Read – *Romans 6:3–5*

Paul shares with us the great mystery, that when we repented of our sins and placed our faith in Christ, we were immersed in Christ's death. When we turned from our sin and received Christ by faith, in God's eyes we were identified with Christ's death. Paul's point is that "if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (*Romans 6:5*). In other words, we should not just claim the promise of having our sins forgiven; we should also claim the promise of life and complete healing that is found in Jesus Christ. God does not just want to forgive us; He wants to completely heal every area of our life.

Christ's death on the Cross and His resurrection give us a new life. That is why Paul said, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (*Romans 6:4*). The Christian life is all about being made new through the power of the Cross. The phrase that Paul uses of walking in "newness of life" does not mean new in time, but new in character, new in quality; a different person.

God wants to make us new through the redeeming power that was unleashed through the work that Christ did for us on the Cross. God is working to transform us and heal us. This is why Paul tells us that if we have been identified, through baptism, with the death of Christ, we should also be identified with the resurrection of Christ and "walk in newness of life" (*Romans 6:4*).

Each one of us are people whose lives God has made new through the redeeming power of the Cross. The truth that Paul wants us to see from *Romans 6:3-5* is that the power of sin is broken in us through Christ's death. We are free to live no longer in the hurt, addiction and brokenness of sin. In Christ, we are dead to sin and alive to walk in the new life that God has for us! How? Because God's gracious love assures it and Christ's death and resurrection accomplishes it.

This is the picture that Paul is trying to communicate in Romans 6:1-7. He wants us to know that we do not have to be under the demands and power of sin anymore. Through Christ every sin has been paid for and you have been adopted as a child of God. You are free from the broken, enslaving power of sin. You have been redeemed. How sad that many Christians are still living as if they are under the curse and power of sin. We must challenge ourselves in this moment to embrace the truth that can set us free. We do not have to sin! We can choose to live completely healed and free!

Paul reveals that inner redemption occurred the moment we placed our faith in Jesus Christ; “a new creation” took place within us. This is why Paul says in *Romans 6:6*, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” The phrase “old self” does not mean old chronologically; it means worn out, useless, fit for the scrap heap. By “body of sin,” Paul meant the sum total of our being, of our specific sinful patterns. All of our sinful addictions, idols, patterns, lustful actions that brought brokenness, hurt, and destruction into our lives have been completely removed from us. The good news is that when you confess Christ as Savior, God connects you with the very power of Jesus Christ and the power of sin in your life is broken.

Sin may tempt you or try to get your attention, but it cannot control you anymore. Imagine that you live in an apartment building. Imagine that your landlord is a brutal, abusive man who extorts extra rent money and steals food from your fridge when you are gone. He constantly busts in at inappropriate times and makes outrageous requests. You don't want to do what he says, but you know that you have little choice in the matter if you want to live in his building. In fact, anytime you question him, he quickly threatens to bounce you and your family into the street.

One day everything turns around because a wealthy aunt leaves you a large sum of money. You use the money to buy the whole

building. Yet, as you sit in your apartment on a warm summer night, rejoicing in your new freedom, you hear a loud pounding at the door. In comes the old landlord with the same attitude and the same demands he has always had. Of course, now things are different. Before you had to do what he said. But now he has no authority over you. All his power to evict you is gone. Even though he can still threaten you all he wants, he cannot harm you, evict you, or take anything from you. You own it all!

The power of sin is broken because we have been ransomed through Christ. All who have received Christ personally have had their leaning and enslaving power toward sin healed. Sin is not in charge anymore; we don't have to do what sin tells us to do. We do not have to walk down paths that will enslave us and wreck our lives. The only way that sin can bring destruction into our lives is if we choose to remain in that sin. If we are trapped in a pattern of sin-destruction-confession, sin-destruction-confession, sin-destruction-confession, it is because we are not living in the redemptive power of Christ's death on the Cross. Redemption is ours! Now we must fight in the power that comes through being set free.

There is still a part of us that wants to sin; the old inclination to sin is still present in us. We are still tempted to sin. But we have a redeemed will, and we have the power of Christ to conquer any and every sin, with the help of our Savior. Until the final redemption that comes when Christ returns we will still struggle with sin, but we do not have to be controlled by sin's destructive desires. Sin does not have to defeat us or enslave us ever again. We have been bought through the ransom of Christ and set free through Christ. Christ has paid the penalty of sin for us!

*Prayer Time – Pray through your relationship to God and to your sin. Pray that you may never be defeated by sin again; you know that power is yours in Jesus' Cross; no sin can force you to fail. Pray for the power of the Cross, your identity in Jesus as victory, and the new life you have in Him, to give you victory. Nothing can defeat you.*

# WEEK 6 – JESUS DIED TO CRUSH OUR ENEMIES

## MEMORY VERSE

In all these things we are more than  
conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

The Cross is not a symbol of defeat, but of victory for those that trust in Jesus Christ. God wants to set you free to experience the amazing victory that Jesus Christ provided in His death. God has created us to be more, to accomplish more and to love life more than we ever thought possible. But to live in that victory and become who God has called us to be we have to embrace who are through Christ. We are victors! Not in ourselves, but because of our victorious Savior who died to crush our enemies.

## Sunday, April 9 // DAY 35

Victory – Taking the Battle All The Way to Victory

Read – *Romans 8:37-39*

It is impossible to read the New Testament without being impressed by how the early followers of Christ lived with joyful confidence. There was no defeatism or hopelessness among the early Christ-followers; they spoke, rather, of victory. Victory, conquest, triumph, overcoming—this was the vocabulary of those first followers of Jesus Christ.

What created such hope and confidence in their lives? They believed that Jesus Christ was their victorious, triumphant King who through the Cross crushed their greatest enemies—Satan, sin, and death. This is why Paul shouts, "...thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," (*1 Corinthians 15:57*). What did Christ do? "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him," (*Colossians 2:15*).

Jesus Christ as the crucified conqueror sounds like a crazy fantasy. He had been rejected by His own nation, betrayed, denied and deserted by His own disciples, and executed by authority of the Roman procurator. A conqueror being crucified? A victorious warrior winning the battle by dying a horrible death? Look at Him on the Cross, arms extended fully out, totally naked, robbed of all freedom of movement, strung up with nails and ropes, pinned and powerless, and wearing a crown of thorns. It appears to be a picture of total defeat. If there is victory, it is the victory of pride, prejudice, injustice, jealousy, hatred, cowardice and brutality. Yet the exact opposite is happening.

What looked like the defeat of goodness by evil, was instead most certainly the defeat of evil by goodness. What seemed to be hatred conquering love was in fact love conquering hate. Though Jesus was dying at the hands of God's enemies, He Himself was delivering the ultimate death blow to all the enemies of God. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, He

was Himself crushing the ruthless power of evil. The victim was actually victorious. Because He was a conqueror king, all those that place their faith in him are now able to live in victory. Through the Cross of Christ, all our enemies are crushed. Jesus Christ is victorious!

This is why Paul shouts that we are more than conquerors. To be more than a conqueror means that before you ever face a problem, you can have boldness in knowing that you can overcome it through Christ. You live with confidence that God loves you no matter what and He will never leave you nor forsake you. The power of God is working in your life and in every situation to secure your victory. Through Christ, you aren't constantly afraid of bad news or of things that may happen that aren't in your plan. When the unexpected happens or you're disappointed, you won't be devastated by them because what limits you does not limit God.

When you know who you are in Christ, you know that with Christ on the inside of you, there is nothing that can happen that will defeat you because there's nothing that can defeat Him! (*1 John 4:4*.) It's so important for us to get this truth down in our hearts. See yourself as more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus. This is the mindset that allows you to live life no longer as a slave but as a conquering, victorious follower of Christ. The Bible declares emphatically that God is not only with us, but He is for us. He's here to make sure we're taken care of. He's here to take care of us. He's here to provide, protect, and empower.

The reason Paul can write that we are more conquerors is because he knew that power of God's love for us. "What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?" (*Romans 8:31-31*). God is so for you that He died for you in order that you could live victoriously in His love. Paul assures us that God is with us and for us, and that is what gives us the confidence to live victoriously in Christ.

I get it that this is hard to grasp at times. Some people just outright struggle with this concept. They picture God as mad and wanting us to suffer in defeat. Somehow, they think God gets a kick out of our suffering and defeat. That's just crazy.

I love what God says through the prophet Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11). In other words, "Don't tell me I'm here to do you bad. Don't tell me I'm here because I want you stay depressed, defeated, enslaved to your sin. Don't tell me I'm here because I'm mad at you. I know the thoughts I think about you, and they're for good, not for evil. I know your future, and it is full of hope. I want you to live and walk in victory!" God is with us, and He is for us, and that is why we are more than conquerors.

So no matter what I go through, I am more than a conqueror, because He is with me and He is for me. Even if it doesn't make sense, He is with me and He is for me. No matter what I face, He is with me and He is for me. No matter what anybody says, He is with me and He is for me. No matter what my emotions tell me, no matter what my bodily aches and pains tell me, no matter what my bank account tells me, He is with me and He is for me. He is on my side. He has given me everything I need to live in victory.

In the darkest part of your journey, the thing that will keep you full of life, peace, and happiness is the victory that the Cross accomplishes on our behalf. It's the knowledge that God is with you and for you. It's the confidence that you are more than a conqueror through Him who loved us and died for us.

*Prayer Time – Pray for the battle you are waging right now. You know your sin and your weaknesses. You know the lies of the Enemy. You must pray for the power of God, the victory of the Cross, the Spirit's indwelling power, and for friends to hold you up and keep you strong. Pray that you might continue to stand strong and take every step to counterattack sin. Never surrender. Our Savior has won!*

## Monday, April 10 // DAY 36

Victory – Leading Us in His Victory

Read – [Colossians 2:14-15](#)

Through the Cross, Christ “disarmed the rulers and authorities” and “put them to open shame” and “triumphed over them. These “rulers and authorities” are demonic powers that exist in the world. One of the clearest statements in the Bible regarding these evil powers is found in [Ephesians 6:12](#) where Paul writes, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Paul wants us not live in fear of demonic powers or the war that wages against us, but to be aware of them.

There is no reason for any Christ follower to fear any demonic power. Through Christ, every demonic power has been defeated. Three times in Scripture, Satan is called, “the ruler of this world.” Just as Jesus was approaching the last hour of His life He said, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” ([John 12:31](#)). The death of Jesus was the decisive defeat of “the ruler of this world”—the devil. And as Satan goes, so go all his fallen angels. All of them were dealt a decisive blow of defeat when Christ died. But how did God, through Christ, win the victory? The conquest is depicted in Scripture as unfolding in three stages.

Stage One. Stage One is the conquest predicted. The first prediction was given by God Himself in the Garden of Eden after sin and evil had ruined the world. God judged the serpent by saying: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” ([Genesis 3:15](#)). We identify the woman’s seed as the Messiah, through whom God’s rule of righteousness would be established and the rule of evil eradicated by the crushing of Satan’s head.

God promised that a day would come when evil itself would

be defeated and removed from the earth. The offspring of “the woman” would crush evil (see [Romans 16:20](#); [Hebrews 2:14](#)). For thousands of years the people of God waited for their victorious warrior to arrive and deal this defeating blow. The wait was finally over when Jesus Christ arrived. That decisive blow began when the perfect offspring, Jesus Christ, was born. This is one of the reasons why the eternal Son of God had to become a man—because it was the offspring of the woman who would crush Satan.

Stage Two. Stage Two begins with the birth and ministry of Jesus. Through the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, we see God’s Kingdom advancing and Satan’s retreating, as demons are cast out, sicknesses are healed, and natural disasters are averted. Jesus also sent out His disciples, as His representatives, to preach and to heal. When they returned, excited that the demons had submitted to them in His name, Jesus responded by saying that He had seen “Satan fall like lightning from heaven” ([Luke 10:18](#)). Jesus proclaimed that God’s Kingdom was once again taking over the Earth.

Stage Three. Stage Three is the Cross of Jesus Christ. The total defeat of every demonic power did not take place until this decisive stage when the conquest was achieved at the Cross. Jesus had warned that Satan would launch his last and ultimate offensive when Jesus approached the Cross. However, Jesus promised that He would win the battle and that through this victory, the ruler of this world would be “cast out”, “judged” and “condemned” (see [John 12:31](#), [14:30](#), [16:11](#)). Jesus knew that at the time of His death on the Cross, the final battle would take place – a battle in which the powers of darkness and all of God’s enemies would be crushed. It was “through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery,” ([Hebrews 2:14-15](#)).

How did Jesus win the battle? He overcame Satan by totally resisting his temptations. Tempted to avoid the Cross, Jesus persevered in the path of obedience, and “became obedient to

the point of death—even death on a Cross” (*Philippians 2:8*). His obedience was indispensable to His saving work. “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (*Romans 5:19*). If Jesus had disobeyed by moving an inch from the path of God’s will, the devil would have been victorious in frustrating the plan of salvation. But Jesus obeyed, and the devil was forever defeated.

With every temptation to retaliate, get angry, and selfishly take matters into His own hands, Jesus remained obedient. By His self-giving love for others, He “overcame evil with good,” (*Romans 12:21*). He loved and forgave those that persecuted Him, spit at Him, and mocked Him. In the middle of pain and hate, Jesus could have stepped down from the Cross at any moment, as they mockingly challenged Him to do (see *Luke 23:36-37*; *Mark 15:30*). But He declined any resort to worldly power, revenge, or brute force. He was “crucified in weakness,” because the weakness of God was stronger than human strength. He fought for us by refusing to disobey God in any way in the most intense temptation ever thrown at any man. He was tempted to hate His enemies, forsake God’s plan, and imitate the world’s use of power (see *2 Corinthians 13:4*; *1 Corinthians 1:25*).

As Jesus was suspended on the Cross, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness, all the evil powers flung themselves upon Him with hostile intent. But Jesus fought with them. He took every thought captive. He never gave up. He obeyed God to the end. He lived by faith.

We are not to regard the Cross as a defeat and the Resurrection as a victory. Rather, the Cross was the victory won, and the resurrection was the victory endorsed, proclaimed and demonstrated. The evil principalities and powers failed in making Christ disobey God. Because of this, they have been defeated and have been put under Christ’s feet and made subject to Him (see *Ephesians 1:22*; *1 Peter 3:22*).

*Prayer Time – Pray over your battles, struggles, strife. Claim the power of the Cross, the victory He has won. There is no enemy He has not conquered. Sin, Death, and Hell are crushed and are awaiting their final destiny at the Return of our King. Claim His victory and live in His conquering power. He has won.*

## **Tuesday, April 11 // DAY 37**

Victory :: Death Will Die

Read – [Hebrews 2:14-15](#)

One of the greatest misconceptions about Satan is that many people think he has the power to send someone to Hell. Satan does not have that power. The only thing that causes us to go to Hell is unforgiven sin. Our willful, open, and deliberate choice to sin against God is what puts us on a fast track to Hell.

Hexes, enchantments, voodoo, séances, curses, black magic, apparitions, and voices might sound incredibly evil, but they are only the bells and whistles of the devil. The one lethal weapon Satan has is the power to deceive us so that we sin. If we buy into that deception, we sin and that is the power that places us under God's judgment and condemnation.

The great deception that leads to sin always begins with a simple lie. It's the lie that God is not enough; that there is something that will give us greater joy, hope, peace, and pleasure than God. By believing this lie, we center our lives on pleasing ourselves and we prefer sin over righteousness. That is why we commit sin, and the consequence of our sin is death, eternal Hell separated from God.

This is what makes Christ victory amazing. Christ came to take the weapon of unforgiven sin out of Satan's hands. In order to do this, Christ took our sins upon Himself and suffered for them. This having been done, the devil could no longer use our sins to destroy us. Taunt us? Yes. Mock us? Yes. But no longer would

those who trust in Christ be condemned to Hell. Christ bore the curse in our place. When Christ died for our sins, He took from the devil his one lethal weapon: unforgiven sin. Try as he will, Satan cannot destroy us. The wrath of God is removed. His mercy is our shield. Satan cannot succeed against us.

Paul refers to this connection between Christ's death and our victory over death in [1 Corinthians 15:56](#), "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." We have all sinned, and the law sentences sinners to everlasting death. The text continues, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" ([1 Corinthians 15:57](#)). In other words, the demand of the law is met by Jesus' life and death. Therefore, sin is forgiven and the sting of death is removed.

Unforgiven sin is removed through the forgiveness of God. Those who believe in Christ will not be sentenced to everlasting death, but will instead "be raised imperishable then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" ([1 Corinthians 15:52, 54](#)). Through the Cross, Jesus Christ provided for us the victory over death so we could live in everlasting life. He has said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" ([John 11:25](#)). Praise God—death, hell, and every demonic power has been defeated, because sin has been defeated through the victory of Jesus Christ!

*Prayer Time – Death is a horrible enemy. But pray through the victory that God has given you even over your last enemy. The power of sin and death can never defeat you. Christ has conquered even our last and greatest foe. Pray that you might not fail when facing death or when you suffer loss. You are more than a conqueror. Pray that you might be faithful even in your last moments. Death will, one day, die—and sin will be no more!*

## Wednesday, April 12 // DAY 38

Victory – Freedom from Fear. Freedom to Live

Read – *Romans 8:1-8*

It is amazing how much our lives would change if we really grabbed hold of life Christ obtained for us through His victory on the Cross. Christ has crushed all of our enemies and promised us a victorious life. If that is true, then why do so many Christ followers walk in hopelessness, defeat, depression, and failure? One of the biggest reasons is that they never live with a mindset of victory.

If we ever want to live in victory, we must begin with a new mindset. That is why Paul challenges, "...letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace." (*Romans 8:6*) If we don't take control of the way we think, we'll never live in the victory and life that God has for us. You can't live a full Christian life if you don't commit yourself 100%. We don't serve a once-in-awhile kind of God. We serve an all-in, 24/7, knows-every-hair-on-your-head type of God. How we think about ourselves and God is a very, very big deal.

If all we do is focus on our sinful desires, cravings, and wants, we will always struggle. We will become defined by strife with God, struggles with self-control and separation. What is the end result? More destruction. But there's another side to that equation. If you approach life with a mindset of following what God's Spirit desires, the results are intimacy with God, internal rejuvenation and inheritance. In the end, you receive life and peace.

However, you can't change on your own. You need the Spirit of God working in you to give you a new mindset. When God comes into our lives, it's not a stopover. God says that when Jesus comes in, He makes a home. He takes up residence in your heart. It's His house, where He's comfortable. You end up having a relationship and being able to focus on the desires of

the Spirit. But why is that so important? Paul writes: The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 2:14*)

If you don't have God's Spirit, living free by loving God will sound ridiculous. The Spirit of God allows us to understand His Word, and through it He reveals His purpose for our lives. It's like one of those decoder rings you used to find at the bottom of cereal boxes. The only way you can understand God's message is through His Spirit. The Spirit will always reveal to us the path that will lead us to victory, joy, freedom, and love.

This is why we have to constantly fight against the desire of the flesh and a sinful, defeated mindset. We need to fight back. Sin is a bully. It's true. It likes to push us around. It likes to get us to do things we know we shouldn't do. It likes to goad us into not doing the things we know we should do. It's time we stood up to our bully.

But here's the problem: We can't do it on our own. Sinful desires are going to keep shoving us into lockers and giving us swirlies until we confront them with a greater power. God's Spirit is the only One that can strengthen us enough to stand up to the sinful desires of the flesh.

We try to stand up to our sinful desires, but willpower just can't get us there. If we were able to will ourselves into perfect obedience, Jesus' death was a waste. We just can't—not through willpower, not through conforming to the world's patterns. We can only overcome sin by the power of the Spirit.

When we try to live without a mind that is set on the Spirit and what God wants, we lose sight of who we really are. When we put willpower or conformity before God's Spirit, what we're really doing is struggling with God's grace. We feel we're not worth it, and we become burdened by guilt. That guilt is heavy, and it crushes our effectiveness for the kingdom of God.

We need a mind that is focused on the victory that Christ achieved for us on the Cross. We have to constantly remember who we really are: sons and daughters of God. We can't do anything to change the way He sees us. When we struggle and fail against our sinful desires, giving in to guilt can't buy us freedom. The only way to be truly free is to lean on God's Spirit. His grace and power are more than enough.

The incredible, transforming promise of Romans 8 is that the power of sin is broken in our lives through the victory of Christ's work on the Cross. In Christ, we do not have to live in defeat. The power of sin is broken through Christ's victory on the Cross. Not generically in Christians everywhere, but specifically in you! You have a choice now; you do not have to keep on sinning. You fight from victory, not for victory. Christ's victory assures you of victory. Do you live with a mind that is set on the Spirit leading you in victory?

*Prayer Time – Pray through the facts of your sin (by confessing them), and claim the victory Christ has earned for you. Pray out of victory, not defeat. Pray for a mind that is set on following and obeying God's Spirit. A mind that believes living by God's directions will lead you to joy, not despair. Pray for hope because of Christ's conquering power over sin. In prayer agree with God on your status: Conqueror! By the Cross of your Savior. Pray over defeats you have suffered when you waged war in your own power in the past.*

## Thursday, April 13 – DAY 39

Victory – Christ, Our Victor and Our Victory

Read – [Romans 6:11-14](#)

We live in victory, but we still have to fight the battle of sin that wants to lead us to destruction. We have to constantly be awakened by faith to engage in a counterattack through the power of God. This

is why scripture commands: “Look carefully then how you walk” (*Ephesians 5:15*). “Put on the whole armor of God” (*Ephesians 6:11*). “Prepare your minds for action” (*1 Peter 1:13*). “Make every effort” (*2 Peter 1:5*). “Be sober-minded; be watchful” (*1 Peter 5:8*). We still fight against the sinful desires that “war against your soul” (*1 Peter 2:11*).

That is what Paul was talking about in *Romans 6:11-14*. There is a great conflict and battle going on in the life of every Christ-follower. Think of it as a fight to reign over your life: “Do not let sin reign.” The word “reign” is simply the verb form of the word for king. There is a challenger to the throne, a revolutionary, a rebel who wants to take over the kingdom; namely, sin. “Do not let sin reign.” He is in revolt and mutiny.

Sin wants to lead a coup and gain the throne of our lives. And we as Christ followers are called to resist. This rebel is attacking our bodies as an army attacks a castle. The battle is fierce and at times incremental surrender and defeat are all that seem possible. But we must keep fighting and remain alert.

There are weapons inside of the castle that may be captured and used by the enemy for his unrighteous purposes. These weapons are the parts of our body – our eyes, our ears, our tongues, our hands, our feet and our sexual organs. *Romans 6:13*: “Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments (weapons) of unrighteousness.” When the word “instruments” is used in all four other passages in the New Testament it means “weapons,” not just instruments. Paul is specifically using battle language to refer to this war that is going on within us. The battle cry is going out: “Don’t let the rebel, sin, capture the members of your body and turn them into weapons against the true King who reigns over your life.”

There is a true King over the realm—God. “Do not surrender the members of your body to sin—the rebel contender for the throne—so he can make them weapons of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God.” (*Romans 6:13*,

paraphrased). The true King is God. The rebel is Sin. Stay loyal to the true King with all your weapons and all your servants; with all your desires and all your members. This is the battle that Paul describes. The question is how do we fight it and how can we win?

First, we have to see that God is our King. To Him belongs the castle of the body, the service of our desires, the weapons of our members and the throne of the kingdom. The call here is for us to be loyal to the King. He made us alive and made us His dwelling place through the victory already won in Jesus Christ. Keep trusting Him, depending on Him, and submitting to Him. We must resist all contenders for the throne of our lives; it belongs to God.

Second: we have to see sin as a power, not just an act. Sin threatens to reign. It is not just the acts we commit but the power that takes us captive through sinful desires bringing about actions. The desires of the body are not sin in and of themselves, but are servants of the body and can be captured by the rebel leader, Sin, and made into internal enemy agents that seduce us into handing over members of our body that become weapons of unrighteousness. The desires of the body can be captured by the power of sin so that we pursue our sinful desires more than we pursue deeper intimacy with Jesus Christ.

For example, the desire for food serves us well, but when sin captures it, the desire becomes gluttony or bulimia and ends up ruling us for the sake of the enemy. Our tongues, mouths and stomachs become weapons of unrighteousness. The desire for love serves us well, but when sin captures it, the desire may become all about our vanity, fame, popularity and people's approval above God's approval, hence becoming a weapon of unrighteousness. The desire for rest and sleep serves us well, but if sin captures it, the desire becomes laziness. The desire for sexual satisfaction is a good servant of procreation and joy in marriage, but if sin captures it, the desire becomes lust for pornography, masturbation; sexual immorality, adultery or homosexual relations, and the good gift of sex become the means by which we satisfy selfish desires bringing great sin into our lives, rather than His blessings.

Third, we have to see and live in the victory that is ours in Christ. To find victory we must go directly to what Christ did for us on the Cross. Paul tells us that just as Christ died, “so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (*Romans 6:11*). The phrase “consider yourselves dead to sin” is the absolute centerpiece of Christian victory. It means assessing the facts, pressing our minds upon the importance of what is at stake. It is something we do with our reason and our will. It is allowing our minds and hearts to see that Christ died for us. That we are united with Him, and that we are totally forgiven and loved by God.

When sin tempts us to present our members as weapons of unrighteousness, we are called to choose against those desires. “Don’t let sin reign.” Do not present your eyes and tongue to fulfill that desire. We are to choose God more than anything else in the world because we, by faith, believe that God and His promises are supremely better than anything else the world can offer us. Choosing, is finding one thing preferable to and far more enjoyable than another thing.

At this point, we can describe the battle in negative terms: We are to say no to the desires of sin on the basis of what God has done and who we are in Christ. We are dead to sin and its desires; sin no longer looks preferable. We can also describe the battle positively: When sin sends its desires to tempt us, we are to prefer God, His works, His ways and His promises. We are alive to God. If Satan attacks with deceitful desires, we must counter with reliable desires that will not let us down and that lead to everlasting joy and supreme pleasure.

In other words, the front-line battle against sin, which glorifies God, is based on what He has done for us in Christ’s victory over sin. This allows us to be forgiven of all our sins and to be counted righteous in Him. This battle is fought by experiencing death to sinful desires and life to new desires. Sin has lost all its power, Satan has been defeated, and you are alive in victory!

*Prayer Time – Walk onto the battlefield of your life. Pray about the enemies that seek to destroy you, steal from you, and*

*render you useless, and that are a burden to others in the war. Pray about every struggle, every sin, every weakness—not to pity yourself, or to fall under a load of guilt and shame, but to gain victory. As you pray, develop a strategy, a plan, for dealing with your life as you live every moment before God’s watching eyes. Declare your failures and defeats beneath the covering of Christ’s forgiveness; and plan, choose to not fail again, by Christ’s help. Pray for yourself. Pray for your friends and family. Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*

## **Friday, April 14 // DAY 40**

Good Friday

Read – [Mark 15:21-39](#)

Jesus taught the foolish, fed the hungry, healed the sick, encouraged the brokenhearted, counseled the wayward, and loved the sinner. Yet, Jesus was emphatic that the primary purpose of His coming to earth was to glorify God by suffering and dying for our sins. In [John 12:27-28](#), which chronicles the week leading up to Jesus’ death, He says, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” In that moment, Jesus was setting His gaze on the Cross.

The closer Jesus approached the day that He would die, the greater His soul agonized. But what troubled Jesus? Some suggest it was the physical torture and agony of the Cross that Jesus agonized over. In the next twenty hours or so, He would go without sleep, be on trial six times, be scourged, mocked, punched, spit upon, and deprived of all physical comforts. The pain of crucifixion was so horrendous that a word was invented to explain it, “excruciating,” which literally means “from the cross.”

Was Jesus merely a coward in His last night on earth? The answer, of course, is NO. Jesus is no coward about physical pain. He is

brave. But in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before He dies, we find Jesus in utter agony, dismayed, and crying. This begs the question: what is it that Jesus is wrestling with here that causes Him such distress? The ensuing physical challenges, though great, are not what He is wrestling with. The careful reader will notice that Jesus tells us precisely what He is wrestling with—“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me” ([Luke 22:42](#)). But to understand His anguish and agony over the “cup”, let us back up and consider something Jesus knew all too well: the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Jew was well acquainted with a number of metaphors for God’s wrath. Darkness, thunder, the winepress—such images pictorially captured the severity of God’s hatred of sin. But there was another symbol that Israel was quite familiar with—the cup of God’s wrath (see [Psalm 75:7-8](#); [Isaiah 51:17](#)).

The cup was a dreadful symbol of the deserved holy wrath of God being poured out on all those that oppose Him in sin. When the Almighty visited a city with His cup of wrath, His enemies had to drink it down to the very bottom. But never before Calvary had the total measure of God’s wrath, the eternal weight of it, been poured out. Yes, there were “previews” of that wrath throughout the Old Testament when places like Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, the firstborn Egyptians were killed, and the Amalekites slaughtered. Yet the full fury of that wrath towards evil and sin had yet to be poured out. It was with this understanding in mind that Jesus was on the ground, sweating drops of blood, because He was wrestling with the cup of His Father’s wrath. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me” ([Luke 22:42](#)).

What Jesus struggled with there was unspeakable: the full measure of God’s wrath, the punishment that should have been poured out on those who deemed God worthless and had rebelled against His glory and goodness. But Christ emerges from His time of prayer, prepares to be arrested, and sets His face like flint to enter the hell waiting for Him.

What does this tell us about the riches of the Cross? It reveals

that we are so deeply loved by the Savior that He was willing to swallow Hell itself for us. When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" on the Cross, He was actually experiencing the forsakenness and wrath we deserve (see [Mark 15:34](#)). The cries of Christ are the screams of those in Hell that were cried for us.

Christ drank the cup so that we who trust in Him will never have to drink the cup of God's wrath. There is a real judgment that is coming to all those that do not, by faith, trust in Christ. The Bible describes "a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" ([Hebrews 10:27](#)). It calls us to live "with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" ([Hebrews 12:28-29](#)). Jesus warned the people of His day to "flee from the wrath to come" ([Matthew 3:7](#)). For Jesus Himself will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" ([2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](#)).

Until we feel some measure of dread about God's wrath, we will probably not grasp the true beauty and preciousness of the riches of the Cross. Jesus Christ, and He alone can save us from the wrath to come because He absorbed the wrath of God for us on the Cross. Without Him, we would be swept away forever. Praise to God that Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath bone-dry, leaving not a drop for those who have trusted in Him as their Savior. It is only when we climb Calvary's hill that we will see the extent to which Jesus went so that we no longer have to live as slaves!

*Prayer Time – Pray about staking your life on the authority of Christ. Nothing happened to Him that He didn't permit. Nothing can happen to you without His permission. Pray about the power of Christ, the authority of Christ, and the faithfulness of Christ to do all He needed to do in order to save everyone who believes in Him.*

# CONCLUSION BONUS DAY

## Saturday, April 15 // DAY 41

We pray that over these past 40 Days God has opened your eyes to the amazing, unsearchable truths of what Christ accomplished for you through the Cross. The one question we get over and over again after the 40 Days is—“Okay, now what? What do I do to keep walking and living in the freedom and abundant life in which Christ died for me to live?”

You have to realize that you are a creature of habit. And your habits reflect your true self—you build your daily activities around your priorities and passions. Each day, the same people repeat the same routine, over and over. You make time for what you truly value. You build habits and routines around the things that really matter to you. This is an important principle to understand as you seek to live no longer as a slave, but in the freedom of Christ.

Every day, you must “preach” to yourself the message of the Cross. Your audience is your own heart. And the message is simple: Christ died on the Cross for your sins so you could truly live for God. This means that you continually face up to your own sinfulness and then flee to Jesus through faith in His shed blood and righteous life.

It’s a matter of sitting yourself down, grabbing your own attention, and saying, “Jesus Christ is what matters most in life. In God’s presence is where life, joy, freedom are found: I am forgiven! I am no longer a slave to sin. I am a child of God based on the sacrifice of Jesus. Christ died for me so that I am fully loved, accepted, and approved by God. I now live in the victory that is mine in Jesus Christ!”

If you want the flame in your heart to be kept alive, you have to keep coming back to the source. The Cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of your love is kindled for God, but you have to get near enough to it for its sparks to fall on you. How do you keep the flaming passion for Christ burning brightly in the drizzle of real life? Let us share five very simple ways we have found that help us draw near to the Cross each day.

- 1. MEMORIZE THE GOSPEL** — The Bible refers to memorizing Scripture as storing up His Word in our hearts (*Psalms 119:11*). God wants you to tuck His promises into your hearts so that, no matter where you are or what you are doing, you can pull them out and be strengthened by their truth. Start with the Gospel. All of God's promises and commands are precious, but the verses that tell you of the Son of God who gave His life in your place on the Cross are the most precious of all.

Having these verses instantly accessible is so helpful. For example, if you find yourself losing perspective at a difficult point in the day, reach into your memory and pull out *2 Corinthians 5:21*, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Does that put things in a new light? God has addressed your most serious problems: sin and judgment. The more you remind yourself of this, the more you will begin to see the power of the Cross and start living in that power. This perspective has a transforming effect in the midst of the daily troubles and inconveniences of life.

- 2. PRAY THE GOSPEL** — The Gospel should be at the center of your prayer life. The Gospel makes it possible for you to approach God. The Gospel

gives you the confidence to pray boldly—you are accepted by God’s beloved Son. There is nothing complicated about this. To pray the Gospel, simply begin by thanking God for the blessing of eternal life, purchased through the death of His Son. Acknowledge that Christ’s work on the Cross is what makes your very prayer possible.

Thank Him because Jesus bore God’s wrath for your sin, you will never be separated from God’s love. Thank Him that because of the Cross, you are reconciled to God and you have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, lead you, guide you, and empower you to resist sin and serve God. Because of the Cross, you have been adopted by God as His son or daughter. God is now your loving Heavenly Father. Ask God to bless you graciously with all that you need to obey and glorify Him.

**3. SING THE GOSPEL** — A Christian’s heart should be brimming every day with songs about the riches of the Cross. You need to sing and worship about the Cross more than just on Sunday. Make Cross-centered worship a regular part of your daily routine. If you can’t play an instrument, then worship to recorded music. There is no better way to start each day than to sing and listen to songs that speak of the Cross with clarity and power.

**4. REVIEW HOW THE GOSPEL HAS CHANGED YOU**  
Many people today want to forget the past. The mistakes they have made and the sins they have committed are not subjects they like to revisit. One of the best ways you can draw near the blazing fire of the Cross and cherish its riches is to remember the past. Doing this should remind you of how marvelous God’s salvation really is. The apostle Paul was committed to remembering what he once was because that memory magnified

God's grace. "...though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:13). Though written some thirty years after his conversion, Paul remembered vividly and specifically his many sins prior to conversion.

What made Paul an effective apostle was that he never forgot his days as a persecutor and sinner. An ongoing awareness of grace reminded Paul of the appalling sin from which he had been delivered and an ongoing awareness of the sin that kept him dependent on grace and the riches of the Cross. It's vital for you to never forget as well.

You need to follow Paul's example. You can say, "I was once a \_\_\_\_\_" and fill in your own descriptions of your sinful state. And you don't need a dramatic testimony to do so. Every story, dramatic or sweet; whether you were lost in dark and dangerous sin, or it could be you have been in a church pew since the day you were born; your story is what God did in you. Your testimony is how, when, where, and under what circumstances God brought you to Himself. Your story is a miracle; every story of salvation is a miracle because you didn't write it by yourself. God intervened; He was working in you. He changed your heart. He saved you. Take time to think about all of that.

- 5. STUDY THE GOSPEL** — To grow in your passion for what Jesus has done, increase your understanding of what He has done. Never be content with your current grasp of the Gospel. The Gospel is life-permeating, world-altering, universe-changing truth. The riches of the Cross have more facets than any diamond. That is why every year we do the 40 Days of Passion. You must continually keep

examining what Christ did for you on the Cross.

So let us share some practical recommendations for making the Gospel an ongoing life study throughout the year. First, camp out in the books of Romans and Galatians. Get a good commentary from guys like John Stott, John MacArthur, or Martin Luther to assist you in your study. Go online and read *sermons from John Piper*. [Download YouVersion](#) and start a reading plan. Second, don't be afraid of technical theological terms. Take the time to learn the meaning of words such as atonement, substitution, propitiation, justification, redemption, reconciliation, ransom, and salvation. If you are looking for a guide, *The Atonement by Leon Morris* and *The Cross of Christ by John Stott* are all-time favorites because they explain each of these words in detail.

One last point, do you have a daily commute, or another regular time when you can listen to a sermon or an audio version of the Bible? Instead of talk radio or even music, allow your heart to be drawn to the Cross during your commute.

We hope these five practical recommendations have given you a clearer understanding of what it means to make every day a day centered on the Cross. As you think about all these activities, it is vital to remember that you cannot do this on your own. You need God's Spirit to light the truths of the Cross within your heart. This is true at the moment your heart is regenerated and it is true every day of your Christian life.

Each time you memorize, pray, sing, review, or study the Gospel, you must ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and bring the riches of the Cross alive to you again. He is quick to hear and faithful to answer. But His help must be actively sought.

Because of the empowering grace of God's Spirit, we have been drawing near to the blaze of the Cross day after day for many

years now. The suggestions we have made have been invaluable to us in our own growing process. Through the five steps, the sparks from the blazing fire of the Cross have fallen on us many, many times, and our own zeal has burned brighter and brighter. If God can do this in our lives, He can do the same for you. Draw near to the blaze every day. Build a Cross-centered life, one day at a time and live your life in the power of the Cross.

# REFERENCES

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This 40-day devotional is to be used for educational purposes only, and cannot be sold or reproduced without prior consent from the Journey at First Baptist. Some ideas, thoughts and material from the following books were used in the writing of this 40-day devotional:

- *The Gospel for Real Life by Jerry Bridges*
- *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary by J. D. Greear*
- *Identity: Who You Are in Christ by Eric Geiger*
- *The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die by John Piper*
- *I Really Want to Change... So, Help Me God by James MacDonald*
- *A Call to Die: A 40 Day Journey of Fasting from the World & Feasting on God by David Nasser*