

a Month of Looking at Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

*“Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face,
and the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of His wonder and grace. . .”*

I originally wrote these devotions for a friend who was battling cancer. I was trying to grab hold of how I might encourage her, and I realized that there was no deeper well of encouragement than looking at Jesus.

In light of that realization, I offer these devotions to all of us. How deeply we need the kind of encouragement that can only come when we are face to face with Jesus.

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by Sallie Ross
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Day One

“Come, follow me, Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed Him.” Mark 1:17-18a

Jesus knew the heart of obedience; He *was* the heart of obedience. He knew that “*Come, follow me*” must precede the unfolding of the plan God has for a life. It is not merely Him stepping into our lives—into the midst of where we are before we know Him. It is a matter of us making a choice and stepping out. When we are securely His, then *He chooses* what of our past to weave into His present.

Fear is the time that transpires between the call and our own “at once.” Whether the call is situational, daily commitment, whatever, it is fear that keeps us from dropping the very things that identify us and following Him. Fear makes so much noise inside of our head, so much substanceless distraction, that the intimacy and the power of the call to come and follow loses its strength. That same call to a heart that is unimpeded by fear draws the believer to an immediate response.

- *What “Come, follow me” can you remember ignoring?*
- *Where is it still difficult for you to step out?*
- *Where have you responded “at once” and see his blessing and hope?*

May that offer you his encouragement.

Day Two

“The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.” Mark 1:22

In our culture, little is known about true authority. Images are conjured up of Marine sergeants chest to chest with recruits, red-faced and yelling orders while the recruits passively but attentively respond. Some images of authority seem to carry with them the threat that if you don't follow the demands, you're toast. There is a wielding of power and a sense of fear.

Jesus' authority had nothing to do with worldly power and fear but everything to do with His Father. There was no need for threat or power struggle; the Word spoken and lived out was the heart of authority. He who from the beginning was with and in God, spoke only what He heard His Father say, and those who heard *knew* and were amazed. Like Mary at the tomb hearing the “gardener” speak her name, she *knew*. Oh, that we might attend to no other voice. . .

- *Remember times in your life when you unquestionably heard the voice of God.*
- *Are there things you do that cause you to hear the law more easily than you hear true teaching?*
- *Listen in silence and hear Jesus speak your name.*

Day Three

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.” Mark 1:35

“While it was still dark”. . . When it’s still dark, we can’t see what else needs to be done (by God’s grace, dust is not visible in darkness!). When it’s still dark, nothing is very familiar or comfortable. It is as if God has covered the known that we might call out to Him for direction. And if, in the moments when we awaken and nothing feels familiar, we get up and walk to Him, we will find our hearts so much more able to hear without distraction.

Sometimes we so fear the solitary places, that we busy our lives so we don’t even see those places. Jesus went off to a solitary place; we assume it was perhaps so that He would not *be* noticed. But perhaps, also, that He would not notice, would not be distracted. He who could even feel power going out when His cloak was touched; wouldn’t it be hard for Him to not notice the world around Him?

In those moments when you awaken and it’s still dark, there is a choice—succumb to the powers of darkness that gnaw with intent to consume, or get up, leave the darkness, and go to meet the Father.

- *Jesus, God’s own Son, needed time alone with the Father*
- *Think of the places where it is easier to succumb to darkness and fear, and ask the Father to help you to make a plan of how to get up from those places, leave them, and meet with Him.*

Day Four

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself that house cannot stand.” Mark3:24

The word “kingdom” gives, in itself, a sense of completeness. There is a sense that, within a kingdom one has all that one would need. In our lives there are many kingdoms. And when we think of division, our minds go to some of those larger kingdoms—like the church.

But I believe this verse calls us deeper and closer. I believe it calls us to examine our own hearts and to look for division within. If I proclaim Jesus with my lips but live otherwise with my life—there is division. Living otherwise doesn’t have to be monumental but can begin as incremental. Where do I read God’s Word and respond with “Yes, but”? Where do I struggle with belief that the promises of scripture are truly for me?

It is not a matter of words but of obedience. And in that obedience is the unity and the strength to stand—a strength that is not our own but is fully accessible from our loving Father.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

Where it is easy for you to trust God.

Where it is hard for you to trust God.

One place within where there is division that you can relinquish.

Day Five

“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the Word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the Word, making it unfruitful.” Mark 4:18-19

In my own times of discernment, there have been times when I have walked in confidence, and there are other times when every day found my stomach and heart sharing residence in my throat, choking the very word and hope that lies within me.

What strikes me in this verse is that the vine remains and perhaps is even visibly okay until it is time to produce fruit. Then it is clearly unfruitful. I think of the Christian tendency to look at other brothers and sisters who seem so at ease in their service to the Lord, who seem so confident in their exposition of scripture. And the one who is comparing begins to feel small and ineffective in his Christian life. God tells us to look at the fruit. A vine may look healthy for a time, but when it's time to bear fruit—that is the time of true disclosure.

And for us, have the worries of this life left the soil of our hearts unable to accept and nourish the Word given to us? We have the choice each day—will we embrace the tenuous circumstances of life as our compass, or will we let the Word of God fill our being and bear His fruit in our hearts and lives?

Ask God to show you:

What are the worries?

What are God's promises?

On which can you base your life and hope?

Day Six

“The disciples woke Him up and said to Him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still.’ Then the wind died down and it was completely still.” Mark 4:38-39

I find that often I have to come to the place of crying out “Don’t you care?!” before I can even *begin* to receive His stillness. Daring to come to that place means that I am willing to let all of my frustration, anger, and feelings of abandonment have voice and come out of the darkness of my soul.

To refuse to take that step and yet still seek His stillness is no less than being near death from thirst and putting a bucket nearly full of rocks down into a well. There is enough water, but there is not enough room in the bucket to be filled.

When I become like the child pounding his father’s chest and crying, I am honest with him; I am honest with myself. And at the end of my tantrum I can melt in his arms and receive his comfort and peace.

- *Where are the places of “Don’t you care?” in your life?*
- *What are some rocks you can remove from your bucket?*
- *Where do you need most to hear the “Quiet! Be still.”?*

Day Seven

(Speaking to the man who had been demon-possessed) “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you. (He did) “and all the people were amazed.” Mark 5:19,20b

This man’s life had been hell. Scripture tells us that he lived in the tombs and could not even be restrained by chains. *“Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.”* v5 Just as the demons recognized Jesus, Jesus recognized the demons and called them out from this man.

What strikes me in this story is first of all that once again the man has a home. Satan has kept him from that very place of encouragement and comfort, leaving him in a place of death. But Jesus’ first words to the man were to “go home”. The homecoming may have been a bit cautious at first but then glorious.

The second thing is the strength and the value of telling our stories. When we tell others how much the Lord has done for us, when we hear those stories ourselves, there is a profound spiritual encouragement. Too often we reiterate the stories of our infirmities and woes, and then it is those things that come to identify us. But when we are attentive to the Lord’s work, when we look for Him in the midst of our circumstances, when we eagerly tell others just what He has been about in our lives, then once again we are at home—the home the Father gives our hearts while we are this side of heaven.

- *Are there places in your life where you live in the tombs?*
- *Do you come with a posture of resigning yourself to the demons or expecting to see the Lord’s hand?*
- *What is a story of the faithfulness of our Jesus that you can share with someone today? Do it!*

Day Eight

“A large crowd followed and pressed around Him. (the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years thought to herself) “If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed.” Mark 5:24b,28

So long broken, so long longing to be healed—the very life blood draining from her body and hope draining from her heart. But there was still enough hope to keep her going and to believe that even a *touch* of this Jesus’ garments could heal her.

There are two directions we can take as we walk the harder paths. We can very easily assess the circumstances with our own vision and understanding, and then withdraw convinced that hope is not to be our portion. This often seems the more natural bent; it is also the bent that pulls us from the Father’s storehouse.

Or we can, like this woman so long broken, know that our very hope lies in the touch of our Lord Jesus, and throw ourselves totally at His mercy, seeking Him with all of our hearts.

Oh, Lord Jesus, that we, like this woman, might not be subdued by circumstances but rather drawn on by the hope of your healing touch.

- *Where have you taken the world’s diagnosis and withdrawn?*
- *When are you most likely to be relentless in your search for the Father’s hope?*
- *How can you offer up those withdrawn places and touch His garment?*

Day Nine

“ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ ” Mark 5:30

Every time I read this, it just blows me away. Here is Jesus in the midst of the momentum, being pushed and pulled—physically and spiritually. Here is Jesus in the midst of being sought after for good and for bad. Scores of people noisily shouting at and about Him, *and still He feels the power go out from Him when someone touches His clothes.*

How incredibly intimate is this God of ours. He notices and He knows. His heart is turned to his children. Just as a mother hears her own child’s voice at a playground crowded with other children, God hears our voice and responds.

Another piece to this is how He gives us the power to do the same. I think of the times when, in response to a situation I knew nothing about, the Holy Spirit has prompted my heart to pray for or act out of his heart toward another person. The person was amazed, and I was encouraged. Often we feel as though our lives are too busy or loud to hear those needs, but then we look at Jesus, and his world was busy and loud, but his heart was set on his Father, and through that posture the Spirit had full access to Him. May it be the same with us.

- *Think of a time when God’s intimate response to you amazed you*
- *Think of a time when the Holy Spirit prompted, you acted, and a person was deeply touched.*
- *Ask the Lord for the grace to be more attentive, especially in the midst of the momentum.*

Day Ten

(Jairus' daughter is dying and Jesus heals the bleeding woman on the way to Jairus' house. Others came to tell Jairus his daughter was dead) "Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, 'Don't be afraid; just believe' " Mark 5:36b

My first thought when I read this is to put myself in Jairus' place. If I had sought the Lord, and He was coming but was taking His time and "bothering" to heal people along the way—if I received news that my daughter had died—not only would I be grief-stricken, but I believe I would also have been angry. *"If you just had come more quickly" "If you just hadn't stopped to find that woman,"* and on and on.

But this is not an *"Oops, guess I didn't get there fast enough"* situation; God doesn't have any of those. Instead it is a call to ignore the circumstances and keep believing—something that is relatively easy when you are dealing with circumstances at a distance, but so much harder when the circumstances are your own, and they are pressing.

We see that believing is the antidote for fear. In order to believe, we must know; and so we are called to be in the Word of God to truly know Him and His character. In order to believe, we must bear witness to. Throughout the Old Testament God is telling His people to "Remember. . ." what He has done and who He is. It is a call for them to gain confidence in the things God has done in their lives and in His presence.

Jesus knows that fear is present; His first response to Jairus is *"Don't fear."* But He also know His Father, and in that intimacy He can confidently offer us confidence, no matter the circumstances.

- *Are there places where you are angry with God or feel abandoned? Articulate those and offer them up to Him.*
- *Make a mental or actual list of the places and times where His presence has been undeniable in your life and the lives of those around you. Give thanks.*

Day Eleven

(Jesus put those who laughed at Him in unbelief out of the room, and took the little girl's parents and the disciples [those with belief] into the room where the little girl was) "Talitha koum!(which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!') Immediately the girl stood up and walked around." Mark 5:41

Jesus takes our belief and works with it. The little girl's father believed that Jesus could heal his daughter; otherwise he would not have sought Him at such a seemingly hopeless time. We don't read or know his response when the men from his house came to say that his daughter was dead. We do know that Jesus ignored them and turned to the man with assurance. And clearly, the man turned to Jesus and believed.

We may feel our belief is too small; God does not measure as we do. God takes whatever faith we have and pours Himself into it. Our faith increases as *He* fills us. If we use circumstances to batten the hatches of our hearts, then there will be little room for the Holy Spirit to fill us. But if we are willing to give ourselves to Him, then He will take us into the rooms where there is death in our lives—and He will encourage us with the miracles His love creates.

- *Where do you laugh nervously at prospects of Jesus healing or making changes—a laughter that is borne of unbelief.*
- *What part of your life do you long for Him to enter into and be about calling you forth?*
- *Lift that place up to Him, ask Him to help you in your unbelief, and prepare to "immediately stand up and walk around."*

Day Twelve

“He told them to give her something to eat.” Mark 5:43

I love it; our God is a totally practical God! Many of us grow up immersed in the symbols of the Christian faith—stained glass windows, ornate sculpture, statues, formal language. All of these things, while sometimes feeding us, also have kept us at more of a distance from a practical God. If my heart is broken and my life a dark mess, can One I have to approach with “Thee” or “Thy” really meet me in the midst and set me free?

There is nothing distant or impractical about our God. Here is a little girl who has been sick unto death—not a very strong state! And now, in response to His call, she has stood up and walked around. Perhaps He just knew human nature and knew that those around were so astonished that the practical things might not come to mind. Just as He knew what the parents and the disciples needed to build up their faith, so He knew what this little girl needed. *“Hello, a little food would be a good thing right about now!”* What an incredible joy for that mother to be able to prepare a meal for the child she thought she had lost forever.

- *Where are you reluctant to bring God the practical matters in your life?*
- *Are there things you can think of in your life that keep Him at more of a distance?*
- *Offer up that reluctancy or that distance, and just watch what He'll do to tend to even the smallest of details in your life.*

Day Thirteen

“Herod feared John (the Baptist) and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.” Mark 6:20

The phrase that strikes me in this passage is *“he was greatly puzzled”*. We see that Herod feared John, protected him, and was greatly puzzled. We could do the same with electricity. We could fear it, knowing it to be very powerful, protect it from spilling out where it shouldn't, but still be puzzled—how in the world does this work? Yet we certainly like to enjoy its attributes.

Weak analogy, perhaps, but also a sense of wondering just how it is that God reveals Himself. Often He uses people. I think of the woman who brought me to faith. I remember watching her a lot before I knew Jesus. She seemed to have great confidence blended with great humility. She was not judgmental but able to walk with the rich and the poor and she had love to give to both. I knew that something was different about her, but I was puzzled as to what it was.

By God's grace, as believers, we don't have to be puzzled—our God reveals Himself to us through the power of his Holy Spirit. But we do have our own call to be salt and light—and often that will leave those unbelievers who see us a bit puzzled. Be it those who sense our peace in the room where chemo is administered, those who watch us delight in our children, those who see us quietly bow our heads before a meal, may we who belong to the Lord of the Universe be both salt and also willing to give reason for the hope that lies within us.

- *Think back to people in your life whose peace was almost puzzling to you.*
- *Think of the places God is currently calling you to be his witness, no matter how obscure they may seem.*
- *Pray that his Spirit makes Him irresistible through you.*

Day Fourteen

“The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.” Mark 6:26

And so Herod had John the Baptist beheaded. In my holier-than-thou posture that can come all too easily, I can look at this and not even begin to imagine how Herod could have done such a thing. But oaths were serious things, and being disgraced before so many others would have been unthinkable. Surely ill-made promises and saving face are things that all of us have struggled with from time to time.

But God gives us warnings. The scripture says that the king was greatly distressed. What signal is distress? It’s clearly a signal that something is wrong, that we’re stepping out of the Father’s favor, that a change must be made— a situation altered. And when we ignore those warnings, when we are backed up against a wall and are ready to bow to the pressure, then truth be told, the words *“Crucify Him !”* are resting on our lips as well.

We must learn to let the dissonant chords of distress shake us to attention—take us to our knees with words like *“My Lord, and my God.”* And then no oath will look so ominous, no disgrace so able to destroy.

- *Look at the people, things, and relationships in your life right now. Are there any so pressing that they would cause you to deny your Lord?*
- *Are there any dissonant chords, no matter how subtle, within your heart?*
- *Pray that the Lord might sensitize your spirit so completely that you can sense and respond to his caution without pause.*

Day Fifteen

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.” Mark 6:34

Often, when we think of compassionate people, we think of people whose emotions seem to ooze out of their pores. It’s as though their hearts pour out at the slightest of tuggings.

But here we see Jesus’ picture of compassion. Compassion does not stop with feelings; it then moves on to an action of some sort—an equipping. Here we see Jesus respond to the needs of the large crowd and immediately begin teaching them. As a matter of fact, He began teaching them *many* things—things they would need. Sheep without a shepherd will die; left to themselves and their own devices, they are resourceless.

Out of the “*many things*” we see that God is not stingy. He is not going to give us a morsel when we need a full meal. As we read in Philippians 4:19 *“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

May we be eager recipients of the Lord’s compassion, and may that compassion pour freely from us to those He brings into our lives—no matter the cost.

- *What are some ways that people have shown compassion to you?*
- *Think back on times when the Lord’s compassion poured out of you for someone else.*
- *Ask the Lord to give you a heart that is ready to be compassionate and to act.*

Day Sixteen

“This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat. But He answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’ ” Mark 6:35-37

We come back again to the compassion of Jesus. If you remember, the original intent of the time was spoken to the disciples when Jesus said: *‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’* That rest was quickly hindered by those who recognized Jesus and by his compassionate response to them. Now, it is late in what should be a season of rest, and the disciples suggest that Jesus send the crowd on their way; they might be hungry!

If I were a disciple, I’m not convinced that my motive of wanting to send the crowd away would be totally out of concern for their hunger. After all, wasn’t this to be *my* time alone with Jesus? And what a precious commodity that would be.

But Jesus insisted that the provision come from Him, through His disciples. In this act He is doing a number of things. He had been teaching the crowd many things; He is going to give them a hands-on teaching. And his disciples are going to be called upon to put flesh on their faith.

The compassion of Jesus not only teaches us who He is, not only lets us experience who He is, but it also lets us participate in the power that is His. There is, within that compassion, an empowering that allows us to take our own meager five loaves and two fishes, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, be able to feed any depth of hunger—physical or spiritual.

- *Where do you long for rest?*
- *How is Jesus empowering you?*
- *What are the loaves and fishes you have to offer that Jesus is making an offering for many?*

Day Seventeen

“When they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw Him and were terrified. Immediately He spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.’ ”
Mark 6:49-50

These poor guys were having a hard time of it. Even with unpredictable people we know, there are still certain parameters we can come to expect. Jesus is not big on staying within parameters! And the disciples have just watched a small amount of food feed a huge number of people, and now, as they battle winds in their small boat, their Master comes walking across the lake, enters their boat, and the wind stops. Being a disciple was not for the faint of heart!

What I find interesting is that often those very parameters that we establish to keep our world safe, that actually keep us from the very love and power of our God. I cannot think of the number of times I have sat and grieved at a door God has closed in my life—a door *I knew* would have afforded me just exactly what I needed at that time. And as I sit in self-pity, the provision pours in around me from every other direction, but I’m often too busy tending my own “shrine” to even see it.

We must be willing to open ourselves up to see God in unexpected places and in unexpected ways. We must move from “*Why?*” to “*Why not!!*”. It requires a relinquishing of control (most of which we never had in the first place), and a willingness to let Him into our boat in the storm, *no matter how He got there*.

- *Of what are you most afraid right now?*
- *What could God do with that fear that could make it life-giving?*
- *Ask Him to help you to be willing to accept his provision with confidence rather than fear.*

Day Eighteen

“As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. . .They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched Him were healed.” Mark 6:54,56b

The first question that comes to mind is “What does it take for us to recognize Jesus?” What about Him do we recognize most easily? What posture must we assume in order to see Him?

I am grateful for moments of retreat when I am able to empty myself of the things that often get in the way of seeing Him, and am then able to receive His presence and hope. But I find that I am equally grateful for the moments He orchestrates that I don’t expect. Be it an unexpected kind comment, a parking place at a busy mall, something, anything that pulls me out of the here and now and lets me know that He is ever at work in loving attentiveness.

The second question that enters is “*When I see Him, am I unencumbered enough to be willing to beg to touch even the edge of His cloak?*” In other words, am I aware enough of my desperate need for His total sufficiency? Or am I thinking that perhaps I can handle many of the parts of my life? A foolish posture indeed, that will leave me both helpless and quite alone.

May we ask that our eyes be opened, our hearts readied, and our living Lord found to be as very close as He is. There is none closer.

- *Think of some of the different ways that you recognize Jesus.*
- *Where do you tend to limit Him—doing it on your own?*
- *Ask the Father to show you your desperate need at the same time He shows you His total sufficiency.*

Day Nineteen

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
Mark 7:6b

This one is hard. Jesus was speaking to and about the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law. So we could begin with a larger look—a look at the church and a prayerful examination as to whether or not the Word spoken in the church of our day honors Jesus, not just by the proclamation of truth but also by the living out of that truth.

As well as the examination of leadership as we seek to answer that question, the light lands on each one of us individually. What others are doing, what the greater church is doing is important—especially as they seek to bring the Gospel to the unsaved. But the question lands and must be dealt with at the level of *“What about me?”*

It is easy in the midst of the Body to sing the Lord’s praises; it is easy as we listen to testimonies of his love to give thanks and stand in the midst of a holy awe. But what about our hearts? Unfortunately, we can give praise with our lips and still have our hearts hardened. Unfortunately, we can recognize the magnitude of the Lord’s power but still choose to amass other resources—*just in case* He should choose to not provide for us.

May this scripture bring us to the place of a daily assessment that asks: *“Who does my life say that you are?”*

- *Where is it hard for you to honor God with your lips?*
- *Where is it easy for you to honor God with your lips?*
- *Where is it hard to honor God with your life?*
- *Where is it easy for you to honor God with your life? Pray for an increase!*

Day Twenty

“After He took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then He spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him ‘Ephphatha’ (which means Be opened!) At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly.” Mark 7:33-35

The first thing that strikes me here is that Jesus took the deaf man aside. The question that came to me was *“Do I let Him take me aside?”* There is something almost terrifyingly vulnerable about being taken out of the momentum. For some unknown reason, we tend to live our lives with God like a parent and child at an amusement park, walking with our cotton candy, having to yell to even be heard by the other. Then we complain about the noise and momentum and how we’re being fed nothing more than “fluff”. Indeed.

Then I wonder, if Jesus were to take me aside right now, what would I be willing to let Him heal in me? Would I only let Him “have at” the list I frequently bring to Him, or would I finally listen to the promptings He has been giving me for so long—like sharp pains in the lower right abdomen, does my spiritual appendix have to burst before I can let Him work in me?

The deaf man not only had his ears opened, but that very act and his clarity of hearing enabled him to speak plainly. Where is the clarity of my spiritual hearing? If that clarity is not acute, then the Word that comes from me will be useless to those in need.

Much to consider, but it is much to consider in light of Jesus who waits to take us aside and bring life to our deepest needs and brokenness.

- *In what areas of your life do you host deafness?*
- *What keeps you from letting Him into the deepest places?*
- *Find a time and way to let Him take you aside today.*

Day Twenty-one

“His disciples answered, ‘But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?’” Mark 8:4

Okay, back to the bread. This crowd has been with Jesus for three days without anything to eat. The disciples, reminding me much of myself, seem to have forgotten the miraculous distribution not long before, and so they are asking the same types of questions—*“Where can we get it?”*

The disciples’ reactions are really quite familiar to all of us. A need arises and they look for a physical means of meeting the need. Now that’s not all that strange, as the need is for physical food. But when they realize that nowhere within the vicinity could that much food be found, they consider the suggestion unworkable.

God calls us not to stop there. Our resources do not exist only in the natural world but extend into the supernatural. As Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 19:26 *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* We must use the resources we have been given but also storm the gates of heaven to seek the other resources He has for us.

Jesus still chose to include the disciples in His act of feeding the multitude. He didn’t come back with *“Showed you once and now you’ve blown it,”* but He was willing to let them be a part of another miracle—hoping, I am sure, that the repetition would cement the reality they were being shown of our Father’s nature. He is thankfully as generous with us.

- *What are some specific miracles you have witnessed or been a part of in your life?*
- *Can you think of a particular time where you might have given up before God did in the search for resources?*
- *Ask for grace for today—to look beyond the physical for resources.*

Day Twenty-two

“When He had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, He broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so.” Mark 8:6

There seems much to look at in this verse. Jesus takes what there is and gives thanks for it. He doesn't get worked up about there being only seven loaves for so many people, but He gives thanks to his Father for the provision. When we come to a place in our lives where our provision seems less than our need, do we measure by the need or by the fact that the Father has provided?

Jesus takes the provision and, along with his disciples, distributes it. How often do we receive provision and hold onto it? *“This is a good start, Lord, and I'm thankful; now I'll just wait until the rest comes in and then I'll start passing it out!”* More of the *“I'll believe it when I see it”* than the *“I'll see it when I believe it”* posture.

We are to expect that the Lord will be our provision; we are to take what it is that He gives to us; we are to give thanks; we are to give of that provision. And whether the provision is exact or if there are basketsfull to gather—*He* is providing for us; *He* is our provision. Why would we ever seek anywhere else?!

- *Do you take what you receive with thanksgiving or measure it against what you think you need?*
- *Do you truly believe that God is your provision?*
- *Take some time to let Him help you to relinquish life as you think it should be and receive his heart and vision for you.*

Day Twenty-three

“On the way He asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ . . . ‘But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am?’ “ Mark 8:27b, 29a

The first question that Jesus asked could allow the disciples to stay at a theoretical distance. They need merely report the things they had heard other people say about Jesus. It is a safe distance, one which does not demand vulnerability.

The second question that Jesus asked would reveal where the rubber met the road, or the sandal met the stone, for the disciples. To respond to that question, a disciple was no longer able to maintain a safe distance but was instead revealing where his heart was.

This is not a one-time question for us as believers; this is the daily core of our faith. Who do *we* say that He is? If, like Peter, we answer *“You are the Christ”*, then our lives must live that out. It is a question that we can ask ourselves each day—*“Is the life I am living—spoken and unspoken—testifying to the fact that I believe Jesus is the Christ?”* And if the answer is yes, then we need to be in a posture of praise before our loving God. And if the answer that day is no, then we must seek repentant hearts and then move into a posture of praise before our loving God. Either way, it is being in the presence of our God that will align our heart as they are meant to be—what great hope lies within.

- *If you were to look at your life today, how would you answer Jesus’ question?*
- *If your answer reflects his true essence, give thanks; if your answer reflects your sin, repent and then give thanks.*
- *How can you help others to know the true answer to that question—ask Him to show you.*

Day Twenty-four

“You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Mark 8:33b

Jesus had been teaching the disciples that He must suffer, be rejected and killed, and that He would then rise again. Peter took Him aside and was rebuking Him for the things He was saying (*How familiar that inclination in my own life*). Jesus rebuked Peter.

You can certainly imagine Peter’s heart and intentions. He loved Jesus; he knew in his heart who Jesus truly was. He envisioned that what was most important was the ministry Jesus would have on earth and could *not* imagine that death on a cross would be the pivotal part of that ministry.

And it becomes so with us, too. We look at the people and situations around us. We are godly people, and so we somehow believe that our “imaginings” must be God’s, too. We believe that we know how marriages should be, how children should respond, how long people should live and what their quality of life should be. But we don’t.

Our call on this earth is to be about the things of God. That means being willing to relinquish life as we think it should be. That means being willing to let God take us anywhere and into anything. That means being willing to die or to let others die. That means being willing to come to Him without our own road map and to trust His navigation. That means being willing to walk into or walk out of anything He tells us to.

His gift to us is grace—everywhere we need it, known or unknown. As long as we are seeking Him we will have that grace and his peace. As long as we seek the things of men we will feel helpless and distressed. Is it even really a choice?

- *Where in your life are you seeking the things of men?*
- *What are the things of God you long for?*
- *Ask Him to help you to lay down your map and go confidently in the direction of his heart.*

Day Twenty-five

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it.” Mark 8:34b-35

It’s a huge question that arises from this, *“What is it to deny ourselves—how do we lose our lives for Him?”* We could easily move into legalistic responses, with self-flagellation and religious rhetoric. However, when we are looking at what we are relinquishing in order to deny ourselves, our focus is on what we are relinquishing. When we look at the Lord Jesus in order to deny ourselves, our lives become full with the things that move his heart and the choices that He prompts within us. We begin to see the whole world as He sees it—evil begins to bear a more obvious and repulsive face, and compassion that is God-prompted becomes what feeds our hearts.

What the world counts as loss is not to be our measure. If it is, we will find ourselves painfully aware of ourselves and even more painfully unaware of our God. What God counts as gain—sharing his Word, living a life of obedience (which gives us deeper access to Him), living out of compassion—will be the very measure from which we may be filled to overflowing.

May the obstacles and longings of life lose their importance in our lives, and may we go, follow Him, that our life will be found in wholeness and in truth.

- *What are the parts of “self” for you that need to be denied?*
- *How can you more totally “lose your life for Jesus”?*
- *Ask for the grace to begin that walk.*

Day Twenty-six

“Peter said to Jesus, ;Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Mark 9:5

Boy, don't I know this one! I'm in the midst of a profound spiritual experience; I've found a mountaintop. And *immediately* my mind goes into gear and tries to figure out how I can make this one last. I'm really close to God, here, and I know that's good, so keeping the momentum and setting up camp here *must* be the answer! Then I think back to the Israelites and the fact that God was always moving— they had to keep their eyes peeled to make sure they were right with that pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night! So should it be with me.

I think one of the things that happens to us is that we really *do* long to be in the Lord's presence, but even more we long for things not to change. And so we look for a “safe” place, a place where there is life and hope, and we tend to want to build a shrine there, to remain. What we need to remember is that everything in the world will change, but our God does not change. Hebrews 13:8 tells us: *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*

I think of praying with dear friends whom we had gone to visit. It was our last night with them, and the prayers were rich and tender. When there were no more words there was an even richer silence—a silence in which I longed to remain. Why? Because the next word would be “*Amen*” and the time would end. But our God is different, and He calls us to be willing to voice that “*Amen*”—not because there is an end, but so He can walk us into *his* “Begin”.

- *What are the things or people in your life that you hold close?*
- *Is it a healthy holding, or is it too closely?*
- *Ask God to give you his confidence to let go that you might find yourself deeper in his unchangeable love.*

Day Twenty-seven

“Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him.’ “ Mark 9:6

As I read this scripture, I realize that I sometimes think of the love between the Father and the Son in too clinical of a way. I recognize, at least to some degree, the magnitude of the sacrifice they both made. I see Jesus’ obedience in that He was always looking to His Father for direction. But when I read this, I see a delight and an intimacy that I don’t often consider.

Yes, this is for the disciples who were witness to Jesus’ transfiguration; they had been chosen for this revelation. But I can’t help but sense that this was also for Jesus. He had just spoken of the path He would have to take to the cross, and we can only imagine the impact that also had on Him. And so to have the experience of the transfiguration, and to hear the affirming voice of His Father saying *“This is my Son, whom I love,”* must have been *such* a sweet balm to Jesus’ heart.

Our God is an economical God. When there is blessing given, it is given to as many as can receive it. Our God is an encouraging God: in power and in passion He calls us forth. Our God is a lover, and how very much He loved his Son. And He tells us: *“Listen to Him”*. Lord, that we may learn even better how to listen to your love for us.

- *What things in your life signal God’s love for you?*
- *Are those things that you easily notice or do they tend to get lost in the shuffle?*
- *Ask the Father for an opportunity to hear his voice in deeper ways, and come expectant for Him to respond.*

Day Twenty-eight

“ ‘Everything is possible for him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.’ “ Mark 9:23b-24

I love this verse because it carries with it a promise from God which evokes such a richly honest response from the man. The promise is that *everything* is possible for those who believe. Hearing that “everything” brought an impetuous response that resounded with honesty: *“Yes, I do believe, but I can’t even begin to ingest that “everything”, oh, Lord, if that is true, then please, please bring me to a place of being able to step into your magnitude.”* What a *glorious* response!

Unfortunately, it is all too easy for us to attain head-knowledge of scripture. We can memorize and recite the verses that apply to our life situations or the situations of others, and yet the words never seem to touch our hearts. It is as though we are afraid to be honest with God—God who knows our every thought even before it is formed.

I would pray for all of us the ability to gain enough strength from the faith we do have, that we might come into the presence of God through Jesus and petition Him with honest hearts: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

- *What are the things your heart longs for with which you are reluctant to be honest with God?*
- *What part of “everything” do you find yourself holding back from?*
- *Ask the Father to open your heart to the expansiveness of possibility in Him.*

Day Twenty-nine

“ But they (the disciples) didn’t understand what He meant and were afraid to ask Him about it.” Mark 9:32

What the disciples didn’t understand was when Jesus had told them: *“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and after three days He will rise.”* v.31 This wasn’t the first time He had taught them this, but still they didn’t understand.

A couple of thoughts come to mind. First of all, what keeps us from asking when we don’t understand. On a human level we might be afraid of sounding stupid (assuming all others understood), that others might look down on us, mainly all reasons that center around self.

But here we also see the word *afraid*. They were afraid to ask Him. Here we touch on the roots of denial. That fear might stem from concern that we might not really want to know the truth. That fear might keep us from asking a doctor to elaborate on a diagnosis; that fear might keep us from questioning a spouse when their distance has become excruciating. Because if we know, then we have to deal with the consequences.

What the disciples were unable to walk into was the incredible truth of where this path would take Jesus and then subsequently take them and all of the rest of us. It was a terrifyingly glorious truth– the problem was that it was terrifying before it was glorious!

The next question I have is why, given God’s consistency, do we fear. I know there are all sorts of answers, but to me it is a call to place ourselves squarely in the midst of scripture and be in the midst of that unalterable consistency. Then we will dare to ask the questions; then we will be able to step (or be carried) from terrifying into glorious.

- *Spend some time reflecting on the very nature of God.*
- *What questions are you afraid to ask God?*
- *Ask Him for the grace to ask and to trust, all the while waiting to see his glory.*

Day Thirty

“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” Mark 9:42

This brings to me yet another questions that I need to be asking myself daily: What in my life is an obstacle to others? There is clear discernment involved with this, taking into consideration the people God has placed in my life who are watching and learning—known or unknown. It is not something that I can know totally on my own (though some sins are clearly evident) but something the Holy Spirit must reveal.

One thing I have found is that the Spirit is more than faithful to reveal. When one of my sons was ten, I was pointing out to him that it seemed as though most of his food landed on his clothing. It also seemed as though it’s time for him to begin to become a bit more conscientious about this. And so one particular day I was chastising him about the myriad of chocolate stains on his clothes from a fudgesicle he had eaten. He really had little recourse. The very next day I ate one of those fudgesicles. As I neared the end of my treat, pieces of ice cream began to fall uncontrollably off the stick and landed on my shirt and shorts. I couldn’t have stopped it – I tried. I cleaned myself off, and with still-wet marks on my clothes, went to find my son. I apologized and we both laughed; I think the Father was laughing, too.

For the places where we are stumbling blocks to others, God is faithful to reveal. We have to be as willing to recognize, repent, and when it is possible, to reconcile.

- *Are there times in my life where I know I have been a stumbling block to others – where my actions or inaction has kept others from God?*
- *If any of those places are left unrepented of, take this time to do so.*
- *Ask the Father to make your spirit more sensitive to His, that you might see and know how your life can encourage others on the journey to Him.*

Day Thirty-One

“ *What do you want me to do for you?* ” “ *He asked.* ” Mark 10:36

Our friends went to an island for their honeymoon. While there, the husband went out on a small boat and stepped on sea urchins. A large number of hooks went into his feet, and he became very, very sick as the poison ran through his body.

His blood counts were crazy, and week after week after returning home, he had high fevers and little sleep. People all over were praying for his healing, and every day a number of people came to him and prayed just for that. His healing was the focus of all of their prayers.

One evening, about seven weeks into the sickness, our friend awoke in a pool of sweat and was unable to return to sleep. He went downstairs and began to pray fervently. Suddenly, in the midst of his prayers, he saw a vision of Jesus. Jesus was standing before him in all of His royal robes and glory. Jesus asked him: “*What do you want?*” Our friend looked straight into the face of his Lord and said, “*You, Lord; I want you!*” Never mind the fact that the focus of his every prayer for weeks had been for his healing, when he came face to face with Jesus, Jesus was what our friend really wanted.

When we allow ourselves to come face to face with our Savior, all else pales and the true desire of our heart is Him. This is truly what relinquishment is; this is where our freedom lies. The way to that place is through worship; it is where He resides.

- *What do you want Him to do for you?*
- *What do you really want Him to do for you?*
- *Let go of your expectations and let Him design the hope of your heart.*

Lord, hear our prayer.