

CONNECT 7 DAILY DEVOTIONS



August 2

Theme: Are You Thirsty?

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 136:1-9, Romans 9:1-5, Matthew 14:13-21

August 9

Theme: Ruler of Nature

Readings: Job 38:4-18, Psalm 18:1-9, Romans 10:5-17, Matthew 14:22-33

August 16

Theme: Lord of All

Readings: Isaiah 56:1,6-8, Psalm 67, Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15. 28-32, Matthew 15:21-28

August 23

Theme: Who is He?

Readings: Isaiah 51:1-6, Psalm 138, Romans 11:33- 12:8, Matthew 16:13-20

August 30

Theme: Follow Jesus

Readings: Jeremiah 15:15-21, Psalm 26, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

Sept 6

Theme: Little Children

Readings: Ezekiel 33:7-9, Psalm 32:1-7, Romans 13:1-10, Matthew 18:1-20

Connecting to Worship: August 2

Theme: Are You Thirsty?

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 136:1-9, Romans 9:1-5, Matthew 14:13-21

The Right Signal

Monday July 27, 2020

When Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them. —

Matthew 14:14

Matthew 14:14-21

It was a tragic mistake. On July 3, 1988, the guided-missile cruiser *USS Vincennes* shot down an Iranian airliner with 290 souls aboard. All were lost. The ship's captain mistakenly thought they were under attack by an F-14 Iranian fighter.

Public opinion polls showed that most Americans opposed paying compensation to the victims' families. The cruel treatment of American hostages in Iran was still fresh in many minds. But President Reagan approved compensation. Asked by reporters if such payment would send the wrong signal, he replied, "I don't ever find compassion a bad precedent."

The principle of revenge is so much simpler to practice. Yet compassion is Christ's way—a deep caring for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the whole person. It reveals the heart of God for sinful people—for you and for me.

The feeding of the 5,000 was a miracle born out of compassion. Jesus was moved by the physical and spiritual needs of the people (Matthew 14:14; Mark 6:34). He was not content just to teach them and then send them on their way.

As Christians, we must look at the whole person through the eyes of Jesus. Being moved by compassion always sends the right signal.

By: **Dennis J. DeHaan**

Reflect & Pray

**Give me a heart sympathetic and tender,
Jesus, like Thine, Jesus, like Thine;
Touched by the needs that are surging around
me,
And filled with compassion divine. —Anon.**

Compassion is love in action.

The Greatest Invitation

Tuesday July 28, 2020

Reflect & Pray

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Isaiah 55:1

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Isaiah 55:1-7

During a recent week, I received several invitations in the mail. Those inviting me to attend "free" seminars on retirement, real estate, and life insurance were immediately thrown away. But the invitation to a gathering honoring a longtime friend caused me to reply immediately, "Yes! I accept." Invitation + Desire = Acceptance.

Isaiah 55:1 is one of the great invitations in the Bible. The Lord said to His people who were in difficult circumstances, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." This is God's remarkable offer of inner nourishment, deep spiritual satisfaction, and everlasting life (vv. 2-3).

Jesus's invitation is repeated in the last chapter of the Bible: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17).

We often think of eternal life as beginning when we die. In reality, it begins when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

God's invitation to find eternal life in Him is the greatest invitation of all! Invitation + Desire = Acceptance.

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your promise of mercy, pardon, and eternal life. I acknowledge my failures and receive Jesus as my Savior today.

When we accept Jesus's invitation to follow Him, our whole life changes direction.

By: **David C. McCasland**

The Search For Satisfaction

Wednesday July 29, 2020

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? —

Isaiah 55:2

Isaiah 55:1-6

When it comes to jigsaw puzzles, we all know that to enjoy a satisfying outcome you need all the pieces. In many ways, life is like that. We spend our days putting it together, hoping to create a complete picture out of all the scattered parts.

Yet sometimes it seems like a piece is missing. Perhaps we've been pursuing the wrong pieces to the puzzle. Even though we may know that life without God at the center is a life that has lost the most important piece, do we live as though He isn't particularly relevant? And even though we may attend church regularly, is He the throbbing center of our lives? Sometimes we grow accustomed to feeling distant from God. This makes it easier to sin, complicating the sense that something important is missing.

But no matter how far we may drift from God, He wants us near. He appealed to His people through the prophet Isaiah: "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance" (Isa. 55:2).

If something is missing in your life, remember that God is the only One who can fully and abundantly satisfy you. Let Him complete the picture of your life.

By: **Joe Stowell**

Reflect & Pray

The God-shaped void within our heart

Cannot be filled by treasure;

It's only God who satisfies

In ways we cannot measure. —Sper

*There's a longing in every heart that only Jesus
can satisfy.*

Bring What You Have

Thursday July 30, 2020

“Bring them here to me,” [Jesus] said.

Matthew 14:18

Today's Scripture & Insight:

John 6:4–14

“Stone Soup,” an old tale with many versions, tells of a starving man who comes to a village, but no one there can spare a crumb of food for him. He puts a stone and water in a pot over a fire. Intrigued, the villagers watch him as he begins to stir his “soup.” Eventually, one brings a couple of potatoes to add to the mix; another has a few carrots. One person adds an onion, another a handful of barley. A farmer donates some milk. Eventually, the “stone soup” becomes a tasty chowder.

That tale illustrates the value of sharing, but it also reminds us to bring what we have, even when it seems to be insignificant. In John 6:1–14 we read of a boy who appears to be the only person in a huge crowd who thought about bringing some food. Christ’s disciples had little use for the boy’s sparse lunch of five loaves and two fishes. But when it was surrendered, Jesus increased it and fed thousands of hungry people!

I once heard someone say, “*You* don’t have to feed the five thousand. You just have to bring your loaves and fishes.” Just as Jesus took one person’s meal and multiplied it far beyond anyone’s expectations or imagination (v. 11), He’ll accept our surrendered efforts, talents, and service. He just wants us to be willing to bring what we have to Him.

By: **Cindy Hess Kasper**

Reflect & Pray

**What have you been holding back from God?
Why is it difficult to bring that area of your life
to Him?**

*Jesus, help me to surrender whatever I have to
You, knowing You can multiply a little into a lot.*

What Money Can't Buy

Friday July 31, 2020

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon
Him while He is near. —

Isaiah 55:6

Today's Scripture:

Isaiah 55:1-7

Money is a necessary part of living. Without it, we couldn't secure the necessities or luxuries of life. But there are things money can't buy. As preacher W. A. Criswell said, "Money will buy luxuries, but it will not buy spiritual power. Money will buy advancement and preferment, but it will not buy the recognition of God. Money will buy . . . favor and accolades, but it will not buy soul respect."

The greatest good—so great that it is in a category all by itself—cannot be bought. If the entire human race were to bankrupt its resources in an effort to buy forgiveness of sin and eternal life with Jesus, it would be infinitely insufficient. All the wealth of the whole world cannot purchase the supreme blessing of forgiveness and heaven.

We'll never accumulate enough riches to purchase a place in the paradise of God. But

there's good news! Salvation can be ours "without money and without price," according to Isaiah 55:1.

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? You need only to stretch out your empty hands in childlike faith to the Lord (John 1:12). Cry out to Him and confess your sin. "He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

By: **Vernon Grounds**

Reflect & Pray

**I am redeemed, but not with silver;
I am bought, but not with gold;
Bought with a price—the blood of Jesus,
Precious price of love untold. —Gray**

*The faintest knock of faith opens wide the door
to forgiveness.*

Connecting to Worship, August 2

Theme: Are You Thirsty?

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 136:1-9,
Romans 9:1-5, Matthew 14:13-21

Connecting to Worship: August 9

Theme: Ruler of Nature

Readings: Job 38:4-18, Psalm 18:1-9, Romans 10:5-17, Matthew 14:22-33

Time Alone With God

Monday August 3, 2020

[Jesus] went up on a mountainside by himself
to pray.

Matthew 14:23

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 14:13–23

It was a busy morning in the church room where I was helping. Nearly a dozen little children were chattering and playing. There was so much activity that the room became warm and I propped the door open. One little boy saw this as his chance to escape so when he thought no one was looking, he tiptoed out the door. Hot on his trail, I wasn't surprised that he was headed straight for his daddy's arms.

The little boy did what we need to do when life becomes busy and overwhelming—he slipped away to be with his father. Jesus looked for opportunities to spend time with His heavenly Father in prayer. Some might say this was how He coped with the demands that depleted His human energy. According to the gospel of Matthew, Jesus was headed to a solitary place when a crowd of people followed Him. Noticing their needs, Jesus miraculously healed and fed them. After that, however, He “went up on a mountainside by himself to pray” (v. 23).

Jesus repeatedly helped multitudes of people, yet He didn't allow Himself to become haggard and hurried. He nurtured His connection with

God through prayer. How is it with you? Will you take time alone with God to experience His strength and fulfillment?

By: **Jennifer Benson Schuldt**

Reflect & Pray

Where are you finding greater fulfillment—in meeting the demands of life or in cultivating your relationship with your Creator?

When we draw near to God our minds are refreshed and our strength is renewed!

Retreating Forward

Tuesday August 4, 2020

When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

—

Matthew 14:23

Today's Scripture:

Matthew 14:13-23

A friend told me about his church's leadership retreat. For 2 days, church leaders pulled away for a time of prayer, planning, and worship. My friend was not only refreshed but also energized. He told me, "This retreat is really going to help us move forward as a church ministry."

It sounded funny to me—this notion of retreating in order to move forward. But it is true. Sometimes you have to pull back and regroup before you can make meaningful forward progress. This is particularly true in our relationship with God.

Jesus Himself practiced "retreating forward." After a busy day of ministry in the region of the Sea of Galilee, He retreated. Matthew 14:23 tells us that "when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there." Alone in the presence of the Father.

In this fast-paced, get-ahead world, it's easy to wear ourselves down—pressing ahead and moving forward at all costs. But even in our desire to be effective Christians, we must consistently be willing to retreat into God's presence. Only in the refreshing of His strength

can we find the resources to move forward in our service for Him. Retreat in Jesus before moving forward.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

To face life's many challenges
And overcome each test,
The Lord tells us to take the time
To stop. To pray. To rest. —Sper

*Alone with the Father is the only place to find
the strength to press on.*

Ruler of the Waves
Wednesday August 5, 2020

By: **Sheridan Voysey**

Reflect & Pray

**You are high and above all, Lord Almighty. I
bow to You as the Ruler of my life.**

Our Daily Bread welcomes writer **Sheridan
Voysey!** Meet Sheridan and all
our authors at odb.org/all-authors.

God is great, we are small, and that is good.

[The Lord said], “This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt.”

Job 38:11

Today's Scripture & Insight:
Job 38:1–18

King Canute was one of the most powerful men on earth in the eleventh century. In a now-famous tale, it is said that he ordered his chair to be placed on the shore as the tide was rising. “You are subject to me,” he said to the sea. “I command you, therefore, not to rise on to my land, nor to wet the clothing or limbs of your master.” But the tide continued to rise, drenching the king’s feet.

This story is often told to draw attention to Canute’s pride. Actually, it’s a story about humility. “Let all the world know that the power of kings is empty,” Canute says next, “save Him by whose will heaven, earth and sea obey.” Canute’s story makes a point: *God* is the only all-powerful One.

Job discovered the same. Compared to the One who laid Earth’s foundations (Job 38:4–7), who commands morning to appear and night to end (vv. 12–13), who stocks the storehouses of the snow and directs the stars (vv. 22, 31–33), we are small. There is only one Ruler of the waves, and it is not us (v. 11; Matt. 8:23–27).

Canute’s story is good to reenact when we begin feeling too clever or proud about ourselves. Walk to the beach and tell the tide to halt or try commanding the sun to step aside. We’ll soon remember who is really supreme and thank Him for ruling our lives.

'Were You There?'

Thursday August 6, 2020

Where were you when I laid the foundations of
the earth. —

Job 38:4

Today's Scripture:

Job 38:4-13

What you do with the Bible depends on what you do with the first sentence of Genesis. The Bible opens with a simple statement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). If you believe that, you can believe everything else that follows. If you reject that statement, you will also deny every other cardinal truth in the Scriptures.

Joe and Charlie were arguing about Genesis 1:1. Joe said he believed the record of creation just as it was written. Charlie was an unbeliever, and went to great lengths in giving his own theory of how the world began and then how life developed from a primordial cell through reptiles, monkeys, and up to man. When he was all through, Joe looked at him and said, "Were you there, Charlie?" It was a good question. "Of course I wasn't there," he replied. Joe said, "Well, God was. He was the only one there and I'll take the word of the Eyewitness rather than the guesses of those who rely on their own imagination."

In a court of law, eyewitness testimony carries the most weight. Hearsay testimony is thrown out. The same is true of creation. God asked Job the question, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4). God was there, and His Word can be trusted.

By: **M.R. DeHaan**

Reflect & Pray

I'll trust my all to God alone,
Whose Word is truth and light;
I'd rather walk by faith with Him
Than go alone by sight. —Anon.

*You will be able to trust the Bible when you
have come to trust its Author.*

Wonders in Focus

Friday August 7, 2020

For from him and through him and for him are
all things.

Romans 11:36

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Job 38:1–18

Some of us are inclined to look at the world and see only what's wrong. DeWitt Jones is a *National Geographic* photographer who has used his profession to celebrate what's right about the world. He waits and watches until a shaft of light or turn of perspective suddenly reveals a wonder that had been there all along. He uses his camera to find beauty in the most common faces of people and nature.

If anyone had reason to focus on the wrongs of the world, Job did. After losing all that had given him joy, even his friends became his accusers. Together their voices taunted him for not admitting that he was suffering for sins he was hiding. When Job cried out to the heavens for help, God remained silent.

Finally, from within the chaos of a whirlwind and the darkness of a storm, God asked Job to consider wonders of nature that reflect a

wisdom and power far beyond our own (Job 38:2–4).

Would He now ask us? What about something as natural as the ways of a dog, cat, fluttering leaf, or blade of grass? Could a shaft of light, or a turn of perspective, reveal—even in our pain—the mind and heart of a Creator who has been with us and for us all along?

By: **Mart DeHaan**

Reflect & Pray

Father in heaven, we've spent too much time thinking only about what is wrong and broken with our world. Please help us to see evidence of Your presence in the wonder of what only You could have done.

In the faces of nature there are wonders that never cease.

Connecting to Worship, August 9

Theme: Ruler of Nature

Readings: Job 38:4-18, Psalm 18:1-9, Romans 10:5-17, Matthew 14:22-33

Connecting to Worship: August 16

Theme: Lord of All

Readings: Isaiah 56:1,6-8, Psalm 67, Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15. 28-32, Matthew 15:21-28

Pure Worship

Monday August 10, 2020

My house will be called a house of prayer.

Mark 11:17

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Mark 11:15–18

Jose pastored a church known for its programs and theatrical productions. They were well done, yet he worried the church's busyness had slipped into a business. Was the church growing for the right reasons or because of its activities? Jose wanted to find out, so he canceled all extra church events for one year. His congregation would focus on being a living temple where people worshiped God.

Jose's decision seems extreme, until you notice what Jesus did when He entered the temple's outer courts. The holy space that should have been full of simple prayers had become a flurry of worship business. "Get your doves here! Lily white, as God requires!" Jesus overturned the merchant's tables and stopped those who bought their merchandise. Furious at what they were doing, He quoted Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7: " 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.' But you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:17). The court of the gentiles, the place for outsiders to worship God, had been turned into a mundane marketplace for making money.

There's nothing wrong with business or staying busy. But that's not the point of church. We're the living temple of God, and our main task is to worship Jesus. We likely won't need to flip over any tables as Jesus did, but He may be calling us to do something equally drastic.

By: **Mike Wittmer**

Reflect & Pray

Why do you attend church and meet with believers? What expectations of yours might you need to let the Spirit change?

Father, show us where our expectations of worship fail to please You. Help us see that it's all about You.

To Tell The Truth

Tuesday August 11, 2020

We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus
the Lord. —

2 Corinthians 4:5

Today's Scripture:

2 Corinthians 4:3-7

When you think of the term *evangelism*, what picture flashes onto the wall of your mind? A large stadium filled with people? A small booklet with a set of diagrams? A Christian wearing a pin with the symbol of a fish? A zealous believer playing intellectual chess with a pagan opponent? A salesman convincing a reluctant person to “try Jesus”?

Evangelism is a 10-letter dirty word to some of us. While we think it’s a dandy idea for others, we’re sure it isn’t for us. We’re not cut out to sell, nor shrewd enough to play intellectual games with non-Christians.

Evangelism, though, isn’t about being a huckster who cons people into buying what they don’t need. It has nothing to do with grabbing people by the lapels and shoving on them a faith that goes no deeper than the shirt pocket. What a grim indictment resides in the remark, “You could identify the people she had witnessed to by their haggard look.”

Evangelism is simply sharing with others what we know about Jesus. “We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5). No tricks. No deception. Speak the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth—in love. Then leave the results with God.

By: **Haddon W. Robinson**

Reflect & Pray

It's not our task to force God's truth
On those who may the truth detest,
But we are asked to share Christ's love
And let God's Spirit do the rest. —D. De Haan

*We who know the joy of salvation should not
keep it to ourselves.*

Talking About Jesus

Wednesday August 12, 2020

I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. —

1 Corinthians 2:2

Today's Scripture & Insight: **2 Corinthians 4:1-6**

Former major league baseball player Tony Graffanino tells of an ongoing ministry effort in a European country. Each year his organization holds a week-long baseball camp. During this week they also offer a daily Bible study. In past years, the leader tried to find reasoned ways to convince the campers that God exists so they would place their faith in Him. After about 13 years, they had seen only 3 people decide to follow Jesus.

Then they changed their approach, says Graffanino. Instead of “trying to present facts, or winning arguments for a debate,” they simply talked about “the amazing life and teachings of Jesus.” As a result, more campers came to listen, and more chose to follow Him.

The apostle Paul said that when we tell others about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we should set “forth the truth plainly. . . . We do not preach ourselves,” he said, “but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:2,5 niv). This was Paul’s standard for evangelism: “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

We should be knowledgeable about the Bible and about the reasons for our belief, and sometimes we need to explain those reasons. But the most compelling and effective story we can tell puts Christ in the center.

By: **Dave Branon**

Reflect & Pray

Father God, please use me in the lives of others.
Remind me to talk about who Jesus is and His life and teachings. And not to be dragged into debates,
but to share Jesus’ amazing life.
The risen Christ is the reason for our witness.

All Welcome!

Thursday August 13, 2020

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Luke 5:32

Today's Scripture & Insight: Luke 5:27–32

The much-prayed-for film night at the church youth club had finally arrived. Posters had been displayed all around the village and pizzas were warming in the oven. Steve, the youth pastor, hoped that the film—about gang members in New York who were brought face-to-face with the claims of Jesus by a young pastor—would bring new recruits to the club.

But he hadn't realized that a key football match was being shown on television that evening, so attendance was much smaller than he had hoped for. Sighing inwardly, he was about to dim the lights and begin the film when five leather-clad members of the local motorbike club came in. Steve went pale.

The leader of the group, who was known as TDog, nodded in Steve's direction. "It's free and for everyone, right?" he said. Steve opened his mouth to say, "Youth club members only" when TDog bent down and picked up a bracelet with the letters WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) stamped on it. "This yours, mate?" he asked. Steve nodded, hot with embarrassment, and waited while the new guests found a seat.

Have you ever been in Steve's situation? You long to share the good news about Jesus, but you have a mental list of the "right" people who would be acceptable? Jesus was often criticized by the religious authorities for the

company He kept. But He welcomed those everyone else avoided, because He knew they needed Him most (Luke 5:31–32).

By: **Marion Stroud**

Reflect & Pray

**Lord, please help me to see people through
Your eyes of love and to welcome all those
You bring into my life.**

*A heart that is open to Christ will be open to
those He loves.*

Bold Persistence

Friday August 14, 2020

Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” —

Matthew 15:28

Today's Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

In 1953, a fledgling business called Rocket Chemical Company and its staff of three set out to create a line of rust-prevention solvents and degreasers for use in the aerospace industry. It took them 40 attempts to perfect their formula. The original secret formula for WD-40—which stands for Water Displacement, 40th attempt—is still in use today. What a story of persistence!

The gospel of Matthew records another story of bold persistence. A Canaanite woman had a daughter who was possessed by a demon. She had no hope for her daughter—until she heard that Jesus was in the region.

This desperate woman came to Jesus with her need because she believed He could help her. She cried out to Him even though everything and everybody seemed to be against her—

race, religious background, gender, the disciples, Satan, and seemingly even Jesus (Matt. 15:22-27). Despite all of these obstacles, she did not give up. With bold persistence, she pushed her way through the dark corridors of difficulty, desperate need, and rejection. The result? Jesus commended her for her faith and healed her daughter (v.28).

We too are invited to approach Jesus with bold persistence. As we keep asking, seeking, and knocking, we will find grace and mercy in our time of need.

By: **Marvin Williams**

Reflect & Pray

**Something happens when we pray,
Take our place and therein stay,
Wrestle on till break of day;
Ever let us pray. —Anon.**

Persistence in prayer pleases God.

Connecting to Worship, August 16

Theme: Lord of All

Readings: Isaiah 56:1,6-8, Psalm 67, Romans 11:1-2a, 13-15. 28-32, Matthew 15:21-28

Connecting to Worship: August 23

Theme: Who is He?

Readings: Isaiah 51:1-6, Psalm 138, Romans 11:33- 12:8, Matthew 16:13-20

The Bell

Monday August 17, 2020

I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 16:13–20

Jackson dreamed of becoming a US Navy Seal from early childhood—an ambition that led to years of physical discipline and self-sacrifice. He eventually faced grueling tests of strength and endurance including what's referred to by trainees as "hell week."

Jackson was physically unable to complete the exhaustive training, and reluctantly rang a bell to inform the commander and other trainees of his choice to leave the program. For most, this would feel like failure. But in spite of the extreme disappointment, Jackson was later able to see his military failure as preparation for his life's work.

The apostle Peter experienced his own form of failure. He boldly proclaimed that he would remain loyal to Jesus even to prison or death (Luke 22:33). Yet later he wept bitterly after he denied that he knew Jesus (vv. 60–62). But God had plans beyond his failure. Prior to Peter's denial, Jesus informed him, "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18; see also Luke 22:31–32).

Are you struggling with a failure causing you to feel unworthy or unqualified to move on? Don't let the ringing bell of failure cause you to miss God's greater purposes for you.

By: **evanmorgan**

Reflect & Pray

What did you view as a failure in your life that God used to help you grow in Him? Why is it vital for us to find our identity in how God views us?

God, help me to use every circumstance, even my failures, for Your glory and honor!

Who Do You Say He Is?

Tuesday August 18, 2020

Who do you say I am?

Matthew 16:15

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 16:13–20

In a 1929 *Saturday Evening Post* interview, Albert Einstein said, “As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. . . . No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.”

The New Testament Scriptures give us other examples of Jesus’s countrymen who sensed there was something special about Him. When Jesus asked His followers, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” they replied that some said He was John the Baptist, others said He was Elijah, and others thought He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets (Matt. 16:14). To be named with the great prophets of Israel was certainly a compliment, but Jesus wasn’t seeking compliments. He was searching their understanding and looking for faith. So He asked a second question: “But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?” (16:15).

Peter’s declaration fully expressed the truth of Jesus’s identity: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (v. 16).

Jesus longs for us to know Him and His rescuing love. This is why each of us must eventually answer the question, “Who do you say Jesus is?”

By: **Bill Crowder**

Reflect & Pray

Lord, I long to know You better. Teach me more about Your beautiful character so that I might grow more in love with You and follow You with my whole heart.

The identity of Jesus is the central question of eternity.

Mistaken Identity

Wednesday August 19, 2020

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” —

Matthew 16:15

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 16:13-20

My youngest brother, Scott, was born when I was a senior in high school. This age difference made for an interesting situation when he grew to college age. On his first trip to his college campus, I went along with him and our mom. When we arrived, people thought we were Scott Crowder and his dad and his grandmom. Eventually, we gave up correcting them. No matter what we said or did, our actual relationships were overridden by this humorous case of mistaken identity.

Jesus questioned the Pharisees about His identity: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They replied, “The Son of David” (Matt. 22:42). The identity of Messiah was critical, and their answer was correct but incomplete. The Scriptures had affirmed that Messiah would come and reign on the throne of His father David. But Jesus reminded them that though David would be Christ’s ancestor, He would also be more—David referred to Him as “Lord.”

Faced with a similar question, Peter rightly answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Still today, the question of Jesus’ identity rises above the rest in significance—and it is eternally important that we make no mistake in understanding who He is.

By: **Bill Crowder**

Reflect & Pray

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

—Grant

No mistake is more dangerous than mistaking
the identity of Jesus.

The Real Jesus

Thursday August 20, 2020

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. —

Matthew 16:16

or hear about. Stick to the Bible. When people try to minimize His identity, tell them in no uncertain terms who the real Jesus is!

By: David C. Egner

Today's Scripture:

Matthew 16:13-20

Who is Jesus? Observing the ways He is portrayed these days, it's almost impossible to recognize Him as the Jesus of the Bible. Some groups add to what the Bible says about Him, while others diminish Him to simple humanity, claiming that He was merely a wise teacher or a master moralist. Some would like to make Him disappear altogether.

But this is nothing new. It's been happening for nearly 2,000 years. This reminds me of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the US Declaration of Independence. He went through the New Testament Gospels with scissors and cut out all references to Jesus' deity and the supernatural. This is known as *The Jefferson Bible*. Even recently, people have approached the Gospels in similar ways.

When Jesus asked His 12 disciples what people were saying about who He was, some answers were Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist, but these answers were all inadequate. Peter was correct when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Don't be deceived by fuzzy, watered down, or false descriptions of Jesus that you read, see,

The Price Of A Soul
Friday August 21, 2020

He who wins souls is wise. —

Proverbs 11:30

Today's Scripture:

Matthew 16:24-28

According to a *Wall Street Journal* article, Hemant Mehta wanted to find out if he was “missing something” as an atheist. So the DePaul University graduate student went on eBay with this proposition: He would spend 1 hour of church attendance for each \$10 bid by the highest bidder. A former evangelical minister won with an offer of \$504.

How much would you pay for the opportunity to present Christ to an unbeliever? The apostle Paul gave a lot more than \$504 in his endeavor to bring the gospel to people who had never heard of Jesus Christ. He traveled many long, hard miles across the world. In a gripping account he told of his experiences: shipwreck,

imprisonment, floggings, stoning, beatings, exhaustion, hunger, cold, and peril (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

In the past 2,000 years of missionary effort, valiant men and women have left their homelands to proclaim Christ in remote, primitive, and dangerous settings. Many have lost their lives; others have suffered persecution. In many parts of the world today, to talk publicly about Jesus is to risk hardship, jail, and even death.

When we consider Jesus’ sacrifice for us, any sacrifice we make to bring others to Him is worth the cost.

By: **David C. Egner**

Connecting to Worship, August 23

Theme: Who is He?

Readings: Isaiah 51:1-6, Psalm 138, Romans 11:33- 12:8, Matthew 16:13-20

Connecting to Worship: August 30

Theme: Follow Jesus

Readings: Jeremiah 15:15-21, Psalm 26, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

[Follow Me](#)

Monday August 24, 2020

Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. —

Mark 8:34

Today's Scripture:

Mark 8:34-38

During World War II, B-17 bombers made long flights from the US mainland to the Pacific island of Saipan. When they landed there, the planes were met by a jeep bearing the sign: "Follow Me!" That little vehicle guided the giant planes to their assigned places in the parking area.

One pilot, who by his own admission was not a religious man, made an insightful comment: "That little jeep with its quaint sign always reminds me of Jesus. He was [a lowly] peasant, but the giant men and women of our time would be lost without His direction."

Centuries after our Savior walked the streets and hills of Israel, the world with all its advances still needs His example and instruction. When His ways aren't followed, numerous problems and evils arise in our world—including immorality, crime, and greed.

How do we follow Jesus' ways? First of all, we turn from our sin and entrust our lives to Him as our Savior and Lord. Then, we seek His will in His Word each day and put it into practice by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. We learn to deny our selfish desires and give ourselves completely to following Jesus (Mark 8:34-35).

If you want to get in line with the purposes of God, respond to Jesus' invitation: "Follow Me!"

By: **Vernon Grounds**

Reflect & Pray

THINKING IT OVER

For help on your Christian journey,
read the online booklet **What Does It Take To**

Follow Christ?

To find your way through life, follow Jesus.

Follow The Instructions

Tuesday August 25, 2020

Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. —

Matthew 7:24

Today's Scripture:

Matthew 7:24-29

One of my boyhood hobbies was building model planes. Every time I opened a new box, the first thing I saw was the instructions, but I didn't think I needed to follow them. In my mind I knew exactly how to put the model together. Not until I had glued a few pieces together did I realize I had skipped an important step, like putting the pilot in the cockpit.

It's easy to think that we have no need for instructions for our lives, only to later realize that we've messed things up. Which is exactly why Jesus advised that following His instructions is the way for wise people to build a safe, solid, and significant life (Matt. 7:24-29). He had just told the listening crowd to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, to forgive enemies, and to sell treasures so that they could give to the poor (5:39-44). But just getting the instructions isn't enough. The key is to follow them. "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (7:24).

Those who don't follow the instructions are, as Jesus put it, "foolish" (v.26). To the world, forgiving your enemies and giving to the poor may seem like a silly way to build a life, but, take it from Jesus, it's the wise way.

By: **Joe Stowell**

Reflect & Pray

Lord, help me heed Your every word,
Commands that I have read or heard; As You
reveal Your will each day, Help me to follow
and obey. —Fitzhugh

To build a rock-solid life, follow Jesus'
instructions.

Following The Master

Wednesday August 26, 2020

At the command of the Lord they remained encamped, and at the command of the Lord they journeyed. —

Numbers 9:23

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Numbers 9:15-23

At a dog show near my home, I watched a Cardigan Welsh corgi named Trevor perform. At his master's command, he ran several yards away and immediately returned, he jumped fences, and he identified objects using his sense of smell. After finishing each exercise, he sat down at his master's feet and waited for more instructions.

Trevor's careful attention to his master's instruction reminded me of the devotion God desired from His people as they followed Him through the wilderness. God led in a unique way. His presence appeared as a cloud. If the cloud ascended, He wanted His people to move to another area. If the cloud descended, they were to stay put. "At the command of the Lord they remained encamped, and at the command of the Lord they journeyed" (Num. 9:23). The Israelites followed this practice day or night, regardless of how long they had to remain in one place.

God wasn't simply testing the Israelites; He was leading them to the Promised Land (10:29). He wanted to take them to a better place. So it is with us when God asks us to follow Him. He wants to lead us to a place of closer fellowship with Himself. His Word assures us that He is loving and faithful in leading those who humbly follow Him.

By: **Jennifer Benson Schuldt**

Reflect & Pray

In fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do, where He sends we
will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey. —Sammis
God asks His children to follow the Leader.

Free to Follow

Thursday August 27, 2020

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:29

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 11:25–30

My high school cross-country coach once advised me before a race, “Don’t try to be in the lead. The leaders almost always burn out too quickly.” Instead, he suggested I stay close behind the fastest runners. By letting them set the pace, I could conserve the mental and physical strength I’d need to finish the race well.

Leading can be exhausting; following can be freeing. Knowing this improved my running, but it took me a lot longer to realize how this applies to Christian discipleship. In my own life, I was prone to think being a believer in Jesus meant trying *really hard*. By pursuing my own exhausting expectations for what a Christian should be, I was inadvertently missing the joy and freedom found in simply following Him (John 8:32, 36).

But we weren’t meant to direct our own lives, and Jesus didn’t start a self-improvement program. Instead, He promised that in seeking Him we will find the rest we long for (Matthew 11:25–28). Unlike many other religious teachers’ emphasis on rigorous study of Scripture or an elaborate set of rules, Jesus taught that it’s simply through knowing Him that we know God (v. 27). In seeking Him, we find our heavy burdens lifted (vv. 28–30) and our lives transformed.

Because following Him, our gentle and humble Leader (v. 29), is never burdensome—it’s the way of hope and healing. Resting in His love, we are free.

By: **Monica La Rose**

Reflect & Pray

Lord, I’m so thankful I don’t have to be in charge of my own life. Help me rest in You.

True freedom is found in following Christ.

Subtle Wisdom

Friday August 28, 2020

If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. —

John 12:26

Today's Scripture:

Mark 8:34-38

When I was in college, my co-worker Bud, a fork-truck driver, often enriched my life with his pithy wisdom. We were eating lunch one day, sitting on the back of his fork truck, when I announced that I was transferring to another school.

“Why?” he asked.

“All my friends are transferring,” I answered.

Bud chewed his sandwich for a moment and then replied quietly and with subtle irony, “I guess that’s one way to pick a school.”

His words struck me with rare force. *Of course*, I thought. *But is this the only way to choose a school? Will I follow my friends for the rest of my days, or will I follow Jesus? Will I seek His*

face and His will and go where He wants me to go?

Twenty-five times in the New Testament, Jesus said to His disciples, “Follow Me.” In Mark 8:34, He said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” No matter what others do or what direction their lives may take, we must do what He asks us to do.

The words of an old song come to mind: “My Lord knows the way through the wilderness; all I have to do is follow!”

By: **David H. Roper**

Reflect & Pray

As I walk along life’s pathway, Though the way I cannot see, I shall follow in Christ’s footsteps,
For He has a plan for me. —Thiesen

To find your way through life, follow Jesus.

Connecting to Worship, August 30

Theme: Follow Jesus

Readings: Jeremiah 15:15-21, Psalm 26,
Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

Connecting to Worship: September 6

Theme: Little Children

Readings: Ezekiel 33:7-9, Psalm 32:1-7, Romans 13:1-10, Matthew 18:1-20

Gentle Jesus

Monday August 31, 2020

Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. —

Matthew 18:3

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 18:1-10

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) was a Methodist evangelist who wrote more than 9,000 hymns and sacred poems. Some, like “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” are great, soaring hymns of praise. But his poem “Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild,” first published in 1742, is a child’s quiet prayer that captures the essence of how all of us should seek the Lord in sincere, simple faith.

*Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,
In Thy gracious hands I am;
Make me, Savior, what Thou art,
Live Thyself within my heart.*

When some followers of Jesus were jockeying for position in His kingdom, the Lord “called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:2-3).

Not many children seek position or power. Instead, they want acceptance and security. They cling to the adults who love and care for them. Jesus never turned children away. The last stanza of Wesley’s poem shows a childlike desire to be just like Jesus: “I shall then show forth Thy praise / Serve Thee all my

happy days; / Then the world shall always see / Christ, the holy Child, in me.”

By: **David C. McCasland**

Reflect & Pray

Father, give me the faith of a little child. I want to know Your love and care, and to rest in Your embrace. Grant my desire to be like You in all my ways that I might live for Your honor.

Faith shines brightest in a childlike heart.

Love for Children

Tuesday September 1, 2020

Let the children come to me. Don't stop them!
For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those
who are like these children.

Matthew 19:14 nlt

strata, ethnicity, and family environment are at risk due to neglect, human trafficking, abuse, drugs, and more. How can we honor the Father who loves us by showing His care for these little ones Jesus welcomes?

By: **Bill Crowder**

Reflect & Pray

Be an expression of the love of Jesus.

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Matthew 18:1–10

Thomas Barnado entered the London Hospital medical school in 1865, dreaming of life as a medical missionary in China. Barnado soon discovered a desperate need in his own front yard—the many homeless children living and dying on the streets of London. Barnado determined to do something about this horrendous situation. Developing homes for destitute children in London's east end, Barnado rescued some 60,000 boys and girls from poverty and possible early death. Theologian and pastor John Stott said, "Today we might call him the patron saint of street kids."

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children" (Matt. 19:14 nlt). Imagine the surprise the crowds—and Jesus's own disciples—must have felt at this declaration. In the ancient world, children had little value and were largely relegated to the margins of life. Yet Jesus welcomed, blessed, and valued children.

James, a New Testament writer, challenged Christ-followers saying, "Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans . . . in their troubles" (James 1:27 nlt). Today, like those first-century orphans, children of every social

Tell Me a Story

Wednesday September 2, 2020

He did not say anything to them without using a parable.

Mark 4:34

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Mark 4:26–34

Once upon a time. Those four words just might be among the most powerful in the entire world. Some of my earliest memories as a boy contain a variation on that potent phrase. My mother came home one day with a large, hardcover illustrated edition of biblical stories—*My Good Shepherd Bible Story Book*. Every evening before lights-out, my brother and I would sit expectantly as she read to us of a time long ago filled with interesting people and the God who loved them. Those stories became a lens for how we looked at the great big world.

The undisputed greatest storyteller ever? Jesus of Nazareth. He knew we all carry inside us an innate love for stories, so that was the medium He consistently used to communicate His good news: *Once upon a time* there was a man who scattered “seed on the ground” (Mark 4:26). *Once upon a time* there was “a mustard seed” (v. 31), and on and on. Mark’s gospel clearly indicates that Jesus used stories in His interactions with everyday people (v. 34) as a way to help them see the world more clearly and understand more thoroughly the God who loved them.

That’s wise to remember as we desire to share with others God’s good news of mercy and grace. The use of story is almost impossible to resist.

By: **John Blase**

Reflect & Pray

How could you weave a story or parable into your conversations this week? Maybe something like, “Once upon a time, God answered my prayer in a surprising way”

Jesus, You’re the Wonderful Counselor and the Great and Mighty God. Give us creativity in the ways in which we share Your love with a world that still slows down to hear a story.

Lost but Found

Thursday September 3, 2020

Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.

Luke 15:6

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Luke 15:1–9

When we discovered that my mother-in-law had gone missing while shopping with a relative, my wife and I were frantic. Mom suffered from memory loss and confusion, and there was no telling what she might do. Would she wander the area, or hop onto any bus thinking it would take her home? Worst-case scenarios spun through our minds as we began to search for her, crying out to God, “Please find her.”

Hours later, my mother-in-law was spotted stumbling along a road, miles away. How God blessed us in being able to find her. Several months later, He blessed her: at eighty years of age, my mother-in-law turned to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Jesus, comparing humans to lost sheep, gives us this illustration: “Suppose [a shepherd] has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, . . . he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep’” (Luke 15:4–6).

Shepherds counted their sheep to make sure everyone was accounted for. In the same way, Jesus, who likens himself to that shepherd, values each of us, young and old. When we’re wandering in life, searching, wondering about our purpose, it’s never too late to turn to Christ. God wants us to experience His love and blessings.

By: Leslie Koh

Reflect & Pray

Lord, You search for us and find us. Thank You for making us Your own.

Amazing grace! . . . I once was lost, but now am found. John Newton

A Missing Sheep

Friday September 4, 2020

We are His people and the sheep of His
pasture. —
Psalm 100:3

Today's Scripture & Insight:

Luke 15:1-10

Laura loaded a borrowed goat and sheep into a trailer to transport them to church for a rehearsal of a live nativity. The animals head-butted and chased each other for a bit and then settled down. Laura started for the church but first had to stop for gas.

While pumping the gas, she noticed the goat standing in the parking lot! And the sheep was gone! In the commotion of getting them settled she had forgotten to lock one of the latches. Laura called the sheriff and some friends who searched frantically along a stretch of businesses, cornfields, and woods during the last daylight hours. Many were praying that she would find the borrowed animal.

The next morning Laura and a friend went out to post "Lost Sheep" flyers at local businesses. Their first stop was the gas station. A customer overheard them asking the cashier about posting a flyer and said, "I think I know where your sheep is!" The sheep had wandered to his neighbor's farm, where he had put it in the barn for the night.

The Lord cares about lost sheep—including you and me. Jesus came from heaven to earth to show us His love and provide salvation (John 3:16). He goes to great lengths to seek and find us (Luke 19:10).

When the sheep was found, Laura nicknamed her Miracle. And God's salvation of us is a miracle of His grace.

By: Anne Cetas

Reflect & Pray

Heavenly Father, as we care for the things dear to us, how much more do You care for us, Your children! Thank You for answered prayer and for the miracle of Your grace.

The Good Shepherd gives His life for His sheep.

[John 10:11](#)

Connecting to Worship, September 6

Theme: Little Children

Readings: Ezekiel 33:7-9, Psalm 32:1-7, Romans 13:1-10, Matthew 18:1-20