

Know Him

A 20 day journey

With God

Name: _____

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Has your faith become a chore where once it was a passion?
Are you tired of the self-serving mentality of our culture?
Do you long to move deeper in authentic spirituality?
“Come follow me...”
(Jesus)

In our cynical age, God is looking for those naïve enough to believe that the world can still ***be changed***, those simple fools whose vision is to live and die for Christ alone.

Perhaps it's time to make a simple decision: that we will believe the things we believe and therefore allow them to overwhelm us and to doubt the things we doubt and therefore deny them their power. Perhaps it's time for the shy kid to raise her hand in class and dare to be wrong, dare to incur a little ridicule for seeming too keen.

Have we the courage to radiate our passion in such a cynical age, **to live for Jesus,”** **dangerously, obsessively, and undeniably”**? Not for money , not for fame, not for career, not for popularity? To live our lives for Jesus Christ alone? It seems to me to do less is to be less than human. It is to cast off restraint. It is to perish. But to live that dream is eternal.

Everything is different. Nothing has changed. In contemporary culture, Christ's call to costly discipleship is still the key to life itself. In the 20 day journey my prayer is that you will encounter a deep friendship and allegiance to Jesus.

If you're ready for such a commitment– a cause to live for –join an underground movement around the world. A change is coming, and this is your invitation.

To Live For What Matters,

Jamie Starrett

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Day 1

Read: Psalm 71:5

Thought/Insight: Strange driver

Recently, we made some updates to our home computer. We stepped into this century with our internet access and leaped from dial-up to high speed. WOW...what a difference! On the first night, I think that I watched 43 movie trailers, bought and downloaded two cd's, and listened to five podcasts. I probably went to bed around 2 A.M. However, in the midst of the switch, I somehow screwed up our e-mail software. Since I now have "high speed," I jumped online and headed to the "live-chat help center." After waiting for less than a minute, I was typing back and forth with some tech dude in Texas, and he was giving me insight on how to fix my e-mail "POP3 Server something-or-other." Blah, blah, blah. He lost me at "POP3." He could tell from my slow and ignorant typing that I was lost, so he sent me a message telling me that with a few clicks of the mouse, I could surrender control of my PC to him via the web and that he could fix the problem right from his desktop. All I had to do was click on a few links and "let him drive."

I surrendered and let the man take over. My cursor started to move, and I realized that he had taken control of my machine. I actually sat in front of my computer and laughed out loud. He was opening and checking stuff that I didn't even know was there from over 1,200 miles away! He was changing settings, double checking virus controls, and securing my e-mail future. He even went back and changed a few things I had screwed up in the process of trying to fix things. He then clicked on the help window and typed. "All finished...thanks for letting me drive. Let me know if I we can ever be of assistance again."

Switch gears for a minute. Within the memory of my computer, I have personal tax information, social security numbers, credit card numbers, personal e-mail, family photos, and countless other pieces of really important information that I am sure I could find if I ever really needed them. That is not the crazy part though. What is crazy to me is that I let some strange guy from Texas who I do not know have access to my life. He was driving and could go anywhere. It really gets crazy when I think about the fact that I am not sure if I have given God that much control. There are days when I wonder if I have clicked on the link that "lets Him drive my life."

Read: (NLT) 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 "I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. And he did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that he will continue to deliver us."

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Day 1

Paul talks about being “down and almost out,” but still trusting in God.

- Evaluate your own spiritual life right now. What is your “soul status”? Are you damaged, hurt, feeling good, or feeling bad?
- Have you let someone else influence your life to the point that you could say that he or she is “driving” your life? Is someone else besides God currently in the driver’s seat?
- Can you say, like Paul, “We are confident that He will continue to deliver us”? Why or why not?
- What is stopping you from surrendering complete control to Him?
Who do you know that you could talk to about surrendering complete control to God?

Authentic Faith is an issue of completely surrendering control. Some call that Lordship.

Read: Proverbs 3:5-6

- How much of our hearts are we supposed to give to Him?
- How much are you currently investing?
What do you want to do about it?

Reflection: Someone will “drive” your life. It’s going to be you, God, or someone else who you allow to influence you. God is the only one who is the expert on how to drive and where to go because He is your Creator. Let Him have control.

Pray: Jesus, forgive me for not giving you complete control of my life. Today, I surrender control to you. Lead me. I put my trust and confidence in you!

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Day 2

Read: John 10:1-11

Thought/Insight: A half-life.

Are you caught in a half-life? An even better question is, are you living a full life and experiencing all that God has for you? Have you surrendered everything to God or are you living a half-life? You see, when we hold out on Him, that is exactly what we are doing. We are half-life-ing it.

I once heard salvation described as this: “Giving all that you know of yourself to all that you know of God.” Salvation happens in a moment. Life IN Christ, with Him working on and in us is a process. We can experience all the He has in store for us, or we can experience just half of it, or even less. Make no mistake. He is not the one holding out. We are.

When Moses led his people out of Egypt and out of slavery, they found themselves facing the split-open Red Sea, and they had a choice. Put everything in His hands and walk through or stay on the shore and take on the enemy themselves. They wagered everything, trusted God with all that they had, and went through the Red Sea. God held up His end of the deal. He did not hold out on them. He took care of them and kept them safe. Now, fast forward just a bit. Moses went to the top of the mountain to spend time with God and to get instructions from Him directly. The very same people who trusted God with everything and walked through the Red Sea and who trusted God for hundreds of years while they were locked away in slavery began living a half-life. Some 40 days into Moses’ trip to the top of the mountain, they began giving “some of themselves” and their worship to a gold cow made of melted earrings. Funny how they trusted God for hundreds of years, but now could not wait 40 days. Because of that “half-living”, cow worship moment, the Bible points out that 3000 of them never got to see all that God had for them. Specifically, they did not even get to see the sunrise the next morning (*the entire story can be found in Exodus 32*).

Now, I am not suggesting that if you hold out on God, poof, you are dead. What I am saying is that over and over in the Bible, as people held out on God, they missed the fullness that He has waiting for them. They ended up living a half- life and receiving less than what God really has to offer. How about you? Are you living a half-life?

Read: John 10:10

- Are you in a season where you are holding something out on God? What might you be holding back? Why are you afraid to give it to Him?

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3. Pray for him/her. We need to talk to God about our friends before we talk to our friends about God. Prayer is so powerful. It can change people when nothing else can.

4. Talk to him/her in private. (Matthew 18:15) Invite them to come over your house, or go to their house, or out for chips & salsa, or to a game, or just hang out. The point is to spend time with them, always being sure to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Whatever you do, don’t gossip! This puts you in the same position that they are in.

Pray: That you would remain close to the Lord. Pray also for someone you know who has fallen away from the Lord. Ask God to use you to help bring him/her back soon!

A 20 day journey with God

Day 20

“The Ultimate Confrontation”

What do you do when a Christian brother or sister you know has stopped coming to church? What do you do when they start hanging out with the “wrong crowd”? What are you supposed to say to them when you see them in the halls at school? How do you act? Do you pretend nothing is wrong? Do you ignore them? Do you preach at them? Sometimes considering others before yourself means that we need to have an uncomfortable conversation. When it comes to confronting others about sin in their lives, it is so much safer to just blow it off and simply take care of yourself, isn’t it? Fortunately, the Bible has the answers to these questions.

Read: James 5:19-20

Is this passage written to Believers or unbelievers? (19) How do you know?

What does it mean to “stray from the truth”?

What does the “truth” refer to?

The phrase “and one of you turns him back” means that by what you say and do, you are able to help that person make an “about face”, to turn around and head back to the Lord.

But wait, how do we know that we have the right to “judge” someone by telling them to change the way they’re living?

Galatians 6:1-2 says, “Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other’s troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.”

So how do you show consideration for others and help a person like this? Here are some practical, biblical ways.

1. Judge the sin, not the sinner. It is perfectly fine to bust your friends when they do something dumb. The thing to remember is that even though your friend was wrong, you still love them. You accept them, even though you reject their sinful behavior.
2. Remember that you can fall into sin also. We are all just one dumb decision away from tanking our lives.

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Day 2

- Jesus said that He came to give life. What happens when we try and accept His gift of life without accepting the boundaries He gives us to live it in?
- Think about a time you felt the freedom that a life with Christ offers. Why don’t we live there more often?
Who do you need to talk with about surrendering some of these things you have identified?

Reflection: Holding back leads to living a half-life. Give Him everything. He wants it.

Pray: Jesus, I do not want to live a half-life. Help me to surrender everything to you! I want to live the abundant life that you offer me. Give me the courage to surrender today

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Day 3

Read: Genesis 39:11-23

Thought/Insight: Sitting and waiting

Are you kidding me? Joseph was locked in jail for something that he did not even do, and we are left to hold on to the phrase, “And the Lord was with him.” That is so unfair. What am I saying? Joseph was the one in jail trying to cling to the promise that God would never leave him or forsake him. Well wait, who am I kidding? At least he had “favor in the eyes of the prison warden” (LOL). That is really looking at the glass “half full,” if you ask me.

I can say that through many of the dark times of my life, I have not had a “half-full” attitude. I think as I look back, more often than not, I was in the middle of my personal crisis, wondering where in the world God was, and when He was going to rescue me. I have probably missed His blessing for me many times in the process of all my “boo-hooing” about my situation. In the story of Joseph, over and over, he demonstrates “authentic faith.” A faith in God that says, “No matter what I see in front of me, I trust You. No matter what this situation looks, sound, or even smells like, I trust you. In spite of my current position, setting, or circumstances, I trust you.”

What was it about Joseph that kept him holding on? What was it that kept him from losing it when everything seemed to NOT be going his way? Remember, he was probably a teenager during parts of his struggle. Maybe he was even a lot like you. While he probably did not deal with the pressure to pass chemistry or the temptation to look at internet pornography, he was sold into slavery by his brothers and left to rot in prison. Yet, he somehow kept it together. The foundation of his faith was solid. His foundation was God. His foundation was our same God, who never changes, never waivers, always keeps His promises, and in the end, wins. What is your faith resting on?

Read: Genesis 39: 23

- Identify a time in life where you felt like God had abandoned you? How did that situation work out? In the end, did He ever leave you?
- How do you feel about other people’s “happy endings” compared to your current situation. Have you shared that with God? Why not?
- What is the foundation of your faith?
- Do circumstances regularly change your opinion about how God feels about you?

What is your reaction to crisis? Do you run to God or do you run from God?

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Reflection: Do you know any “lepers” who need to be touched? What are you doing about it?

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Day 19

“The Ultimate Untouchables”

Of all the encounters Jesus had with people in the Bible, perhaps none is more intimate and emotional as His meeting with a poor leper man. If it's true that a picture is worth a thousand words, then the sight of leprosy is a library full. It is a disease that eats away the flesh and destroys life little by little. It is degrading and it leaves it's victims feeling desperate.

Read: Mark 1:40-45.

This leper came to Jesus in reverence, humility and in faith. And Jesus responds with three incredible acts of mercy.

Compassion. Jesus was moved by this man's condition. The words “felt compassion” literally mean that His “insides were moved”. His eyes were filled with tears and his heart was filled with pity and concern. This man was a nobody. Unwanted. Unloved. An outcast. He had no friends and no future. But he did have faith.

Have you ever felt lonely? Unloved? Unwelcome? Unwanted? Like a nobody? A loser? Ever experienced deep emotional pain? Do you think God sees you like He did this leper? (Check out Psalm 103:11-12; 9:12) He sees, He knows, He understands, He cares and He feels.

Touch. What happens next is so shocking, so surprising, so unexpected that it must have astonished the crowd that day. Jesus simply touched him. This was amazing for three reasons. First, it was gross. Second, it was illegal to do so back then. Third, it was risky. He ran the risk of catching this disease. Jesus loved to touch people, though He didn't have to. His touch said something. It communicated love, acceptance, understanding. And isn't that what we all really want? No doubt, this was the first loving touch this leper had felt in a long time.

Have you ever felt the touch of Christ? Has he touched your life? Have you accepted His love or are you still trying to earn it? Have you let Him heal you of your past?

Words. Notice what Jesus did NOT say to this man. He didn't say, “*First, get your act together, then I'll help you.*” Or, “*You're too far gone for even Me to help.*” Or, “*Ewwwwww, you're gross. Get away!*” No. Jesus simply said, “***I am willing.***” This is the heart of God for you as well (see Isaiah 1:18; 45:22; Matthew 11:28-29; Revelation 22:17). And this is the heart he wants you to have for others.

Jesus' compassion said, “I care.” His touch said, “I understand.” His words said, “I'm willing.”

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Day 3

Reflection: God's character never changes. Ever.

Pray: God, today, help me to act like Joseph. I want the foundation of my faith to be you!

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Day 4

Read: Daniel 3

Thought/Insight: Jesus Hoops.

What is your faith in God dependent on? Are you trying to make God jump through hoops before you will trust Him?

I love the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These are three guys facing their own deaths because they stood up for something they believed in, and they trusted God, even without a certain outcome. That is the kind of stuff Hollywood makes movies about!

A couple of years ago, I was reading this “furnace story” and stumbled across a little phrase that for most of my life had gone almost completely ignored. Check this out. After hearing from Nebuchadnezzar, “The Boys” (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) comment to him that they *believed* God could rescue them, and that they really *hoped* that He would get them out of their situation. Then, this little quote is stuck in there, demonstrating how much they trusted God, “*but even if He does not*, we will not worship your gods.” That quote guaranteed them a trip to the furnace, but it also sealed their allegiance to and faith in God.

When I found that phrase, I was at a point in life where I was hurting. I *believed* God could help me. I really *hoped* that he would. However, I was unwilling to continue to trust Him unless the landscape of my situation changed. I was not demonstrating a genuine, authentic faith in Him. I was demonstrating a faith that said, “God, if you jump through these hoops that I am setting up, that make me happy and cause my life to turn out awesome, I will trust you.” I was stopping short of saying, “but even if you do not, I will still trust you completely.”

Authentic faith in Christ is one that says, “Lord, I believe that you can, and I hope that you do, but even if you don’t, I trust you.”

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2. John 4:28-30, 39-42. Who might the people be in verse 28, and how did Jesus use this woman to witness to them?
3. Acts 2:42-47. What are some of the things the early Christians might have had in common with one another?
4. Acts 17:1-4. Why do you think Paul made it his custom to always preach to the Jews? In what ways could he relate to them?
5. Acts 17:16-34. How did Paul seek to relate to those who were not Jewish, like Him?
6. Romans 7:15-25. What experience do all Christians share with one another?
- 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7. What did Paul and Silas use to connect with those to who they were ministering? How did they embrace people as Jesus did?

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Day 18

“The Ultimate Bridge”

Jesus built a bridge to all people in order to show them how much He understood them. One way He demonstrated this was in the way He spoke. Jesus told stories (parables) about things that were familiar to everyday people’s lives. He told stories about:

- Farming (Mark 4:1-20)
- Eating fish (Luke 11:11-13)
- Birds (Matthew 6:26)
- Flowers (Matthew 6:28-30)
- Friends (Luke 11:5-10)
- and Family (Luke 15:11-32)

Those things don’t sound very “spiritual” do they? We might think the Son of God would communicate in a highly intelligent, spiritual language that we wouldn’t understand. But Jesus chose to come down to our level instead of requiring us to come up to His. He got into our world so we wouldn’t have to struggle to comprehend His. He relates to us as Someone who has been there, because He has!

So what should we do? What should our response be?

Plan. What are some ways this week you can begin changing your thinking about identifying with people? What obstacles will you need to overcome? How do you plan on accomplishing this in your life? Write down the name of one person with whom you need to build a bridge of communication.

Act. Put your plan into practice. Go to the person with whom you need to build a bridge of communication with and attempt to talk to him/her. If you’re worried about taking a direct approach, try sending an email, text message, calling them or writing them a note and dropping it in the mail.

3. *Pray.* Before you take any steps, you need to pray. Make sure that there is nothing in your life that would cause the person you are trying to reach to not hear God. Ask God to search your heart. Ask Him to provide you with courage and wisdom and love.

Below are references that have something interesting to say about putting other’s first. Spend a few minutes looking up the passages, answering the questions and writing down a few relevant ideas that pop into your head.

1. Matthew 9:9-13. How did Jesus embrace that tax collectors rather than reject them at this dinner?

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Day 4

Read: Daniel 3:24-28

- Do you trust God? Why or why not?
- Has a friend or loved one broken your trust so badly that you have a hard time trusting others, including God? What do you need to do to get beyond that?
- Name three promises from the Bible you believe to be true about God.
- What areas of your life have you not trusted God completely with?

What “hoops” have you set up for God to jump through?

Reflection: Why would God keep his word to thousands of generations of people and not keep his promises to you? He can be trusted.

Pray: God, I believe that you have the power to help me. I hope that you do, but even if you don’t, I still love you and trust you.

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Day 5

Read: John 10:27-29

Thought/Insight: If/Then

Have you ever had an if/then friendship? You know what I mean. One of those friendships that says, “IF you wear the right clothes, THEN, you are my friend. IF you let me borrow \$5, THEN, we can still be friends. IF you drink at the party with me this weekend, THEN you are still cool. IF you sleep with me, THEN, we will still be a couple.” Our world is filled with If/Then relationships.

When my wife and I got married, we decided very early that we would attempt to root out all if/then statements from our relationship. We want our relationship to be based on unconditional love and not “performance goals” for each other that change constantly depending on our needs, wants, or desires. That decision has kept me from ever wondering about her love for me. I know that none of my actions affect the amount of love she has for me. If I forget to take out the trash or carry up the laundry, she still loves me. She may get frustrated, but she still loves me. If she comes home later than what she says or forgets to tell me that work called, I love her just the same. I may be frustrated, but my love for her never changes.

God is not interested in if/then relationships. His son died on the cross for us because we needed a savior and He promised that He would send one. We did not deserve it. As a matter of fact, every day, our sinful actions communicate to Him that we do not deserve one. However, His love for us is not if/then. It is not dependent on our actions. His love for us is constant. It never changes. Sure, there are consequences to sin, but His love for us never changes. Why then, does our trust in Him seem to waiver so often then? Other people can hurt us or we can have a bad week, and we find ourselves saying, “God, don’t you love me?” The Bible is filled with stories of people who got in trouble and God bailed them out, not because of their actions, but because of His goodness. His love for us is not if/then love. Do you love him in the same way?

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Day 17

Pray: Pray for your family, your friends, and those who you pass by everyday. Ask God to use you to make a lasting impression in their lives. Then talk with a family member or friend about things you could actually do to relate to others and meet their needs.

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Day 17

“The Ultimate Relater”

One of the biggest reasons Jesus came to this earth was to relate and identify with His creation. For some, that is a hard thing to realize. After all, how can a holy God who has infinite wisdom relate to humans whose emotions fluctuate like a raging sea? It does seem impossible – until you realize that Jesus identified with us by:

being tempted ~ Luke 4:1-2, 13
feeling lonely and rejected ~ Matthew 27:46
being abandoned ~ Matthew 26:36, 40
being abused ~ Mark 15:16-19
feeling sad ~ John 11:33-36
feeling used ~ John 6:26
feeling stressed and discouraged ~ Matthew 26:37-38
being angry ~ Mark 3:5
being tired ~ John 4:6
being busy ~ Mark 1:29-35, 39
being questioned and challenged ~ Mark 11:27-28
being misunderstood ~ Mark 3:21
feeling unappreciated ~ John 4:43-44
being hated ~ Mark 3:6
being ignored ~ Luke 7:44-46
being lied about ~ Matthew 26:59-61
feeling betrayed ~ Matthew 26:20-25
being thirsty ~ John 19:28
feeling hungry ~ Luke 4:2
being made fun of ~ Matthew 27:29
being forsaken, burdened by our sins ~ Matthew 27:46 & 2 Corinthians 5:21

Does it surprise you to discover that Jesus felt and experienced some of the very same things you experience? In every circumstance we face, Jesus is able to say, *“I know how you feel.”*

Reflection: How can you identify with the people God has placed in your life? The people that you see every day are real people with real feelings and real emotions and real needs. Are you putting other’s needs ahead of your own needs? Why or why not? Jesus came to identify with people in order to offer them what they so desperately needed. You and I are called to do the same.

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Day 5

Read: John 10:29

- Have you ever been put in an if/then position in a relationship? How did that make you feel?
- How do you view your relationship with God when it comes to your performance? Can you accept the fact that he loves you unconditionally?
- Do you have a hard time loving God unconditionally?
- According to John 10:29, name three things that can take you out of God’s hand (this is a trick question).

Figure out a way to regularly get in God’s word so you can see evidence of His fulfilled promises.

Reflection: If/then love does not reflect God’s love.

Pray: God, I love you...no matter what!

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Day 6

*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.
Proverbs 28:26*

Read: Genesis 2:1-24

Humans are the last thing that God created. Why do you think that He waited until the very end to create us?

Why did God put man in the garden? What does that tell us about our place on earth today?

Verse 25 says Adam and Eve were both naked and felt no shame. Why do you think that they were able to feel this way?

Verses 15 and 16 tell Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. Do you think that this is an unreasonable request?

Insight:

We all want to make wise decisions when it comes to living our lives, but so often we are tempted to choose options that are harmful or dangerous. Why do we make such poor decisions and become fools so often? The answer to this question many times lies in our inability to recognize or acknowledge who God is in our lives. If we remind ourselves that God is God and we are not, then we will be more likely to listen to Him. If we keep in mind that He is our loving heavenly Father and wants what is best for us, then we will be much more likely to follow His instructions on how to live even when we don't understand why.

In today's text we read about a God who created everything. The earth, plants, stars, sky everything – He created it all. Then after everything is created He took some of the dust that was in the ground and breathed life into it and formed humans. Out of all of God's creation He chose to combine His breath with some dirt and form people whom He would task with certain responsibilities.

Remembering that we were created by God for certain tasks is a critical component to making good decisions. We are free to choose many things in life, but not all of them are valuable for helping us accomplish the responsibilities that God has entrusted to us. The writer Paul says this in his first letter to the Corinthians, "Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is beneficial." (I Cor. 6:12) God gives us the ability to make choices about how we are going to live, but with that ability comes the capability of forgetting the place that God should occupy in our lives--namely, as the one who knows what is best for us.

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Day 16

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Day 16

“The Ultimate Download”

Jesus considered others before He considered himself by coming to earth on our behalf. Sometimes, the best way to identify with someone is to picture what it would be like to be that person. You ought to try it sometime. Think about someone at your school who is totally opposite from you and imagine being that person. We need to get into the world of other people in order to try and understand who people are and what they are really like. Jesus got into our world.

Read: John 1:1, 14, 18 and then consider the following questions.

Who is “the Word”?

What did John mean when he wrote “the Word became flesh”?

Did Jesus stop being God when He became human?

What did Jesus do when He “became flesh”? (v. 14)

What is it in verse 18 that tells you what Jesus did for us?

When we talk about how God became human, we’re unraveling a mystery. Most of us know things about where and how that amazing event took place, but when we stop and think how the infinite God of the universe humbled Himself to become one of us, it’s a huge mindblower!

Read: Philippians 2:5-8 ~ consider the humbling steps Christ took in becoming your Savior.

Verse 6 – Jesus, who was God, became human

Verse 7 – Not just any human, but a servant

Verse 8 – Not just any servant, but a humble one

Verse 8 – He was obedient – even to the point of death

Verse 8 – Not just any death, but a tortuous, cruel death on a cross

Jesus is the ultimate example of how you and I should consider others before ourselves. He is the only One who is worthy of any kind of praise. It is difficult, at times, to put other’s need ahead of our own. But be encouraged! The ultimate example has been “downloaded” for you to follow!

Read: Philippians 2:1-4 ~ consider how you can put others first in your life

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When we overlook the fact that we are the creatures created by the Creator we will tend to choose unwisely when faced with tough decisions. We are tempted to make these unwise choices because we stop looking towards the tasks that God has for us and instead look at the options that serve what *we think* are in our own best interest. In this process we choose things that are not beneficial for our lives.

God created you and wants to partner with you to help bring justice, mercy, love, kindness, compassion and humility to this earth. Making decisions that help this process along can sometimes be difficult because the choice between right and wrong is not always obvious. Sometimes the options that you have to choose from are not necessarily black and white. When faced with decisions that fall into the proverbial grey area ask yourself these questions, “Is what I am going to choose to do here going to help me acknowledge that God is God and I am not? Does choosing this option over that option help me accomplish the things that God wants me to do in this life or does my choice say that I do not trust God and I’m putting my trust in myself?”

Reflection: Remember that all the choices you make in this life matter eternally. To help guide you in making good decisions you need to start by remembering that God is God and you are not. What areas of your life do you need to remember that God is your loving Father who deserves loyalty and submission? Are there choices that you are making that might be saying that you don’t really trust God?

Pray: Father, You are creator and I am the created. Help me to see myself in the proper place so that I may make the kinds of decisions that honor You and help me to partner with You to accomplish your goals for this world.

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Day 7

*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.
Proverbs 28:26*

Read: Genesis 3:1-13

What are the “trees” that you are tempted to “eat” from?

If you were the devil and were trying to tempt someone like you into sinful patterns, what lies would you tell them? Are you buying into any of these lies?

In verse 9 God calls to Adam and Eve as if He could not find them. Why do you think that He does this? After all He is God and must have known where they were.

Insight:

Yesterday we saw that one of the keys to making wise choices in life is realizing our proper spot in relationship to God the Father. If we forget that God is our loving Father who wants nothing more than the best for us, then we will fall back into relying on ourselves and subsequently make unwise choices.

In today’s text Adam and Eve find themselves in the garden tempted by Satan and forced to make a choice of eating the fruit from the one tree they were not supposed to eat from. At first, it was clear to them that they should not eat fruit from this tree, but then Satan comes in the form of the snake and confuses the situation for them. The evil one is a master at confusing us in order to lead us towards making unwise decisions that could destroy our lives and relationship with Christ. In this story he tempts Eve in three ways. They are important to recognize because Satan still tempts us today in these same ways.

First of all, the tempter takes a command of God and exaggerates it in order to confuse Eve. He questions her by saying, “Did God really say that you must not eat from *any* tree in the garden?” He expands the command from one tree to all the trees and makes God sound unreasonable. In your life it might sound something like this, “Did God really say that you must not ever have sex?” The answer to that question is of course no, because God celebrates sex in marriage, but at this point in your life it might feel that way and Satan might use it to make you feel that God is asking something unreasonable from you. If you begin to think God is unreasonable then you have no reason to trust Him and make wise choices that reflect that trust.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 15

I am okay with just being decent at crocheting. I am okay with having a lot of things that I could work on in order to be great at them. Because what I want to be the best at, is following Christ. I read what Paul writes and I cringe a little bit. Can I say what he says? Can I ask people to follow me as I follow Christ because of how well I do it?

Here’s the thing. People are watching us, whether we ask them to or not. They’re watching. Some of them are friends, and some are people on the fringes of our life, but they are watching nonetheless. We have been given a tremendous responsibility, a cause to dedicate ourselves to in our following Christ, day in and day out. And how we handle this task has far-reaching implications, way beyond just our lives. The lives of countless others are affected by how favorably we portray Christ.

We have said that friends determine the direction and the quality of our lives. I think the opposite is just as true. We, as a friend, can help determine the direction and quality of other’s lives. Before doing anything else well, do this well. Follow Christ. By doing this, we are being the best kind of friend we can possibly be.

Reflection: What sorts of things are you really great at doing? Are you so good at these things that, just by having people watch you, they could learn it too? Based on how you follow Christ, would you want people to follow your example? If not, why? If so, why?

Make an effort this week to follow Christ well, by being a good friend.

Pray: God, help us to follow you in such way that other people are drawn to watch. May we reflect you in such a way that people better see and understand who you are by the way we live.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 15

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1

Insight:

There are not a lot of things that I claim to be great at. I would say I am average at a lot of things (cooking, cleaning, athletics, driving etc) and in need of improvement in a lot more. There are a lot of things that I love to do – whether I am good at them or not, I'm not sure, but I enjoy them. My husband, my family and my friends – they all make fun of me because I love to crochet. I know, most of you have probably stopped reading at this point, and I don't blame you. I probably sound a lot of like a grandmother and totally irrelevant, but for the sake of honesty I will put it out there. I love to crochet.

Now, even in this, I would not call myself a pro. It took me about seventeen attempts to make a hat – so I have quit trying to make things circular in shape and have stuck with the basic squares and rectangles. I have made three blankets and countless scarves (they make great gifts). I love doing it in front of the television. If my husband wants to watch a little college football, I whip out the old hook and yarn and get to work. Granted, doing it while sitting in front of the television allows more room for error. This happens because more often than not I end up watching the screen, and not the stitches and I miss a few, or double up one, or any number of things. And when that happens I have a choice. I can either undo some work and correct it, or bypass it, knowing no one else will notice my mistake and keep right on trucking.

Most of the time I keep going. Most of the time the mistakes aren't that noticeable. Most of the time I don't care that they are there. Most of the time. Do you know when I do care? When I am trying to teach someone else how to do it. When I have finally been successful in convincing someone that this really is a worthwhile skill, I care very much about what my stitches look like. Their impression of and feeling towards crocheting rests on my skill and success at doing what I claim I can do. They are after all following my example as I educate. If people are watching me, I want to be worth watching. I better step up my game (my crochet game...I know, still lame).

This is exactly Paul's point. I say, crochet as I crochet. Paul says, follow me as I follow Christ. If I mess up a few stitches, I give a bad representation of crocheting, of what the product is supposed to look like. If we mess up following Christ, we represent him poorly and give a false impression of what Christians look like. For me, a scarf is at stake. For us, as believers in Christ, so much more hangs in the balance.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 7

The next trick that the devil pulls is getting Eve to doubt the motivation of God by getting her to question what He said. "You will not surly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." In fact, when they finally do eat from the tree, their eyes are opened to the difference between good and evil and as a result humanity starts choosing things that are not good for it. God knew that we would be tempted to choose evil and tried to protect us from choosing it, not because He was scared of us, but because He wanted to protect us. In your life it might sound something like this, "You will not die if you give into partying. It is fun and if God really loved you He would want you to have a good time with your friends wouldn't He?"

The last scam that the serpent pulls is getting Eve to rely on her own feelings instead of trusting God. In verse 6 she sees that the fruit is good for food, pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, so she took some and ate it. We have impulses towards many things in life, but if we gave into all of them it would be harmful to our wellbeing. If we rely on our feelings when making choices we are bound to make some unwise decisions along the way because our moods and feelings change all the time depending on what is going on around us. If we base our decisions on feelings rather than trusting God's motivation for us then all Satan has to do is wait around long enough until we are in the wrong mood and then He has us. It might sound like this in your life. "I know that I should do this, but I'm just so mad at my parents for grounding me that I will show them by doing....". If you rely on feelings to make decisions then you are dead in the water when it comes to making good decisions that will cause you to live the kind of life God want for you.

Reflection: Life is difficult and decisions are not always easy to make. Most times the choices are not black and white. To help make good decisions, ask yourself these questions, "Is Satan trying to get me to overreact to God's commands? Do I doubt God's motivation for my life by choosing to do this or that? Is my life summed up by reacting to feelings instead of relying on the promises of God? Is this a wise choice for me to make in respect to where I want to end up someday?"

Pray: Father, thank You for loving me and caring about what is best for me. Lead me not into temptation today and help me to trust that Your motivation for my life is the best thing for me.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 8

*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.
Proverbs 28:26*

Read: Psalm 37

What do you think it means to “delight in the Lord”? Do you delight in the Lord?

When you see others who make bad decisions prosper in some way from their actions, how does that make you feel?

Do you experience the reality of verses 23 and 24?

How can you show your gratitude to the Lord today?

According to this psalm what awaits those who live a wicked life?

Insight:

As a teenager you see people around you who are making bad decision and often times these people seem to be the ones, “Flourishing like a green tree planted in its native soil” (verse 35). They are more popular because of their parties. They have boyfriends and girlfriends because they are willing to do things physically that you are not willing to do. They get better grades because they cheat on tests. It doesn’t seem fair does it? This often times makes it hard for you to see the value in making good decisions when those who are making bad ones seem to prosper. But the writer of this poem reminds us that God will take care of the righteous and that the way of the wicked will perish. Clinging to the truth that God is in control can help us in times of confusion.

This psalm starts out with a warning about getting worked up about the good fortune of the wicked. “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for they are like grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” The writer again reinforces this idea in verse 7 when he says, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him, do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their schemes. Do you fret, or worry when others succeed by wicked means?

Twice he warns about fretting over the success of evildoers because, fretting “only leads to evil.”(verse 8) If you are more worried about the decisions of others, instead of your own, you are bound to become angry, which will lead to you also taking part

A 20 day journey with God

Day 14

Project Runway is way more entertaining when I can commentate on it with someone on the couch beside me. Reading is more fun when I can talk about it and process it with a listening ear. And that is just the small stuff. There has been, and there will be, big, hard, stuff that comes along, and I don’t want to be, and I can’t be, alone when it does.

People need people. We are not intended to be loners in this world. We need to allow ourselves to take a seat. Allow our arms to be lifted. Allow people to come in. Allow them to come close, whether we feel like we require it not. Because someday it will be essential to have the help and the hands, on either side of us, to make it. We were created for relationships. We were created for this.

Reflection: Why do you think we sometimes think we can do life alone? What is an area of life that is easy for you to ask for help in? What is an area of life that is hard to ask for help in? What is one way this week where you can be intentional about getting help for someone when you would normally want to do it alone?

Pray: God, thanks for friends who surround us on either side and lift up our arms. Help us to keep from thinking we get through life without the help of others, and when we need help, give us the strength to ask for it.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 14

Read: Exodus 17:8-14

Insight:

People need people. I don't care what anyone else says. We as humans were created for relationship – and not just with God, but with each other as well. As basic as this seems, I forget that sometimes. Sometimes I think I could curl up on my couch with a good novel and some tivoed episodes of Project Runway and be happy for the rest of my life. But, as appealing as this sounds to me, inevitably I realize sooner or later, I need more than a remote and a book - I need people.

I think God either finds my lapses into this thinking totally insulting or absolutely hilarious. Maybe it is a little bit of both. Usually, he puts me in some sort of desperate situation where I require help from another human, like getting lost in downtown Atlanta, or reaching for something from the top shelf of the pantry, to help me realize, again, I can't go at it alone.

We just read the story of Moses, a powerful and influential man, who had more reason than anyone else to think he didn't need people – especially whining and complaining people, like the Israelites. I have to wonder if when he went to the top of the mountain while the Israelites were fighting below, if part of him just wanted to get away.

We have no way of knowing, but I don't think it took very long for Moses to get tired of holding up his own hands. It takes me about thirty seconds. And in one of the most compelling word pictures I have ever found in Scripture, we see how desperately and mightily he needed friends. He needed their support, their strength, their endurance, their assistance and their persistence – not just metaphorically, but literally.

What do you think was going through Moses' mind as he sat on the rock and allowed his right hand men to lift his deadened arms in the air? I picture his head bowed, his brow furrowed and his back bent. And I imagine this day being engrained in his memory forever. If he was ever tempted to think he was too good for the help of others, he need only think back to the faithfulness of Aaron and Hur as they tirelessly came alongside him and empowered him to win the battle. And should that memory start to fade, he could just as easily go back to the scroll God had him write after the Israelites won, because this was "something to be remembered". A great military feat, yes. But I think there was another reason for writing it down as well. Write this down, because Moses, you can't forget, and Joshua, can't forget, and those who follow, can't forget, you can't do life alone.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 8

in evil activity.

It is important to keep in mind that evaluating life by only what you see in the here and now is deceptive. Do not jump to conclusions and forget that the God you serve is one that cares for His people and will lift them up in His timing. Jesus reminds us in Luke 14:11, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

If you find yourself looking around at others and getting frustrated at their prosperity in the midst of making unwise decisions, try asking yourself the question Jesus asked, "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his soul in the end? (Mark 8:35-37)

Reflection: The Pharisees were always concerned with the deeds of others, but time and time again Jesus' interaction with them challenges them to stop looking at how others act and to start being concerned with their own hearts. As you seek to serve God by living a life that pleases Him, be careful that the deeds of others do not cause you to be jealous of their achievements. One of the keys to making wise decisions is remembering that your Father in heaven alone is to be concerned with the deeds and actions of others.

*Do you need to confess jealousy over the action of others?
If so, confess this out loud to someone today.*

Pray: Father, You alone are the Judge of the deeds of men. Show me how to focus on living a life that pleases You.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 9

*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.
Proverbs 28:26*

Read: Psalm 38

How has sin affected the writer of this Psalm?

What is his attitude towards God?

Are there patterns of sin that you have never confessed to God?

How could having a forgiving heavenly Father, help you make wise choices?

Insight:

In his book, “In The Grip of Grace” Max Lucado tells the story of the boy who was shooting rocks with a slingshot. The boy could never hit his target. As he was in his Grandma’s backyard one day, he spied her pet duck. On impulse he took aim and let it fly. The stone hit, and the duck was dead. The boy panicked and hid the bird in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. After lunch that day, Grandma told Sally to help with the dishes. Sally responded, “Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn’t you Johnny?” And she whispered to him, “Remember the duck!” So, Johnny did the dishes. What choice did he have? For the next several weeks he was at the sink often. Sometimes for his duty; sometimes for his sin. “Remember the duck,” Sally would whisper when he objected. So weary of the chore, he decided that any punishment would be better than washing more dishes, so he confessed to killing duck. “I know, Johnny,” his Grandma said, giving him a hug. “I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you.” He’d been pardoned, but he thought he was guilty. Why? He had listened to the words of his accuser.

We all have those unfortunate moments of weakness when we make bad decisions and fall into temptation. But if we are not careful we can let a one-time slip up develop into a pattern of life that can destroy us. When we fall, we feel guilty and try hard to not repeat the same mistake. In time we may find ourselves repeating that misstep, only this time we do not feel quite as guilty as the last time. Eventually this gives way to a pattern, and this pattern becomes a habit, and this habit develops into a way of life. The key to stopping this blueprint for life is confession.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 13

In a way, I hear Naomi saying to Ruth, “Save yourself!” In a way I hear her cry to Ruth to go on with out her, that she can’t hold on. And in a way, I see Ruth pull Naomi back up in the poetic and powerful words she shares with her. According to Ruth, nothing but death will separate them. Here they become more than daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, they become friends.

You know what I think is one of the most difficult things about friendships? The fact that you care, the fact that you are invested in someone and are concerned about their well-being. You celebrate their wins, you mourn their loses, you do life together. Doing life together can be hard. Being someone who cares, being a friend, is not easy.

Strange that God made it that way on purpose. But he did. When it comes to friendships, no one is isolated, no one is free from the responsibility, or free from the pain and the privilege that is relationship. And it is a pain, and it is a privilege, and it belongs to each of us as it belonged to Naomi and Ruth.

That is why friendship is so valuable. It costs you something. It costs you your comfort, your safety and to a degree your freedom. True friendship costs you a bit of yourself. Don’t think Ruth didn’t lose anything when she decided to pick up and leave with Naomi. She lost the way life had always been, but for what gain? A friend. An ally. A companion.

If you haven’t already, you will, some day, be at the place where someone cries out to you, “I can’t hold on! Save yourself!” You will be given the choice, to stop being concerned, to stop caring and to move on or at least to the degree where you remain safe. When it comes, hunker down, and use an arm to pull them back up on the tube. Go where they go, not because it is easy, but because you are a friend. Be a Ruth to a Naomi – despite the pain, and because of the privilege. Be a friend.

Reflection: If you were Ruth, would you have had a hard time deciding to stay? Have you ever been a position to stand by a friend when it would have been easier to leave? Did it cost you something to be faithful to them? Is there someone in your life now who needs a hand and your help to be pulled up? Think of someone specifically now...What can you do this week to help them?

Pray: Father, thank you for friends and the investment they make in us, and the chance we have to invest in them. Help us to be faithful to these people in our lives, even when it is not comfortable or easy.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 13

Read: Ruth 1:1 – 18

Insight:

I love tubing. My husband and I live near a lake and have friends who have a lake house. When summer rolls around, the boat, the bathing suits, the life jackets and the tubes come out. I love it!

Growing up, my family had friends with a lake house too. These friends were hard-core when it came to tubing. The object was not to create a fun/relaxing/somewhat exhilarating tubing experience. Their goal was to throw you off, get you airborne, land in such a way where you would take in some lake water, and then come bobbing back to the surface a little water logged and a little worse for the wear.

I will never forget one summer and one particular ride with my sister Elyse. We climbed on the tube, got situated, gave the signal, and took off. Now, this ride was only enjoyable for so long, because going that fast, the water drops felt like bullets hitting our skin, our eyes stung from the wind and our muscles ached from our tight grip. At times it was unclear whether we were laughing or crying. The driver of the boat noticing our signs of weakness swung the boat around in a tight curve over its own wake. My sister bounced high in the air, but hung on with one hand. When she landed, all of her but her arm was in the water. Elyse looked up at me, and in complete seriousness, and with what seemed like our lives at stake, said “I can’t hold on, save yourself!” It was not funny at the time, because it really seemed like this was life or death, but fifteen years later it is hard to keep a straight face when talking about it!

Instead of letting her go though, I helped pull her up and back on to the tube, only to have us both get mercilessly thrown from it a few minutes later.

I love that story. I love Elyse’s flare for the dramatic, and her selfless, but totally exaggerated plea for me to save myself on the tube. I love it because in the face of what seemed like imminent danger, Elyse gave me the permission to go, even urged me to go, and I chose instead to stay.

We just read about Ruth and Naomi. You may be familiar with the story because verses sixteen through eighteen are used fairly regularly in wedding ceremonies, but I find it interesting that in their original context they were said between friends. These particular friends were hurt and scared, and would not have been blamed at all, should Ruth had chosen to leave. But these were words shared between friends that decided to remain faithful to each other, circumstances aside.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 9

By realizing that we have a God who is willing and able to forgive us when we sin, it frees us to not buying into the lies of the evil one. If we are slow to confess we may find ourselves like Johnny in the story above – enslaved by our accuser.

Making wise choices is dependent upon our ability to learn from our past mistakes and ask for forgiveness. The author of Psalm 38 has been making unwise decisions and is experiencing the consequences for his sin. (verses 1-8) He realized that the key to making better decisions in the future depends upon his confession of sin and learning from his past mistakes. He says, “I confess my iniquity (sins) I am troubled by my sins...O Lord, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior”

Reflection: How honest am I with God? Do I believe that God is willing and able to forgive me when I mess up? Do I ask for forgiveness regularly? Do I accept this forgiveness?

Take time and confess before the Lord.

Pray: Father, forgive me for not asking for forgiveness. Teach me to learn from my past and to live into the freedom You give me in Jesus.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 10

*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.
Proverbs 28:26*

Read: Psalm 39

What happened in verse 2 when the writer of this psalm kept still?

Why did he, “cry for help”?

Have you ever prayed verse 4?

What does verse 6 say to you?

Insight:

Have you ever made a New Years resolution? Were you able to keep it? Most of us make some vows at the beginning of a new year with good intentions of keeping them, but after a few weeks we tend to go right back to our old patterns, don't we? Most of these vows center on us making wise choices in some area of our lives, and for a short while we prevail.

The setting for this psalm could easily have the writer sitting on New Years Eve looking back at a year filled with disappointments and making some vows for the New Year. Here are his resolutions: Resolution #1 “I will watch my ways.” Resolution #2 “I will keep my tongue from sin.”

David, the writer of this psalm had every intention of keeping these vows but he did what you and I have done plenty of times. He broke his resolutions. David says he is going to curb his tongue when the ungodly are around. And he really tries. But look what happens when he does. He stood there in silence not even speaking of good things. He says that the turmoil just grew to a boiling point inside. And finally he exclaims that, “my thoughts grew hot within me” and “I spoke my tongue with anger”. He just snapped and started to make an unwise choice that he knew he did not want to make.

Been there? You promised yourself that you weren't going to use certain words anymore. But when the emotions burned inside of you, the boiling point was reached and language poured out of you like you were a stand up comedian.

You promised yourself you were going to stop cheating in school this past year but when your grades got low, you got frustrated and resorted to your old ways. So much for that resolution.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 12

to illustrate here on earth his purposeful love for us. This shows me that God cares not just about my relationship with Him, but about my relationship with others, because sometimes they serve as the best demonstration of who He is, here on Earth.

Reflection: Are you in the habit of “confessing” to someone? Who is the “me too” in your life? Do you find it hard to trust someone with your “secrets”? What is keeping you from confession? If you have ever confessed to someone, and been shown mercy, do you remember what you felt like afterwards? Take a moment and remember.

Pray: God, thank you so much for friends. Thank you for giving us a way to be healed from all of the “stuff” we have in our lives by simply talking to those we trust and who love you. Help us to find the strength and confidence to get in the habit of confessing to one another. We love you.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 12

Read: Proverbs 28: 13; Proverbs 28:26; James 5:16

Insight:

Keeping secrets is hard work. Mustering up the strength to keep your mouth shut can be exhausting. I am not talking about hanging on to the latest juicy piece of gossip you are just dying to reveal to any person willing to listen. I am talking about your own little secrets. You know what I mean - the stuff that goes on in your head and your heart; the things that replay themselves when you are lying awake at night. They are mistakes, slip-ups, and misjudgments. And you can't silence them, but you don't think you can tell anyone – and so they become your own dirty little secret.

I hate secrets. I hate the feeling they create in the pit of my stomach. They feel so heavy, they ruin my appetite and they make me feel sick. So, I have a policy. I don't keep my own secrets. If there is something, anything, that I am afraid to tell someone, I know that means I need to tell someone.

The book of Proverbs was written by the wisest man to ever have lived, King Solomon. In this book he has a lot to say about wisdom and foolishness, and if there is anyone who knows a thing or two about that, it would be him. I believe Solomon when he calls the person who trusts in himself a fool, and that keeping stuff to ourselves inhibits us from becoming who God intended us to be.

Silence in your secrets eats away at your soul, “but whoever confesses... finds mercy”. I think you could also find relief, freedom and...a friend. My husband meets with one of his best friends every Monday morning at a Starbucks, Atlanta Bread Company or a local sandwich shop. And every Monday, he and his friend confess to one another, and every Monday they find mercy with one another. They have a saying: “Me needs a me too”. Sometimes the best thing we can do spiritually is find a listening ear in a friend, who can relate, who can encourage, who, along with us, peels back the layers of who they appear to be, and reveals who they really are. And when we do this, we are healed.

These are the kinds of friends I want in my life. These are the kinds of friends I need in my life. We all do. We all need friends who we can trust our souls to, in confidence that they will show us a big part of who God is, by showing us mercy. And I think that is the best part about confessing to one another, about sharing our secrets, about trusting not in ourselves, but in one another. I leave having seen a picture of God. A friend who listens and who extends grace imitates Christ and reminds me, as I so often need reminding, that God is even more faithful to hear, forgive and encourage. What an awesome thing God has done by giving us friends

A 20 day journey with God

Day 10

You promised yourself that you would not let the crowd influence you into doing something that you knew you did not want to do, but you got frustrated at always being left out, so you gave in.

You promised yourself you were going to be more controlled by the Spirit this year but, when you were wronged by that person you got angry and forgot all about forgiveness and patience and the flesh took over again.

When it comes to making good choices in our lives we can learn a key principle from the writer of this psalm. The concept is that there are certain times when we are more vulnerable to making unwise choices. That time is when we are experiencing high emotions. In the case of this psalm David, was trying to keep his mouth shut, but as “his heart grew hot within” and “the fire burned” he “spoke his tongue with anger.”

When you are angry at your parents for something and your “heart grows hot within” it is important to remember that you are more likely to make some unwise decisions during that time. Have you ever said something like this to yourself in a moment of anger, “I’ll show them...”?

When you are going through a break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend you are in a state of emotional upheaval and are much more likely to go out and do something stupid. It might be drinking to numb the pain. It might be a quick hook up with someone to help you feel loved.

Reflection: When you find yourself in the midst of an emotional time, stop and remember that you are much more likely to choose unwisely during this period. Knowing when you are vulnerable to temptation is a principle that will go a long way in terms of helping you make wise choices.

Challenge: Ask someone this week to be your partner in times of high emotional turmoil. Make a vow with each other to call and hold one another accountable to making wise choices during tough times.

Pray: Father, “my hope is in You.” Show me how to lean on You in times of despair and navigate my way through this life in a way that pleases You.

A 20 day journey with God

Day 11

Read: Acts 4:36; 9:1-9, 26-28; 13:1-3

Insight:

My name is Hebrew for “Princess”. Growing up, I loved knowing that. I loved picking up magnets, key chains, paperweights, and certificates that had my name and meaning on it and proudly displaying them in my already cluttered room. I thought my name itself was pretty common and not that cool, but the fact that it meant princess made it way better. Unfortunately for me, in the era we live in now, the meaning of names isn’t that significant. It is more important that the name is trendy, unique and goes well with our last names. This has not always been the case. During the time of the Bible, names were very valuable. People named their children based on what they hoped they would become. The angel Gabriel told Mary to name her son Jesus, which means, “God saves” - and Jesus was sent by God to save mankind from their sins.

We just read about a man named Barnabas. His name probably wasn’t topping the list of most popular names at the time, and we probably won’t find it on a lot of key chains and magnets today, but it did have one thing going for it. It’s meaning. Barnabas means “Son of Encouragement”, and I think there is a reason that the writer of the book of Acts decided to include that for us to read. I think we learn a lot about who Barnabas was, just by learning his name.

Picture the scene for a second. Previously earning a living searching out and killing Christians, Saul has an encounter with a bright light and a big God on his way to a place called Damascus. This experience leaves him temporarily blinded and permanently changed. He does a 180 degree transformation and decides he had it all wrong. Instead of persecuting Christians, he becomes one, and as a result wants to start hanging out with believers back in Jerusalem. The disciples there, rightfully so, were a little nervous about this so-called “conversion”. How did they know this wasn’t some sort of trick and they weren’t all going to end up being turned in and killed for their faith?

But then Barnabas comes into the picture, the Son of Encouragement. He talks with these disciples, shares Saul’s testimony and it is his belief in Saul that changes their mind. As a result, so begins the most influential Christian ministry of all time. Saul is accepted by the disciples, hears the call of God on his life, and as he sets out to go, Barnabas goes with him.

What does this tell me? It tells me that we all need a Barnabas in our lives. It means we need a Son of Encouragement who believes in us, stands up for us, and goes the distance when the opportunity arises to prove it to us. This is the ally who, when all

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other evidence of our past and our failure demonstrates otherwise, has confidence in who we really are. You know what else it tells me? We need to be a Barnabas to someone. I want to be defined by the encouragement I give and the presence I am in a friend’s life. By being faithful to one another in our relationships we are equipping each other to do and become great things. Friendship, true friendship, is a powerful thing. What if in the story of our lives and our relationships, when our name was mentioned, it was followed by, “supporter”, “motivator”, “nurturer”, “promoter”? What if every time someone spoke of us, they immediately followed with a description of how excellent a friend we were? This is Barnabas’ story, a man remembered and noted as an encourager. Will it be ours?

Reflection: If you could come up with any meaning for your name, that describes who you are now, what would it be and why? If you could come up with any meaning for your name that describes who you want to be, what would it be and why? What is keeping you from becoming who you want to be? Have you had a Barnabas in your life? If so, take a couple of minutes to call, email or visit them and them know how thankful you are for them. Who can you be a Barnabas to?

Pray: Father, thank you for making us with the need to receive encouragement, and thank you for making us with the ability to give it. Open our eyes to who it is that might need our help, our support and our love.