



31 Days With Jesus



Who Is Jesus?

He is God (Matthew 26:63-64)

He became a person (John 1:14)

He taught with authority (Mark 1:22)

He healed the sick (Matthew 4:23)

He hung out with the outcasts (Matthew 9:10-11)

He got angry at the religious fakes (Matthew 23:27)

He was persecuted unfairly (Matthew 26:59-60)

He was tempted in every way (Hebrews 4:15)

He never made a mistake (Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 3:5)

He died, rose from the dead, and continues to live to this day

(1 Corinthians 15:20)

He made it possible to have a relationship with God (John 3:16-17)

He can sympathize with our struggles (Hebrews 4:15)

He Loves Us (Ephesians 3:19)

In this devotional, you'll get to explore for yourself the life of Jesus as told by one of His followers. Matthew was one of the twelve disciples and walked with Jesus for three years. When Jesus found him, his character was questionable: as a tax collector he was cheating his own people. Jesus transformed his life, and Matthew would later write the story of Jesus' life so others might also be transformed.

Each day includes a scripture reading, a short inspirational thought, and space for you to reflect on what God is teaching you. Having a quiet time 31 days in a row is tough! Pick a time when you are at your best: if you're a morning person, consider the morning. If you're a night person...you get the picture. Pick a place that is free of distractions. Disconnect from the internet, your phone, anything that'll grab your attention away from God.

Having a quiet time for 31 days is REALLY tough. If you miss a day, don't beat yourself up! Jump back into the swing of things, don't stress yourself out by trying to "catch up." The point is to grow closer to God, so read at your own pace. The goal is not to "finish," but to grow.

Day 1 – Matthew 1:1-25

You may be thinking, “what a crazy way to start the New Testament . . . with a bunch of long, too many-syllable names. If there’s 30 more days of this I’ll have had some good pronunciation practice but reading the New Testament is going to be a drag!”

I know how you feel! I remember thinking the same thing the first time I read the first chapter of Matthew over twenty years ago. Actually, I laughed at the name Jehoshaphat because it sounded like “Joe’s-so-fat.” But, over the years, I’ve learned the list of names you read are important because they set the stage for Jesus as he Savior of the world. Everyone was looking for the Savior but no one expected Him to be a baby. The list of names reveal the power of God’s work, behind the scenes, to fulfill some big-time promises (also known as prophecies) from the Old Testament (all the writing in the Bible before Jesus).

I’ve known a lot of people who read these names and immediately gave up reading the Bible because they didn’t get it. In frustration they say, “hey, this doesn’t read like a love-letter, it reads like a historical genealogy from my history class.” If you feel this way today, my response is similar to how the angel responded to Joseph, “don’t be afraid... don’t hesitate to dig-in and read... you’ll never be the same.” Joseph was surprised with his new adventure and he got to hold the King of the world. May you, too, be surprised with this new reading adventure... soon you’ll hold the truths that are out of this world.

Day 2 – Matthew 2:1-23

Today you read about God's sign (a star) signaling the birth of Jesus. As I read this chapter I realized that all the key players were confronted with the news of Jesus Christ and they acted in different ways.

- The wise men (or the Magi's) chose to find Jesus and rearranged their life to seek Him out.
- The religious leaders (the priests) knew the prophecy concerning the birth of a Messiah and chose to ignore the news of Jesus.
- Herod heard the news and chose to oppose and destroy Jesus out of fear and jealousy.

All three made choices regarding Jesus--all different choices. Do their choices sound familiar to you? Do you know people who have made choices in each of these three ways?

As you walk with Christ, through the New Testament this year, it's my experience that you will respond the way the Magi did and be overcome by Jesus' presence. When God's Word impacts your life you will respond in worship. There's really no other appropriate response other than worship. As your life begins to change don't be silent to those who ignore and oppose... your praise, your life, your words, and your tenderness will act as a strong sign that God is alive.

Day 3 – Matthew 3:1-17

About thirty years has passed from the time you read yesterday (in chapter 2) to what you read today (in chapter 3). Now, you read about John the Baptist, a prophet, a man chosen by God for a mission to set the stage and prepare people for Jesus. John the Baptist's mission included a message--"repent." Repent is basically a fancy word which means, "to change one's mind and act on that change. To turn around. To turn from living the world's way to living God's way."

Did you notice who came to hear John the Baptist's message? Those who sincerely wanted to confess their sins and change, as well as those who wanted to be part of the "in" crowd. The first group experienced baptism and life-change while the others received a lecture and a slap to their character.

Which group do you most identify with? Do you go to church because you need to hear a message that will lead to life-change, or do you go because you want to be seen? When was the last time you asked yourself this question, "Why do I really go to church?"

John the Baptist had a message of change. Jesus Christ is the way to bring about change. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He will change you from the inside out..."

What needs to be changed in your life? It's never too late! Do you need to change your motive for going to church? Is it your heart? Do your actions need change? You can't make any significant life-change without God's help and power...that's a big message in the Bible! That's the goal of the Christian journey... change. That's the reason for this church! By the way, the beginning of the year is a great time to make changes!

Day 4 – Matthew 4:1-11

As you take this daily walk with Christ you'll discover that although Jesus was human, He was also divine (meaning He was God). This is both difficult to figure out and exciting to comprehend.

As you just read, His human life wasn't without temptation. He got the royal treatment from the King of Liars. But, unlike Adam and Eve's first encounter and temptation with Satan, Jesus won! Because He won, we can also win over temptation if we use the same tools Jesus did. Notice Jesus didn't use His supernatural powers (although He could have—remember He was divine) but He used what is available to us today. He used:

- (a) The power of the Holy Spirit (verse 1), and
- (b) God's Word ("It is written").

These are available to us today! If you are a Christian you have been given the Holy Spirit—God within you. Ask for God's help during times of temptation. He wants you to win. Also, as you read God's Word you will learn some promises from God that you can use to counteract temptation.

The more you grow in your faith, the more you will be tempted. If your life isn't being lived for God, you're no threat to Satan's work. But, when you put God first and walk His way you will threaten the enemy and you can guarantee the door to temptation will fly open. Because Jesus defeated Satan, He became a walking example to every human past, present, and future that He is the ultimate conqueror. If that doesn't get you excited you may be dead!

Day 5 – Matthew 4:12~25

If I walked up to you at Taco Bell and said, “drop your burrito and follow me” you would probably think I was crazy and you’d call the police or punch me out. But for the guys you read about today; Simon, Andrew, James, and John it was a different story. They followed. They dropped everything and followed Christ. Why?

I think it’s because Jesus gave them a calling that was bigger than their trade—fishing. He used terms they could identify with to talk about a more important type of fishing—people. Fishing for souls—changed lives. A more attractive catch don’t you think? Think about it, what would you rather do? Pull in a big-eyed bass or open the door to heaven for someone in desperate need to walk through? Can you see why they dropped everything and followed? They sensed a higher calling.

Some say Jesus asked them because fishermen had to have patience and faith to fish. Patience in the waiting game and faith that there were actually fish out there. Do you think you have what it takes to follow Christ’s call to be fishers of people? Do you have patience to allow God to use your life to send a message to your non-believing friends? Do you have faith that God can and will use you? If you do, drop your nets and follow Him...there’s a lot of lost fish out there who need what you have and who you know.

Day 6 – Matthew 5:1-16

I often imagine being one of Jesus' committed disciples and sitting near Him as He talks about living. Here, He speaks to His closest followers about attitudes that flow from a pure heart. Jesus' words are very exciting to read and yet very difficult to apply!

Jesus paints a picture of happiness in verses 3-10, and then He gives us a strong image of how followers are to "look" to the world. Basically, He says, "this is why you're here...to be different." (my paraphrase of verses 13-16) Yesterday you read about a higher calling that affects what you do—fish for people. Today's reading impacts who we are to be—different. Not "weird" different...but "different" different. Different so you stand out in a crowd...not because you're crude but you stand out because you're a person with character. You are different because of whose you are.

Jesus uses the images of salt and light to help us see that we are to counteract decay (salt) and darkness (light) which are symbols of living the world's way. I love the paraphrase (from The Message) that reads, "You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth...and you're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world."

Are you living a life that's different from the world's way? Not a life that brings attention to itself, but a life that counteracts the decay of hatred and brings light to the darkness of evil? How can you be different today?

Day 7 – Matthew 5:17-48

If I only had a few verses of the Bible to read every day, this section would be among my top choices because it is so practical. When I read this section of scripture I often personalize the tender words of Jesus saying something like, “I want you to grow up spiritually so let me give you some ideas on how.”

As a child, I didn’t always appreciate my parents telling me to “grow up.” But, now that I’m a parent, I understand their motive. They wanted me to live out what they were confident I already knew. In these verses, Jesus gives us very practical examples of doing what we already know. He shows us what it means to live a God-first life...a different life (remember the salt and light from yesterday?).

Jesus uses the religious leaders (Pharisees) as bad examples. Jesus saw their religion as a ritual and not a living relationship. The Pharisees were more concerned about looking religious than they were concerned about their heart. Jesus wants us to know that holiness starts with the heart being changed and then the changed heart impacts our actions to others.

You see, starting with the action is too similar to acting...people who act right might impress humans but God isn’t impressed. God is concerned with our hearts. You might even re-read this section and look for the heart-talk. Jesus uses issues such as murder and adultery as examples of heart-talk. Jesus says, “you’re concerned about murder (action) and I’m concerned about your anger (heart). You’re concerned about adultery (action) and I’m concerned about your lust (heart).

You’ll see more of this type of teaching throughout your daily walk with Christ. If you’re concerned about keeping up with this reading schedule (action) remember, God is more concerned with what you learn and apply (heart) than if you finish.

Day 8 – Matthew 6:1-34

It is clear that Jesus knows the inside of our hearts. He knows that we humans tend to go for whatever is the easiest way or for whatever will bring us the most attention. Since that is our human nature, He knows He must give us specific instruction regarding even the normal activities of our faith; prayer, giving, and fasting--some spiritual habits that are foundational to Christian maturity. Jesus wants to make it very clear that these habits should not become a masquerade for attention or an illusion of righteousness. If we are to pray, give, and fast, Jesus is more concerned about our inside (our heart) than how we look to others (our outside performance). Can you tell the heart is a big thing for Jesus?

After reading this chapter I thought to myself; “Don’t fake it...God knows you and He is crazy about you the way you are. Don’t worry...live...be honest with your faith. Learn to pray, give, and fast because you want to develop an intimacy with God, not because you want to impress others. Don’t live to gather things because things produce worry. Don’t worry about getting...receive God’s giving. Remember, if God is impressed with simple things like lilies...He’s really impressed with you! He’ll take care of you.”

Today, remember that if you try to live your life for others’ approval...it won’t last. (See 1 Pet. 1:24 if you like). Focus on your heart and live your life for God’s reward and praise...this you can’t lose and it will last forever.

Day 9 – Matthew 7:1-29

In the last two verses of chapter 7 we read that the crowds were amazed at the teachings of Jesus. No doubt! God in flesh, the Creator of the Universe, the designer of all humanity, teaching people about how to live their life right. That's awesome! "Amazed" almost seems too mellow of a reaction.

As you walk with Christ this month, I want to encourage you to take special notice of how many times you read that people were blown away or amazed by Jesus' words, His actions, and how He lived. You'll probably find that they were amazed because...

He had more than charisma, He had character.

He had more than personality, He had divine power.

He had more than crowd teaching, He had personal tenderness.

He had more than confidence, He had compassion.

He had more than words, He had wisdom.

In His words of wisdom He gave an illustration about a wise and foolish builder. The wise builder not only heard the words of Christ but he put them into action. The foolish builder crashed because he heard the words and didn't apply them.

You too may be amazed at the teachings of Jesus, but you can be amazed and a fool at the same time if you don't apply His words to your life. Make a commitment today to become a wise builder and develop a solid foundation for your life that is based on God's Word...and your life will become amazing.

Day 10 – Matthew 8:1~9:39

As you read chapters 8 and 9 you'll find that Matthew has written about ten miracles of Jesus and placed them together. Did you find all ten in your reading? Isn't it exciting to read about the power of God that was displayed in Christ? Can you imagine what it would have been like walking with Christ and watching Him? Seeing Him firsthand heal a leper, control the sea, and raise a girl from the dead. I know how I feel just reading about His miracles 2000 years later, I can't even imagine what a thrill it would have been to follow His actual steps.

As you walk with Christ through the scriptures, be careful not to miss some of the subtle words spoken by Jesus in the midst of the supernatural crowd pleasing miracles. For example, in-between the crazy man/pig episode (8:28-34) and the girl being raised from the dead (9:23-26) Jesus makes a statement about why He came to earth. Did you catch it? In Matthew 9:12-13 Jesus explains why he came to earth and who He came to reach:

The lost.

The non-religious.

The outcasts.

We see the heart of Christ again when He looks at the crowds and His heart breaks with compassion because the people looked so lost...like sheep without a shepherd (9:36-37). This truth is very important for you to know as you continue to read the New Testament. The bigness of His miracles helped people see He really was who He said He was (God in flesh) but the words He spoke reveal to us the heart of God.

I'm so glad you're reading God's word and seeing His power and hearing about His heart. Keep looking, keep learning, and you'll see God do some type of miracle in your life.

Day 11 – Matthew 10:1-42

Wow! There's a lot to unpack after today's reading. This is one of the those chapters you could study for days and then, when you think you really understanding everything Jesus communicated, you'd probably only be half way to the depths of His work.

As Jesus sent out 12 disciples to preach and heal, He prepared them with a "don't give up" message that speaks to us now. Today, Christians are part of a war...it's been going on a long time. God declared war on Satan (Genesis 3:15), Satan goes after Jesus (Matthew 4), and now we live in a world that Satan influences. Because of this, following Jesus has its difficulties.

The Christian life is a battle and Jesus wants us to know about our future and that following Him and living God's way has a cost... As a Christian you will be opposed, it may be from:

by religious people (v. 17),
by the government (v. 18-19), or
by your family (v. 21)

When you face opposition for your faith (and I hope you do because that means you're living God's way), view the attacks as minor wounds that a loving God easily heals. Your flesh may injure but Jesus makes it clear that our soul can't be harmed (10:28) and that we don't have to fear. "Fear not" is a strong message of Jesus. Why? Because God's love for you is incredible (10:31).

Isn't it wild that God loves you so much that He even has your hairs numbered? Why? Because God is concerned with every detail of your life and He wants you to know it. Trust Him as your strength so you can live as a courageous soldier who can walk into the world of wolves suited with His armor of love.

Day 12 – Matthew 11:1-30

I hope that when you came to the end of chapter 11 you got a smile on your face. Read this paraphrase of verses 28-30 from The Message and imagine Jesus saying these words directly to you....

“[your name] _____ Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Have you ever been tired of doing good? Did you know that a lot of people who serve God and follow Him get tired? In Matthew 10 we read about those who were sent out to do God’s work and were doing a job that may have made them weary.

I know I get tired doing God’s work because it never ends. Sometimes I focus on what I’m doing instead of who I’m serving and I get tired. I focus on the labor and not on the Lord.

I also find myself getting tired because I begin to doubt that my work for God is making a difference I get discouraged and weary. John the Baptist did the same thing. He’s sitting in jail and begins to doubt... “are You really the Messiah or should we keep looking?” And this is from the greatest of all the prophets that ever lived...and he doubted.

There is good news! Jesus promises us rest when we surrender our lives to Him, when we slow down and hang out with Him. It’s an undeniable truth that we become who we hang around...what kind of people do you hang around? Keep company with Jesus and your life will change...that’s a promise.

Day 13 – Matthew 12:1-50

God in the flesh is standing before religious leaders and they don't recognize Him. Jesus is a mystery to them. The Pharisees had spent so much of their growing and learning years studying about how to act religious that they actually missed God in action. It's almost comical, but it's too sad to be very funny. Jesus claims equality with God by stating He's the Lord of the Sabbath and the "religious actors" miss the moment.

In chapter 12 we read about the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus so they could "prove" Jesus wasn't the Son of God and that He was nothing more than a devil-following freak show. It seems every attack thrown at Jesus was met by an answer that baffled the Pharisee's thinking and challenged their religious game.

In verse 30, Jesus makes a bold statement that there is no middle ground in following Him. He says that you can't be neutral about following Him...it's either all or nothing. This is challenging! And Jesus reminds us that following Jesus begins with the heart. He slams the Pharisees and then tells them He can "see" their heart by how they talk. Their religious show meant nothing, but their heart meant everything.

It's good to stop and think about the commitment you've made to follow Christ. You might try writing your answers to these questions below:

Where do you need God to perform surgery on your heart?

Can others tell the condition of your heart by the words you speak?

If you find yourself being neutral about your walk with Christ, what do you need to do?

Also, take a minute and tell God that you don't want to act like a Christian (Pharisee) but that you want to be identified by the fruit you display in your life (v.33).

Have a great day as you walk with Christ in your life!

Day 14 – Matthew 13:1-58

Everyone likes a good story! As you walk with Christ, you'll find that Jesus tells a lot of stories. It's His number one way to communicate truth. Not all these stories are easy to understand and that's why the disciples have to ask Him to explain himself. But all His stories lead to truth.

The chapter you read today has a lot of stories and they're good stories...if you're a Christian. If you're not....ouch. In Jesus' story He paints a clear picture of what judgment will look like. Christians will be separated from non-Christians (or the wheat from the weeds) and there will be weeping and pain for those who made a decision to live their life without God. That's a story that doesn't have a happy ending.

The ending can be changed in everyone's life if they hear God's Word and accept it into their life (v. 8-9). Not only will eternity be planted in their lives but they (we) are given an abundance of knowledge for living today (v. 12).

As you go through your life today be thinking about your friends who need to hear the life-changing story of salvation that is only offered through Jesus. This story isn't fiction and isn't made up...it's a real story of a real Man who died on a real cross so we could receive real forgiveness and not end up at judgment day looking like a weed. Can you share that story with anyone today?

Day 15 – Matthew 14:1-36

Try to imagine what this one day would have been like if you were able to walk around with Jesus. You'd have seen our Lord in all types of situations; from grieving the death of a friend, to feeding 5000, to walking on water, and calming the seas...unbelievable!

What strikes me about this chapter are the times where Jesus went to be by Himself. After the news of His friend's death He wanted to be alone (v.13), and after feeding the multitudes He retreated (v.23). In the midst of all the hoopla, Jesus sought solitude. He knew He had many things to accomplish and lots of people to heal but He also knew He needed time by Himself. His miracles were amazing, but in the midst of grief, people, pressure, agendas, and a mission... He needed to be alone.

He gave us a picture of what we should be doing. Can you learn anything about the importance of spending time with God in the midst of a busy day? When was the last time you experienced some solitude? Is it difficult to pull away from the crowd to be with the Creator? You need some of this quiet-time every day to grow spiritually and become more like Jesus. Learn from the model of Jesus and make sure this happens on the busiest of days. Maybe that's why God said, Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God."

Day 16 – Matthew 15:1-39

Sometimes I lack faith. I hate to admit it...being a pastor and all...but it's the truth. I know I should have total faith in God's way and not question or worry, but that's not always the case. I've seen God work in the past and yet I still wonder if He's going to work in the present. I can point to specific times when God has faithfully answered my prayers but I still wonder if He's going to hear my pleas. Basically, it boils down to either I lack faith or I'm really forgetful about what God has done in the past. To make it worse, I feel guilty about it too. Can you identify with this?

But I begin to feel a little better when I read this chapter and see that the disciples were a lot like me. They just saw Jesus feed 5,000 people a few days ago (Matthew 14) and now they have the nerve (or lack of faith) to ask, "where are we going to get the food?" (v.33). Huh...maybe they were a lot like me (and you?) because they were faced with a tough situation and they had forgotten God's work and provision in the last tough situation. How quickly we forget God's ability to provide.

Today, be encouraged that God still works when you lack faith. He can repeat miracles in your life even when you question. When you're faced with discouragement over an issue in your life take some time (remember the alone time from yesterday?) and consider God's faithfulness in the past. God is good and He'll keep working even when we're faithless, forgetful, or just plain dumb (like me at times).

Day 17 – Matthew 16:1-12

Pharisee and Sadducee yeast sounds a little weird. At first the disciples didn't know what it meant, so if you were a little confused with today's reading you're not alone. Again, in these few verses of chapter 16, Jesus uses another illustration to communicate the essential truth that the inside of a person is more important than their actions.

Typically, the Pharisee and Sadducees were religious enemies because they disagreed on many issues. But when it came to their hatred for Jesus and His teaching they became a team with the goal to discredit and destroy Him. In Jesus' eye Pharisee and Sadducees were both religious frauds because they didn't focus on the issues of the heart (their insides) but on actions (their outside) from the law. As you've been reading, Jesus hated this.

Now, you might have thought, "what the deal with 'yeast?'" Yeast is an ingredient used in cooking to make bread rise. Too much yeast can ruin everything. That's why Jesus called the Pharisee and Sadducees "yeast." Even a small amount of evil in their lives was ruining an entire group of people.

Sins in your life that seem "little" may very well be "yeast" and have big effects on your relationship with God, your witness, and your other relationships. Your sin can impact others just in the same way the sins of the Pharisee and Sadducees were leading others away from the truth that Jesus brought. Evaluate your life today and see if there's any "yeast" that needs to be dealt with.

Day 18 – Matthew 16:13~20

Okay, now that you've read these verses ...who do you say Jesus is? Do you have an answer? Do you think He was just a good teacher? What about a nut-case who claimed to be God? Maybe just another Prophet who made a lot of noise and put Himself in high-profile positions? A lot of opinions are out there, but there is only one right answer to this test. Have you, like Peter, said "Jesus, You are the Son of God, the Messiah who is to save us and secure a place for us with God throughout eternity!" If so...A+, ticket to heaven, salvation, hope for the future, and eternity with God.

If still need more proof, I want to encourage you to keep reading, develop your questions, watch the lives of genuine Christians, and ask God to make Himself clear to you. I can guarantee you He won't appear inside your bedroom in the middle of the night and say, "Psst, over here...hey pal it's all true." God doesn't work like that. That's one of the reasons Jesus didn't give the Pharisees a sign. Jesus knew that miracles help those of faith feel more confident, but they don't lead skeptics to desire salvation. Keep searching and you'll find the answer.

Notice, Jesus specified his question to Peter only, "who do YOU say I am?" After He heard what others thought, Jesus wanted a personalized confession. When it comes to your personalized confession of faith, realize Jesus isn't taking a poll and He isn't looking for the majority opinion or what others think. He wants your personal response. Your answer to that question is the basis for salvation (see Romans 10:9-10; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3).

Today, take some time to write out your decision to follow Christ. Don't worry about what others say about Jesus. What do you say?

Day 19 – Matthew 16:21~28

I'm amazed at how quickly Jesus' words turn on Peter. A little earlier Jesus calls Peter "a rock" because of his professed faith believing Jesus was the Messiah. Now, Jesus says to Peter, "get behind Me Satan." Wow! Imagine how Peter must have felt after hearing those words from his Lord. That must have been a painful moment for Peter going from a "rock" to a "stumbling block."

Why did Jesus use those words? They seem kind of rough don't they? Well, Jesus was laying out God's plan for the world and salvation. He had hinted about it before but now He was making it public and clear. Death and resurrection. Pain and suffering. Ridicule and humiliation. These actions were part of the plan for Jesus to endure and Peter was just thinking like a human—probably like you and I would have thought. He didn't realize that the plan of salvation included Jesus' pain. Peter didn't like suffering (like who does?) and he sure didn't want his best Friend to go through it. To me, Peter's reaction seemed like an appropriate response to show his love, support, and protection for Jesus. But for Jesus, Peter's response was similar to the devil. In chapter four the devil told Jesus he could have greatness without suffering and Jesus knew this wasn't His Father's plan.

Jesus continued to make it clear that God's way was very different from the world's way. To follow Him means commitment—"pick up your cross and follow." Basically, He was saying, "get ready for pain because a commitment to Me won't be easy." But the good news about being a Christian is having the confidence that suffering leads to glory. They go hand-in-hand. Today, try to picture what it might mean for you to suffer for Jesus' sake.

Day 20 – Matthew 17:1-27

Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah (Mt. 16) and now he got to see firsthand that Jesus really was the Messiah, the Son of God. If Peter would have been asked that same question, after the Transfiguration (17:1-13), it would have been a no-brain-needed answer to the question “who do you say I am?” He would have said, “Without a doubt, You’re God. I saw it on the mountain while You were with Moses and Elijah...that was awesome...can You do it again?” But that confession wouldn’t have been as meaningful to Peter’s faith. Before he saw the glory of God, Peter believed, confessed his belief, and received assurance from God on the mountain. I like the way that works; believe, confess, receive assurance. Did it happen that way with you?

The Transfiguration is a powerful event in the walk with Christ and one you might want to further study. The quick version can be understood when you realize Moses represented the Law (the Old Testament) and Elijah the prophets. Both the law and the prophets point to Jesus and the Old Testament and prophetic messages are fulfilled in Jesus. Basically, the Old Testament and prophets painted a picture of the future that was missing THE key character...until Jesus came to earth.

During the Transfiguration Peter wanted to express his excitement by building a shrine to commemorate the occasion. But, before he could take action, he was interrupted by God’s voice booming His love for Jesus. Peter quickly dropped his idea of monument building and dropped to his knees to worship God. Take note of Peter’s response. It’s the only appropriate action you should have when you fully understand who Jesus is...worship. Total commitment to Christ isn’t seen by wearing Christian clothing, getting a cross tattooed on yourself, or building a monument for your faith. Commitment is seen through one’s desire to worship. When was the last time you dropped to your knees in worship?

Day 21 – Matthew 18:1-14

It appears that the disciples might have lost a little of their focus on what's important when they began to argue about positioning (the argument is more clear in Mark 9; Luke 9). Their pride had become an issue. It may have been that they were jealous of Peter, James, and John for going to the mountain with Jesus (chapter 17). They might have even arguing over high positions in the new church that Jesus spoke of. It became such an issue that they even had the guts to ask, "which one of us is the greatest?" I envision it like this, "Hey Jesus, we know You're pretty special being God... uh...but, we're over here kind of wondering which one of us is the greatest...aside from You of course." It's at this point Jesus steps in and teaches about the importance of humility.

Jesus didn't even dignify their answer. Instead, He called a little child into His presence and said the child was a picture of greatness. He told them to stop being childish with their meaningless arguments and become childlike. That was a creative way to deal with tension and teach about humility wasn't it?

True humility is taking your eyes off yourself and putting them on someone else. Humility is a positive consequence for becoming others-centered. What keeps you from becoming others-centered? Pride. Pride has always been a struggle-point with people. The fall of humanity can be traced back to pride. Look for it in your life. Notice it. Catch it action so you can recognize it. Name it. The hurdle to growing spiritually is learning to navigate around the bumps of pride and clear away the mounds of pride that have been building in your life.

Jesus tells His disciples to take drastic measures when evaluating themselves. He doesn't intend for them to literally cut off a hand or a foot since destroying the outside of your body will not affect the condition of a heart. Do you need to take drastic measures to take care of your pride problem? If you want to be great...the road to take is humility and it's easier to get there being a servant than a celebrity.

Day 22 – Matthew 18:15-35

When we say “yes” to living God’s way we are also saying “yes” to living in harmony with others. Healthy relationships are a strong theme in the Bible and God has made sure we have some practical instruction on how to make relationships work, even in the midst of conflict. Most people hate conflict! Do you? Conflict can produce feelings of hate, revenge, and withdrawal.

Jesus tells us that when we have conflict we need to talk face-to-face and try to work things out. If the conflict is with another Christian, harmony should be the goal since it’s the goal of all God-centered relationships. Most of the time, conflict will require forgiveness and Jesus know a lot about forgiveness...as a matter of fact, He died so we could experience forgiveness from our sins that would otherwise keep us from God.

As Peter hears Jesus teach about conflict and forgiveness I believe Peter is anxious to impress Jesus that he is finally getting the idea that followers of Christ are to be different. Because of his growing understanding, Peter comes up with a number which probably sounded high to him—seven (Jewish rabbis taught that you should forgive someone three times). He may have thought, “for us, it should be different, more like seven.” (You got to love Peter!) But Jesus makes seven seem insignificant when He says “7x70.” Jesus doesn’t want His followers to limit their forgiveness to a countable number. Jesus wasn’t pushing for the actual number 490, instead, He was asking for a spirit of forgiveness that wasn’t restricted.

Forgiveness is crucial for the believer. If you want to be forgiven you must forgive—that’s the point of the parable Jesus told. If you’re anything like me, you’ve had a lot of sins forgiven and will need future forgiveness. Your forgiveness of others is crucial to the forgiveness equation. As you continue to grow in your relationship with Christ you will develop an attitude of humility, an appreciation for God’s forgiveness, and a heart to forgive others. It doesn’t come overnight...but forgiveness will begin to appear the more you become like Jesus. Is there anyone you need to forgive today?

Day 23 – Matthew 19:1-12

The Pharisees couldn't trap Jesus on other issues so they went after a biggie—divorce (isn't it interesting that divorce continues to be a controversial issue today?). The Pharisees didn't seem to care about the truth regarding marriage, they were eager to see Jesus fumble His words and contradict Himself regarding His interpretation of the Mosaic Law of Divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Once again, Jesus masterfully backs His accusers up by taking them to a time prior to the Mosaic Law, in Genesis, where God's intention for marriage was that it would be permanent. Jesus changed their focus from divorce to the importance of a lasting marriage—God's design from the beginning.

In verses 4-6 we can learn some solid truths about marriage:

1. Marriage is God's idea. This doesn't take much explanation. Basically, it wasn't some guy name Randy who discovered marriage during the cave-man era.
2. Marriage is a physical oneness. The reference to "two becoming one" points to sexual intercourse. God created sex so that husband and wife would become one flesh, which is a physical image of marriage. That's why God intended sex to be for marriage only.
3. Marriage is intended to last. God's idea of oneness is that it will last as long as one of them is alive. The words, "let no one separate them" don't give room for options.
4. Marriage is male and female. Other variations to man and wife are unacceptable in God's design for marriage. They may become more acceptable in our courts and liberal society but not in God's eyes.

Divorce is going to happen, but that doesn't make it right. It's been happening since the beginning of our time. That's why Moses made a law that required some steps to be taken before divorce could happen. Moses saw woman being thrown out of homes when the husband was frustrated or "done" with them. Divorce was too easy and the sinful people were destroying each other. Divorce brings pain and God hates it.

About half the students I know come from broken families. There's a lot of suffering in their lives and they would be the first to tell you that divorce hurts. As you think and pray about your future, keep in mind that God's plan for your future marriage doesn't include divorce. His plan is that it will last. Don't lose sight of that standard as you continue to live your life hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Here's something worth remembering, "marriage is one of God's most wonderful designs!"

Day 24 – Matthew 19:13~30

The first time I read this passage I thought all Christians had to sell everything they owned in order to follow Christ and make it to heaven. Jesus told the young man those very words, and the disciples left everything they had follow Jesus so poverty seemed like a natural consequence to obedience. I began to wonder if the Christians I knew who had money weren't really "true" believers. I lived with this confusion for some time. Maybe you're confused also...if so, let me help that misunderstanding.

As you read the Bible, it's important not to confuse eternal truths Jesus taught with specific actions of those truths. For example, when Jesus said, "cut off your hand if it's causing you to sin," He wasn't expecting literal mutilation, He was requesting them to get drastic with their sin. He knew one less hand wouldn't change someone's heart.

In today's reading, Jesus' point is to put God before anything else. He knew this man had a problem with money and He wanted to attack the problem and get at His heart. Earlier, you read in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom..." Jesus wants to be first—even before money. Another example, the first two of the ten commandments are, (1) "You shall have no other gods before Me..." and (2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything" (Exodus 20:3-4). The point is loud and clear...loving God must come before everything else in a person's life.

Jesus knew the spiritual condition of this rich man: on the outside he obeyed God's rules, but on the inside (his heart) he obeyed his possessions. Jesus said, "it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom..." and the disciples understood Him completely. Essentially, everyone who lives separated from God is "rich" because they think they don't need anything, when in reality, the opposite is true.

I was "poor" without Christ and now I'm "rich" with blessings because I have a relationship with Christ. True wealth is knowing you're poor enough to need God. Take a moment today and write about your personal need for Him.

Day 25 – Matthew 20:1-34

My mom is a great lady and one of my biggest fans. I'll never forget when she gave my baseball coach a hard time because she thought I deserved to bat higher in the lineup than he did. They discussed my batting average, she reasoned, he countered, and my mom came out victorious. While I may have batted higher in the following games (from 8th spot to 9th) , I lost respect from my teammates because my mom whined.

Because of that experience, I can relate to how James and John must have felt when the mother mom petitioned Jesus for a higher place of greatness. She was just doing her job—being a good Jewish mom. Just like my teammates, the other disciples were ticked—they also wanted positions of greatness with Jesus. Imagine their thoughts, Jesus just said He was going to be put to death, and their minds started to roll... “hmm, if he’s going to be in heaven first, maybe He can talk to God about a better spot in the heavenly line up.” That was all they knew about greatness—a higher position. Once again we see human meeting divine and conflict emerging.

In this discourse with James and John’s mother, Jesus lays out a formula that, to this day, challenges our view of leadership. He said if you want to be a leader you must be a servant. His design for greatness begins at the bottom. If you want to be first, you must be last. If you want to be great, you must serve. Pretty different than, “claw your way to the top at any cost.”

Following Christ isn’t like following other leaders of the world who love to show off their power and authority. Christians show power when they are weak, humble, and others’ centered. Through weakness, God comes alive and becomes strong in the life of the believer. Through humility, Christ can be seen. When you become others’ centered, you become God-centered. It’s a life long journey that begins when you say “yes” to God’s way.

How’s your journey with serving others going? This is one biblical paradox that you may never truly understand (I don’t!).

Day 26 – Matthew 21:1-27

While Jesus was trying to teach the religious leaders that they didn't understand true religion (that it was heart not actions), He also was trying to teach His disciples about true faith. He wanted them to understand the importance of faith. Jesus knew that the only way to please God was through faith.

The backbone to one's relationship with God is faith. To the Christian, faith is everything! We have faith that God became human in Jesus. We express faith in trying to live God's way. We have faith in the unseen future. Faith is what is needed to last. The Christian hall of fame (Hebrews 11) is lined with people of faith. These people of faith trusted God's way as THE way and set their life on a course that reflected faith.

How's your faith today? Do you have faith that God forgives you? Do you have faith that God's plan is a good plan for you? Does your faith really believe that God can use you to do wonderful things? Are you willing to step out in faith and risk being a Christian in today's non-Christian world? Faith... it's a big deal!

I want to challenge you to try something new today. Read Hebrews 11:1 and paraphrase that verse...in other words, write out how you would define faith. Then, list two faith stoppers in your life. What are two things that keep you from living a life of faith? If you have time, write out how the story of the fig tree might relate to you today. Keep the faith...you are loved.

Day 27 – Matthew 21:28~22:14

God doesn't show favoritism. That's good news! The doors to His Kingdom are wide open to any race, color, language, or painful past. God wants the banquet of heaven to be full...but, unfortunately, some will refuse the invitation. Just think about all the different types of people that have said "yes" to God's invitation...

Druggies, Killers, Child abusers, Rapists, Thieves, Pastors, Accountants, Teachers, Students, Etc.

If you're anything like me, you might look at a person and say "no way" when you try to picture them in heaven. I hate this about myself. I often have to stop and say, "Doug, who made you the grace cop?" These passages that you read don't put limitations on people, other than their belief. Jesus died once to save all. He didn't die to save those I think are worthy. No one is worthy, and that's why salvation is called "the Good News."

God wants His house to be full. He wants the party to be filled. He wants to see people saved. Thank Him today that His eyesight isn't as limited as yours and ask Him to help you look at people the way He does. Cover your eyes and begin to see people like Jesus... open the doors and let the party begin!

Day 28 – Matthew 22:15~46

I'm a pretty simple thinker and I love simple answers! The religious leaders thought they were asking Jesus tricky questions, but Jesus immediately gave simple, straightforward answers. When they asked the question about marriage after the resurrection it sounded as confusing as a present day word problem from math class. But, instead of showing frustration, Jesus communicated in a clear, concise fashion.

In verses 37-38 we find a strong theme for the Christian life. Jesus summarizes the Old Testament with what we call the "great commandment". His simple answer is (1)love God, (2)love others. That's

it! He didn't say the most important commandment was not to keep from lying, cussing, having sex outside of marriage, or stealing. Much simpler, right to the point--love God and love others. He knew that if these two were in place, the others wouldn't be issues.

If you spend some time thinking about this answer, you'll find that loving others is going to be a lot easier once you focus on loving God. Actually, everything is a lot easier when you direct your thoughts on loving God. It's not easy to show love to others but that's a commandment that's important to Jesus.

Some say that the Bible can be wrapped up in one word—"don't." But those who understand what it means to walk in God's way find out that "don't" isn't the greatest commandment. Actually, it's "do." For those on the outside of the faith, looking in can be illustrated in a positive way...by doing. You want to follow God's command...DO. DO love God. If you do this, focus your life on loving God, it will result in naturally love others.

Day 29 – Matthew 23:1-39

I'm not sure it's possible to read this chapter and not think, "wow, Jesus sounded mad!" We've seen all throughout the Book of Matthew that Jesus attacked the hypocritical attitudes and lifestyles of the religious leaders and it seems to come to a moving crescendo in this chapter. Religious frauds did upset Jesus 2000 years ago and it can't be any different today.

It's safe to assume that Jesus wanted to make sure His disciples understood that holiness was much more important than looking and/or acting holy. This is a great lesson for us. It's so easy to act spiritual, to wear Christian clothing or jewelry, attend Christian events, and talk a Christian language without being a man or woman of God. Faking it isn't that tough. It becomes even easier as you take your eyes off of the basics (like fairness, compassion, faith, etc...) and put your eyes on the acceptance of others.

Verse 26 is a good one to memorize... "First wash the inside of the cup and then the outside will become clean to." It's a safe bet that if you take care of your heart that you will bear fruit with your life. A clean heart, forgiven and refreshed by God's presence, will produce a real and authentic Christian life. This type of life would never be characterized by the term "painted tombstone" (verse 27)...and that's good news!

If you're wearing a Christian mask ask God to give you the desire and the strength to drop it today. This is one acting job that won't bring fame..

Day 30 – Matthew 24:1-51

Any discussion of the end-of-the-world gets a little spooky at times. Even though you might think it's weird and try to avoid talking about it, Jesus taught on it. The disciples asked for a sign of His coming again and Jesus told them there will be a day when He returns (known as the second coming) No one knows when this time will be—Jesus didn't even know (v. 36).

Ever since I've been a Christian (over 20 years) I've heard different preachers and television evangelists predict a date for the second coming. They've all been wrong. I've learned, over these years, that Christians shouldn't be on the time and date committee trying to predict His return. We should be on preparation committee and communicate, with urgency, that Jesus IS coming again. Jesus told us that the end wouldn't come until the gospel had been preached throughout the world. That's our job, as believers, to spread God's plan of salvation—which is the good news.

During this waiting time on earth we can be assured of persecution for our faith, false teaching surrounding our faith, and false prophets professing a different faith. But in the midst of these trials, Jesus encourages us to keep from panic (v.6) and to be on guard with our lives by living responsibly (v. 42, 44). He also gives us some good news that our survival will result in reward (v. 46).

Although we don't know the time and date, we do know it's going to be sudden and it will catch a lot of people off guard just like the flood of Noah's day (v. 39). Like Noah, be ready. Build your "ark" of faith and obey God's Word. God chose Noah because He found him to be a righteous man whose heart was right. Noah is a good picture of the type of person I want to be...how about you?

Day 31 – Matthew 25:1-46

In this chapter, we not only find more teaching on the end times but also on the responsibility of the believer to do something with his or her life. We've read enough by now to know that the arrival of Jesus (the second coming) is going to be sudden and many won't be ready (vs. 1-13). But the rest of this chapter is a solid wake up call that our life is meant to account for something.

I must write very carefully because I don't want you to think that you are saved by works (what you do for God), because you are saved by your faith in Jesus Christ (what He did for you). But what you do is a result of your faith and salvation. These two stories show us that we aren't to waste our lives but to invest them in God's service.

What is God's service? It may be as simple as giving a cup of water, food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, visitation to the prisons... When you help someone in need you are helping Jesus. Christians are "Christ's one" and are to try to follow Christ's actions while on earth.

Sometimes I think of being one of Jesus' twelve disciples and how I would have responded to the pain and lack of justice he experienced on the cross. I think of what I would have said and how I would have acted. When I put myself in that situation I become quite the superhero, in my imagination. But, in the reality of the everyday situations that Jesus refers to (vs.31-46), I'm not super at all. You see, when I see Jesus in need everyday (when I see others in need) I often miss the opportunity to serve him. I see him in need when I drive by the hungry, pass by the homeless, read about the prisoners, and don't think about offering a drink to the thirsty.

I know I'm saved by faith, but there is an incredible opportunity to do—in the name of Jesus—that demonstrates that my faith is real. Take a look at your life today and think about how you can show someone needy Christ's love in a very real and practical manner. How could you do that today?

