

The
Seedbed
Daily Text



FORTY STEPS ON THE ROAD TO RESURRECTION

Lent

J. D. WALT



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How the Daily Text Works

It seems obvious to say, but I write the Daily Text every day. I mostly write it the day before it is scheduled to release online.

Speaking of that, before we go further, I would like to cordially invite you to subscribe and receive the daily e-mail. Visit dailytext.seedbed.com to get started. Check out the weekly fasting challenge while you are there, and also the very active Facebook group.

Eventually, the daily postings become part of a Daily Text discipleship resource. That's what you hold in your hands now.

It's not exactly a Bible study, though the Bible is both the source and subject. You will learn something about the Bible along the way: its history, context, original languages, and authors. My goal is not educational in nature but transformational. I am more interested in our knowing Jesus than I am in our knowing *about* Jesus.

To that end, each reading begins with the definitive inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the ongoing, unfolding text of Scripture. Following this is a short and, hopefully, substantive insight from the text and some aspect of its meaning. For insight to lead to deeper influence, we turn the text into prayer. Finally, influence must run its course toward impact. This is why we ask each other questions. These questions are not designed to elicit information but to crystallize intention.

HOW THE DAILY TEXT WORKS

Discipleship always leads from inspiration to intention and from attention to action.

Using the Daily Text as a Discipleship Curricular Resource for Groups

While Scripture always addresses us personally, it is not written to us individually. The content of Scripture cries out for a community to address. The Daily Text is made for discipleship in community. This resource can work in several different ways. It could be read like a traditional book, a few pages or chapters at a time. Though inadvisable, the readings could be crammed in on the night before the meeting. Keep in mind, the Daily Text is not called the Daily Text for kicks. We believe Scripture is worthy of our most focused and consistent attention. Every day. We all have misses, but let's make every day more than a noble aspiration. Let's make it our covenant with one another.

For Use with Bands

In our judgment, the best and highest use of the Daily Text is made through what we call banded discipleship. A band is a same-gender group of three to five people who read together, pray together, and meet together to help one another grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ in this life. With banded discipleship, the daily readings serve more as a common text for the band and grist for the interpersonal conversation mill between meetings. The band meeting is reserved for the specialized activities of high-bar discipleship.

To learn more about bands and banded discipleship, visit discipleshipbands.com. Be sure to download the free *Guide to Micro-Community Discipleship* or order a supply of the printed booklets online. Also be sure to explore our online platform for bands at app.newroombands.com.

For Use with Classes and Small Groups

The Daily Text has also proven to be a helpful discipleship resource for a variety of small groups, from community groups to Sunday school classes. Here are some suggested guidelines for deploying the Daily Text as a resource for a small group or class setting.

I. Hearing the Text

Invite the group to settle into silence for a period of no less than one and no more than five minutes. Ask an appointed person to keep time and to read the biblical text covering the period of days since the last group meeting. Allow at least one minute of silence following the reading of the text.

II. Responding to the Text

Invite anyone from the group to respond to the reading by answering these prompts: What did you hear? What did you see? What did you otherwise sense from the Lord?

III. Sharing Insights and Implications for Discipleship

Moving in an orderly rotation (or free-for-all), invite people to share insights and implications from the week's readings. What did you find challenging, encouraging, provocative, comforting, invasive, inspiring, corrective, affirming, guiding,

HOW THE DAILY TEXT WORKS

or warning? Allow group conversation to proceed at will. Limit to one sharing item per turn, with multiple rounds of discussion.

Note: this resource comes with a free series of online streaming videos for each week's group meeting. In them, I share a seven- to ten-minute reflection on some aspect of the Scripture readings from the prior week. Some groups like to play the video at the beginning of this group sharing time as a way of kicking off the conversation.

IV. Shaping Intentions for Prayer

Invite each person in the group to share a single discipleship intention for the week ahead. It is helpful if the intention can also be framed as a question the group can use to check in from the prior week. At each person's turn, he or she is invited to share how their intention went during the previous week. The class or group can open and close their meeting according to their established patterns.

On the Season of Lent

The season of Lent is an ancient practice of the church, traditionally engaged to prepare men and women for baptism on the day of Easter. The word comes from an old English word, *lencten*, which means, “spring,” and connects with the notion of lengthening days. One of the key practices of Lent is fasting. Sundays, however, are always feast days. Properly speaking, the six Sundays of Lent are not counted in the forty days. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues through Holy Saturday. Ash Wednesday is a preparatory rite of passage, a solemn occasion for repentance and faith; it is ideal for focusing attention and clarifying intention.

This Daily Text series begins with the Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday. On Shrove Tuesday (a.k.a. Fat Tuesday), the day before Ash Wednesday, we will gather on the Mount of Transfiguration. Ash Wednesday begins our journey of descent to the cross. Our journey runs the route from Luke 9:18 through 24:8. While the daily reflections focus on the Scripture text, it is imperative to understand that the Daily Text is not intended to be centered around my writings but on the Word of God. Please do not skip or even skim the reading of the Scripture text. I encourage you to read it aloud as much as possible so your ears can hear it. Remember, faith comes by hearing. An audio version of the Daily Text can be found at seedbed.com/dailytext.

ON THE SEASON OF LENT

Each day's reading and reflection leads to a prayer and a question. The prayer will remain consistent for the whole way. Please read the introduction to grasp the significance of the daily prayer and for guidance on engaging it. The question is meant for personal reflection and discussion with others. The Daily Text has become grist for the mill in many discipleship settings and contexts—from Sunday school classes and community groups to discipleship bands and mentoring circles. Also available with this series are additional resources to enable church-wide engagement, including guidance for a preaching series and helps for utilizing the resource in classes and groups. Visit Seedbed.com to learn more.

This resource is also available on our Discipleship Bands App, which can be downloaded from the various app stores online. Visit discipleshipbands.com to learn more. In short, a discipleship band is a group of three to five men or women who read together, pray together, and meet together to become the love of God for one another and the world. When it comes to sustained deep growth in life and faith, discipleship bands consistently deliver.

The Seedbed Daily Text is a growing global fellowship of sowers for a great awakening. It can be accessed online at seedbed.com/dailytext or subscribed to via a daily e-mail. It can be listened to via a link on the daily post and e-mail, through the iTunes Podcast site, and by means of an Amazon Echo device. We also have a flourishing Facebook group for those who enjoy that format.

Introduction

The Journey Starts Here

I don't know why I had the book or how it came into my possession. I have no idea what inspired me to read it in the throes of the insanity that are law school final exams. But read it I did. Through this lesser-known, puzzling novel of a reclusive, enigmatic author, the Spirit of God awakened me to the Son of God who awakened me to the love of God, all of which I knew much about and yet through a glass dimly—still at a level I might have understood property law or torts.

You must be wondering about this book. Despite its triggered landmine explosion in my life, I'm not recommending it, other than to name it as one of those mysterious divine providences whereby, in the words of a Trappist monk, "God gets us where he wants us, no matter the machinations." The author was J. D. Salinger, whose most famous book, *The Catcher in the Rye*, still eludes my reading. The book—*Franny and Zooey*—released in 1961, combined two short stories about a sister and brother, respectively, earlier published by Salinger in *The New Yorker* in 1955 and 1957.

The book tells the story of Franny, a college student in search of purpose, tossed by the waves of the meaninglessness of modern academia and on the brink of emotional breakdown. On a date with her boyfriend, she recounts a

INTRODUCTION

mysterious book that had come into her possession, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, and its strange impact on her life, introducing her to a mantra of sorts known as the “Jesus Prayer.”

And what, you ask, is the Jesus Prayer? Twelve insanely economical, unutterably comprehensive words: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Here’s Franny in her own words on the point of the prayer:

The Jesus Prayer has one aim, and one aim *only*. To endow the person who says it with Christ-consciousness. *Not* to set up some little cozy, holier-than-thou trysting place with some sticky, adorable divine *personage* who’ll take you in his arms and relieve you of all your duties and make all your nasty *weltschmerzen* and Professor Tupperts go away and never come back. And by God, if you have intelligence enough to see that—and you *do*—and yet you refuse to see it, then you’re misusing the prayer, you’re using it to ask for a world full of dolls and saints and no Professor Tupperts.¹

Searching for purpose and tossed to and fro by the waves of a late adolescent crisis of meaning and purpose, I adopted not only the prayer but Franny’s way of praying it. It took on a kind of holy obsession for me. I prayed it as my feet hit the floor in the morning. I prayed it as I brushed my teeth. I prayed it at meals. I prayed it in class.

1 J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (1955; repr., New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 172.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Like most other Christians I had ever known, I knew Jesus as Savior in a transactional way. I am not sure I knew Jesus as Lord until I began to address him as such with such constancy. I assented to the inevitable fact of my being a sinner, much like a box one would check for a preexisting condition (like say a heart murmur, on a medical form). While I had a clear concept of mercy, I had no conception of my actual need for it.

Though I was praying the prayer consistently, I did not begin praying unceasingly until the prayer connected with my walking. I began to pray the prayer as I moved about the world, each word of it in cadence with the next step. Walking here, walking there, upstairs, downstairs, every step: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Something about the rudimentary nature of steps—all at once conscious and unconscious, intentional yet automatic, labored yet effortless—took me inside of the prayer. As the words of my mouth connected with the steps of my feet, the prayer began to groove a well-worn path through the overgrown underbrush of my soul.

Epiphanies abounded. I began to discover my sin as a reality far deeper than my sins. It was not my sins that made me a sinner. I was born this way. I am not a sinner because I sin. No, I sin because I am a sinner. My problem was not at the level of bad behavior but broken identity. I needed mercy not because of anything I had done but because of who I was. Who was I? As a sinner, my identity could be summed

INTRODUCTION

up in one word: a slave. My need for mercy did not rise and fall based on my behavior but was constant and totalizing. This led me to the awakening discovery that Jesus' mercy was more than something he had done. It was his identity. Jesus not only *had* mercy for me, but he was mercy *to* me.

Then the miracle happened. In owning my core identity as a slave, a sinner, and a broken image-bearer of God, Jesus gave me a new identity. He made me a beloved son. With that, my Jesus prayer grew.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son.

I didn't leave behind the first prayer, as though I somehow ceased to be a sinner. I simply added the second.

Why do we need mercy to be sons and daughters? It's one thing to be the grateful recipient of a pardon, but surely there must be more to bearing the image of the triune God than life as a pardoned criminal or even a freed slave. While those are tremendous gifts of grace, they do not begin to touch the enormity of our inheritance. We are the children of God, the sons and daughters of a perfect Father, which makes us the coheirs with the Son of God. On this point, Scripture could not be more clear. Check it out:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with

him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
(Rom. 8:15–17 ESV)

I needed the mercy of forgiveness to pardon my sin and to rescue me from slavery. I needed a new kind of mercy to truly claim my identity and inheritance as a son. This would take the mercy of faith. Why faith? I had read it a thousand times. I was a child of God. I believed it at some level. I sang the songs. Despite all that, this truth had not taken up residence in my deepest self. I think I believed God loved me because he had to love me. I needed to believe this in a much deeper way. I needed to know it in my bones. And so I stepped.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son.

Then the miracle happened. In owning my core identity as a son, a beloved child of an adoring Father, I began to rest in who I most deeply was—my true self. He didn't love me for anything I had done or in spite of my failures. He loved me because I belonged to him. And I began to love him because he belonged to me.

I needed the mercy of faith because this whole concept of a gifted identity was stripping away my old slavish system of self-worth. All of my perceived value, which was built around all the ways I performed and pleased my way to the top, had to go so something new and gloriously devastating could rise up in its place. The mercy of faith gave rise to the mercy of freedom as I claimed the newfound gift of an ancient baptism.

INTRODUCTION

In the days of Lent long ago, I learned to eat the blessed word of my own baptism of belovedness: “John David, you are my son, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.” Just as Jesus received these words prior to any performance, so would I receive them. Just as Jesus would thwart the temptation to prove his identity by turning stones into bread, so would I—by the saving provision of the Word of God spoken in the sustaining power of the Spirit of God. The mercy of sonship and daughterhood is not a static state, but a dynamic, growing reality which must be fed daily by the bread-like manna of Word and Spirit.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son.

As the mercy of forgiveness became faith and the mercy of faith became freedom, I began to discover yet another new mercy—the mercy of fullness. It gave rise to the third and what I believe to be final Jesus prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

I began to discover the power of the love of God. If I could be loved deeply (simply because of who I was), I could love others deeply (simply because of who they were). Carefully consider Paul’s prayer from his letter to the Ephesians:

that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and

grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3:16–19 ESV)

The word *saint* means “a holy one.” A saint is a person who is “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19). According to Scripture, the fullness of God is the love of God in Jesus Christ, which turns out to be the power of God.

Mercy is the soul’s oxygen. The more desperately we breathe it, the more deeply we become it. In this way, the holy love of God is both our identity and our vocation in the world.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son/daughter.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

From sinners and slaves to sons and daughters and from sons and daughters to saints of God—this is the path of descent on the way of the cross. Progress moves by way of forgiveness to faith to freedom to fullness. To be clear, it is not a neat and tidy journey. It will be occasioned by great struggle, often by fits and starts and through both crisis and process. It will be gloriously hard and profoundly good.

God gets us where he wants us by way of our walk with him. Our walk with him is comprised by our everyday steps. This is not a step-by-step follow-the-directions kind of process;

INTRODUCTION

rather it is a following Jesus step-by-step as he leads us. I commend these prayers to you through the days of Lent and beyond. To this day, I pray them every day, multiple times a day. They are not magical incantations, but they will become miraculous interventions. Give them time and space. Give them your breath and your steps. Thirty-six words. Thirty-six steps. But this book is called *Listen to Him: Forty Steps on the Road to Resurrection*. Here are four more word steps for the road: Father, Son, Holy Spirit!

And a bonus word: Amen!



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Shrove Tuesday

Fat Tuesday on Transfiguration Mountain

LUKE 9:28–36 | About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Consider This

We are here—Transfiguration Mountain.

Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Peter, James, and John.

This is the conference of the counsel of the kingdom of God. Moses represents the Law. Elijah represents the Prophets. Rather than representing the gospel, Jesus is the gospel in whom the Law and the Prophets are not only fulfilled but extended into all eternity. Then there are the apostles who will be the church. They represent us. The Law, the Prophets, and the gospel come face-to-face with the Rock and the sons of thunder—the future church.

Jesus, God's Messiah, miraculously unites not only divinity and humanity, but heaven and earth and even the past and the future. In this instance, the representatives of the past are brought into the presence of the representatives of the future and all for the purpose of together beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come! Everything, literally everything, comes together and coheres and transforms, no, transfigures in him. Transformation is to transfiguration as resuscitation is to resurrection.

As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

This is not a dream or a vision or some otherwise ethereal cathartic experience. This, my friends, is the tangible revelation and manifestation of ultimate reality.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in

heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15–17 ESV)

Remember what Jesus told the disciples? “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” (Mark 9:1 ESV).

Isn’t that what Paul was saying?

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor. 15:50–54 ESV)

On this mountain, the paper-thin veil between heaven and earth is pulled back and we behold eternity as a snapshot in time.

When the kingdom finally comes in all its glory, this is what we will see: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah,

Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Ruth and Samuel and David and Elijah and Mary and Peter and James and John and Lydia and Dorcas and Paul and Barnabas and Perpetua and Polycarp and your grandparents and mine and those loved ones in the Lord who succumbed to cancer and tragedy and the children that left us too soon. Together, we will all be transfigured. “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49 ESV).

And at the center of it all we will behold the risen Son of God, the one who not only tasted death but who, as Isaiah prophesied, “will swallow up death forever” (25:8 ESV).

Just when the disciples thought the kingdom had come, and they should make camp, the conference was over. This would prove to be the turning point, the hinge on which the door to the gospel would swing open. From this mountaintop transfiguration high, Jesus will lead us to the lowest place, where the Son of Man will be disfigured on the cross.

That’s why Transfiguration Mountain is all at once the best and worst place on the planet to get ready for Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday opens the doorway to descent, the place where the truth of our mortality is met with the promise of eternity. From dust you have come and to dust you will return. Repent and believe the gospel. If transfiguration is the destination, transformation shall be the journey.

We are headed to Jerusalem now. The cross before us, the world behind us, no turning back; no turning back.

One more thing . . . I didn’t mention it, but we received a massive word from God on Transfiguration Mountain.

“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”
(Luke 9:35 ESV).

That will be our agenda for these next forty days as we make our way down the mountain and on to Jerusalem. Luke, our skillful guide, will lead the way ahead. We will reconvene and regroup tomorrow at the foot of the mountain.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a
son/daughter.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

What does the phrase “Repent and believe the gospel” mean to you at this moment in your life?

Ash Wednesday—Don’t Be Afraid to Ask

1

LUKE 9:37–45 | The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It

scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.”

“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.”

Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, “Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.” But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Consider This

But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Can we resolve something here at the outset of this journey to the cross? The greatest hindrance to growing in our understanding of life, faith, Jesus, the world, and the world to come is our present understanding of life, faith, Jesus, the world, and the world to come. It’s hard to learn what we think we already know. And that may be our greatest problem: we don’t know what we don’t know. Know what I mean?

In other words, the more we grow the more difficult growth becomes and the more likely we are to stall out, plateau, and get stuck or arrested in development.

So what's the remedy for this condition? Sometimes it takes a desert to bring us to desperation, which can lead us to humility, making way for the kind of learning that leads to breakthrough growth. The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, which means, "learner." A disciple is not one who learns by mastering information; rather a disciple is one who learns by submitting to a master. Here's how Jesus describes it:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:29–30 ESV)

This is a perfect invitation to a Holy Lent. Lent invites us to a desert of deepening for the sake of divine love. Lent is not about fasting, though fasting is a key path toward deepening. Lent is not about becoming more disciplined, though discipline comes from the root word, *disciple*. Lent is not about developing an Instagram-oriented designer spirituality so others can #checkoutmyperfectlife. If ever there were a season for #nofilter and no selfies, it is Lent.

Lent opens a time for getting in touch with the holy discontent that comes from having too much of that which does not ultimately matter and too little of that which actually does. Lent unfolds a path allowing holy discontent to

lead us into a brokenness before God (whether that be a real-messed-up-ness or a not-quite-right-ness or a somewhere-in-between-ness). Lent extends the invitation to let our brokenness before God lead us to a deeper surrender and truer submission to Jesus. And the outcome? Finally, through this qualitatively different kind of surrender, Lent reveals all the human possibilities of participating in the divine nature, whereby we may escape the corruption that is in the world and live extravagantly generous lives in the embrace of holy love.

There's a way to avoid this outcome: *But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.*

So what was it they failed to understand? *The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.*

Of course we get this. It's obvious. We learned it a long time ago. This is basic Christianity 101. Remember how Jesus prefaced this critically important statement? *"Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you."*

Okay, so I will go first. Jesus, as sure as I think that I understand what you said here, I am confident that I don't fully get it. I may not even get it a little bit. I want to ask you to instruct me and lead me deeper into the meaning of your life and death and resurrection. I've been in church all my life, and I have the perfect attendance pins to prove it. I've been to seminary and even work for one. I write books about you. But I confess that what I understand causes me to love you and to want to understand more, and I know that understanding

more will cause me to love you more which will lead me to love others more. I'm listening, Jesus.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son/daughter.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

Do the words *holy discontent* ring a bell or strike a chord in your soul? How would you describe your present state of stuckness, or what might be the growing edge of transformation in your life?

Acknowledge That God's Ways Are Perfect

2

LUKE 9:46–50 | An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.”

“Master,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.”

“Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.”

Consider This

Jesus really knows how to end an argument.

Do you remember that time when the prophet Isaiah wrote this?

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
(Isa. 55:8–9 ESV)

Well, this thing going on in today’s text is what that is all about.

The ways of God are not only categorically but catastrophically different than our ways.

It’s easy to look at today’s text and dismiss it as an absurd example that we can’t imagine ever being a part of (i.e., having an argument with someone about who is greater) . . . until we reflect on the unquenchable quest of just about every one of us to be number one at something. It’s always amusing when the worst team in the league manages to upset a better team

and, all of a sudden, all their fans are pompously pointing their index fingers into the air at the TV cameras with the redonkulous claim that they are number one! Whether we can bring ourselves to admit it or not, this quest to be the greatest is in every last one of us.

So what's the alternative? Should we just not care? Should we be complacent? Should we eschew winning and competing to be number one? That's another one of our big problems—to jump to the other extreme, to assume that the opposite of something is always the same thing as the antithesis.

If we have any hope of ever getting the higher thoughts and ways of God (which according to Isaiah, could not possibly be more different than ours), we are going to have to come to grips with this.

In response to the disciples' urinating contest, Jesus says about the most absurd thing imaginable to first-century sensibilities. He gets a child and presents her to the disciples, saying, *"Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."*

Translation: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

It's hard for us to imagine the perceived worthlessness of a child in the first-century context. A child had a status quotient of less than zero. They were seen as property that had essentially little to no value. The cumulative impact of these words alone on the comparative worth of children

today is virtually inestimable. There just weren't any helicopter parents to speak of in those days.

It's mind-blowing. It's the kind of thing you would only take seriously if God said it. And that's pretty much what happened. So back to that "opposite isn't always the antithesis" thought. In my mind, the opposite of the greatest would be the worst. I think Jesus makes the assertion that the antithesis of the greatest is the most humble. When Jesus speaks of becoming like a child in order to inherit the kingdom of God, he is not saying (as we are wont to think) to become playful and whimsical and carefree in the world. That would be to impose a twenty-first-century meaning on a first-century reality. Jesus is talking about becoming humble. He is talking about not considering our status, or that of anyone else, to be the measure of one's worth.

After all, he's the one, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself" (Phil. 2:6–7 ESV).

It means the followers of Jesus don't measure themselves or anyone else like the world measures them. If true greatness is ascribed to the least among us, then in order to be great we must understand ourselves as on the level with the least. In order to do this, we must see ourselves and others from another perspective entirely—the perspective of God. God sees the exact same fundamental worth in every single human being.

If I am to love others as I love myself, and my regard for myself is founded on the ways I have managed to distinguish

myself (or failed to distinguish myself) from everyone else, then I will love others to the extent that they have also distinguished themselves. And to the extent they have not, I will not value them. But if my regard for myself is founded solely on the value accorded to me by the love of God, then I will love others on the basis of the very same value accorded to them by the love of God. This approach actually destroys the world's value system of least and greatest, and isn't that what someone who says of an apparently worthless person (i.e., a first-century child) that they are the greatest, is essentially saying?

This approach, taken to its logical conclusion, ends with the God-given grace to genuinely love the poor rather than just pity them by helping them out with our spare change. Jesus will later say, "As you have done unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it also to me" (see Matthew 25:40). It's only by the mercy of God that we will finally understand that no matter how different we are from one another and how vast the distance may be between our social status, we have the exact same value. This is the economy of grace. It's what makes grace amazing. It's why grace is the remedy to everything that's wrong with the world. It's the only remedy. Everything else is just a temporary fix, a work-around, a Band-Aid.

This is the extraordinary change that God works in the human heart over a long period of time. It's why salvation can't be reduced to a transaction. Salvation is the lifelong process of conversion, of change from one degree of glory to

the next. It comes from beholding Jesus, listening to him, and doing what he says. That never fails.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a
son/daughter.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

How is your own sense of worth tied up with your accomplishments or social status or lack thereof? Have you realized that your own system of self-worth is the way you treat others? What are the implications of this belief?

3

Take the Long View

LUKE 9:51–62 | As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Consider This

There’s a lot we could delve into today, including Samaritan hospitality, apostolic napalm, the homelessness of God, and such. As I worked through today’s text, one word stands out to me and I think it captures not only today’s passage, but one of the key essences of following Jesus and especially *listening to him*.

If you’d like, take a minute and read back through the text and see what one word stands out to you as capturing today’s passage and clarifying a key dynamic of discipleship. (Okay, I’m going to get a second cup of coffee while you do that.)

So what did you come up with? Here’s my answer: *resolutely*.

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

First, note the prefatory words here.

Remember, there are no superfluous words in the Word of God. Every single word matters. They all hold infinite revelation—not in a magical way and certainly not in some relativistic way, but in a meaningful way. I cannot over-stress the need for the people of God (i.e., the church) to raise the bar on our engagement with the Word of God. Our aim is not to master the text but to be mastered by the text. Because I know that's why you read the Daily Text, that's why I write it.

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven . . .

Our relationship with Jesus, our discipleship, must be framed in terms of the big picture. Note, Luke doesn't say, "As the time approached for him to be betrayed, handed over to the religious authorities, mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers, sentenced by a middle manager of Caesar, nailed to a cross, and buried in a tomb." No, Luke takes the long view, he sees past the suffering, even beyond the resurrection and all the way to the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of the Father.

Clearly Jesus knew this unspeakable suffering was coming, and he spoke explicitly about it to his disciples, but he always held a bigger picture. He took the long view. Isn't that what the writer of Hebrews was getting at when he said, "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising

the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2 ESV).

The followers of Jesus take the long view. This doesn’t mean some kind of easy escapism or a defeated resignation to simply endure the hardships ahead. It doesn’t mean delaying life until after death. It’s not a “Things are going to get better, someday,” approach. It’s not a “Grit your teeth and bear it” mentality.

The soundtrack for the followers of Jesus is not, “Some sweet morning when this life is over, I’ll fly away.” The soundtrack for discipleship is more like, “We will rock you!” and “We are the champions!” albeit in a humble sort of way. I am indebted to the British theologian Jeremy Begbie for this insight from one of his lectures where he said, “Christians do not hope ‘in’ the future. We hope ‘from’ the future.” In other words, we aren’t hoping everything is going to turn out okay in the end. We live as those who have already won. The future is a settled matter. Because of Jesus, the future is as fixed as the sun. Our hope is not rooted in our hopefulness. It is securely anchored in the settled future. We hope *from* the future.

Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Back to our word of the day: *resolutely*. Resoluteness in the present comes from confidence in the future. Resoluteness, in the way of Jesus, is not about a “you can do whatever you set your mind to,” self-confident, doggedly determined, boot-strapping-your-way, “Little Engine That Could” work ethic. Resoluteness, in the way of Jesus, comes from an

umbilical-like, life-support relationship with Jesus because he not only holds our future, he is our future. It's why the apostolic writers wrote things like,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35–39 ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. (Heb. 12:1–2 ESV)

Somebody stop me! No matter what obstacle or hardship or disease or persecution or difficult future you are facing today or cross you may be bearing tomorrow . . . don't be afraid of it . . . don't resign yourself to it . . . don't try to be strong and triumphalistic about it . . . instead, invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with a “joy set before us” unshakable confidence in the

future and to empower you in your inner being with the very resoluteness of Jesus to be alive with a life beyond your own in the face of it. This is what he does.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son/daughter.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

How do you understand the difference between hoping *in* the future and hoping *from* the future? What does this have to do with your present?

Listen with Your Ears

4

LUKE 10:1-16 | After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and

drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

Consider This

Let’s begin today with the last verse in the daily text.

Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.

Consider that Jesus is speaking this word directly to you or to me. “[Insert your name], whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me.”

Humor me, and speak that sentence aloud with your name inserted as though Jesus were speaking it directly to you. Remember what the voice of God spoke on the top of Transfiguration Mountain? Of course you remember, but in case not, he said, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

I think we must take that word quite literally. It’s hard to listen if no one is actually speaking. I don’t know about you, but I don’t think I actually listen when I read. In order to listen to something or someone, I must “hear” them. Right? When I read, I think, process, understand (sometimes), and so forth, but I don’t listen, because I don’t hear. The Word of God was not written primarily to be read, but to be heard. As the Scriptures say, “Faith comes from hearing” (Rom. 10:17). I don’t think it’s possible to listen without hearing.

In light of this, I want to issue a challenge for us on this journey to the cross. Whenever Jesus speaks in the text, speak it aloud. It will be a good step in our effort to “listen to him.”

Whoever listens to you [insert your name] listens to me; whoever rejects you [insert your name] rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.

Did you feel the gravity of that sentence? It’s astonishing. Jesus is effectively making you his agent. In other words, you represent Jesus. You speak for him. Listening to you is the same thing as listening to him.

Rather than giving you more to read, I’m going to stop there. I want to ask you to give your full attention to this claim. Is

this true? If so, what are the implications? As a final step, I'd like to ask you to write the bolded sentence (including your name) somewhere you can see it and rehearse it (aloud) each day on this journey to the cross. Please.

For my money, and I've never thought or articulated it as such, but this is the singular point of discipleship-serving as the agent of Jesus. Am I missing something?

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a
son/daughter.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

If you really believed this about being Jesus' agent, what difference would it make in your life? Be practical with your answer.

First Sunday of Lent

Learn Jesus' Most Exuberant Prayer

LUKE 10:17–24 | The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

Consider This

Okay, let's kick off the day with a good old-fashioned pop quiz. Only one question: How many distinct prayers do we have recorded coming from the mouth of Jesus?

Now, to be fair I'm going to make this an open book quiz and give you until tomorrow to come up with the answer. And I'll give you a head start. Today's text gives us one of those prayers.

I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

Let's get the bigger picture of what's going on in the text today. Jesus is enjoying a Holy Spirit joy explosion. Think of it as a divine end-zone dance after a game-winning touchdown. Had high-fives and chest-bumps been invented back then, Jesus and the Seventy-Two would have been doing them at this point in the story. The Seventy-Two were telling stories of crushing demons (note the explicit qualifier, "in your name"). Jesus speaks of his seeing "Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Somewhere over on the sidelines, Team Satan were working the referees for an excessive celebration penalty—to no avail.

This exuberant celebration marks the successful transferability of the authority of Jesus to other people. I mean, it wasn't a sure thing, was it? Something tells me Jesus may have been holding his breath a little bit. Would these men and women actually be able to operate in the gifted authority

of the Son of God? Their coming back with this news was a big deal. In the midst of it all, Jesus couldn't even contain the joy. He wanted the Father to share in this signal moment of celebration. In what clearly ranks as his most exuberantly joyful prayer, he shouted out, *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.*

I call this one "The Prayer of Great Reversal." Jesus is turning the world upside down—no, right side up. The kingdom is breaking in, and the underdogs are winning. Let's take a closer look at the prayer.

It looks like the "wise and learned" are taking it on the chin. Wouldn't that be a good thing—to be wise and learned? Rather than good or bad, I think the issue is one of danger. The great danger of becoming wise and learned is of turning wisdom and learning into a form of status and prestige. You know the familiar saying, "Knowledge is power." It's true. Will my or your learnedness or expertise be for us a source of pride or humility? And that all depends on how we understand from whence our learning and wisdom comes. Watch where Jesus takes it next: *All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

Divine revelation is not a product of religious study. Divine revelation is the fruit of a devoted relationship. Don't hear me wrong. Study is a given. It's just a question of whether

study finds its roots in a relationship characterized by loving devotion or proceeds from a self-determined pursuit to gain power, prestige, or position. We all know people, pastors, scholars, and leaders on both sides of that equation.

It's why the Bible says over and over and over things like, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6 ESV).

Dr. Luke, our guide through the gospel, is a great example of one whose wisdom and learning have come in the relationship way of a disciple of Jesus.

So back to the open book quiz we opened with today about the prayers of Jesus. Rather than jumping to Google or concordances or Bible dictionaries or power-scanning the pages of your Bible, try this. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit in such a way as to reveal and remind you of Jesus' various prayers. Be still before him and rehearse the story of the gospel in your mind's eye. See what comes. This is the stuff of a devoted relationship. From this holy groundedness, it's no holds barred. Go for it.

And don't forget to read Jesus' most exuberant prayer out loud today. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with joyful exuberance in doing so.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a
son/daughter.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

How important is it to you to be known as a knowledgeable or learned person? Why does that matter so much in the world's value system? Why might our humility be more important to Jesus?

Do Good

5

LUKE 10:25–37 | On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too,

a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Consider This

Before we begin with today's text, I want to share the answer to yesterday's pop quiz. How many distinct prayers do we have recorded from the mouth of Jesus? Answer: nine. See appendix A for the prayers.

Now to today's text, which demonstrates the sheer brilliance of Jesus.

The expert in the law comes to test one he calls the teacher. He sees in Jesus a peer of sorts. He is about to get schooled.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Note how Jesus immediately turns the test around by asking the expert in the law about his own subject matter. Jesus refuses to play defense. It's a good lesson for his followers.

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He takes the bait—hook, line, and sinker. Eager to get it right, he responds, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

Jesus gives him an A with a short teacher's note to the effect of, "It's not enough to get the answer right. You have to actually do it." He seems prepared to leave it at that.

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

As far as Jesus is concerned, it's class dismissed. The expert, however, can't leave it alone. Remember, he's trying to test the "Teacher."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Here's what I think he was asking: Who is not my neighbor? These first-century lawyer types wanted to determine who they didn't have to love. Just like with the Sabbath, and their focus on the meaning of the word *work*, this time it was the word *neighbor*. They wanted to prove their perfect compliance with the demands of the Law (i.e., to justify themselves).

In my peripheral vision I can see the disciples off to the side turning to one another with wincing looks of, "He just

said the wrong thing!” “The expert is about to get it handed to him.”

Rather than a frontal smackdown assault, Jesus lays a story trap. He will lead this expert down a path where he will be confronted with the absurdity of his own outlook.

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.”

A man is all we get. Attacked, robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead.

“A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”

The expert’s notion of the Law is under scrutiny now. Of course, the priest and the Levite couldn’t get near this guy. It would make them ceremonially unclean, which would prevent them from performing their religious responsibilities in the temple (heaven forbid!). The Law, meant to illuminate all of life, had through their misguided interpretation become the source of their blindness. The priest and the Levite saw the bleeding man. The trouble was they didn’t have eyes to see him.

At the same time, the expert is confronted with the urgency of the life-and-death situation at hand. Somebody needs to help this poor soul. He’s probably asking himself W.W.M.D.? (What would Moses do?). Jesus, the Master Storyteller, artfully dances with the expert like a prize fighter. Jab. Jab. Jab.

“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.”

BOOM! Right hook! But a Samaritan . . . Really?! The expert’s jaw drops, but Jesus doesn’t indict him just yet with the neighbor question. What fascinates me is what Jesus doesn’t do here. If I were telling the story, I might just leave it at, “he took pity on him,” and moved on quickly to the gotcha part. Instead, Jesus goes for the love part. He proceeds to reveal the extravagance of divine love in ordinary human form. I want you to see this. I’m going to enumerate and list for effect.

(1) He went to him and bandaged his wounds, (2) pouring on oil and wine. (3) Then he put the man on his own donkey, (4) brought him to an inn, and (5) took care of him. (6) The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. (7) “Look after him,” he said, “and (8) when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

All this time I’m thinking the neighbor is the guy who got beat up and left for dead. Jesus completely flips it.

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

This is not a question of who is my neighbor. The big question is, How can I be a neighbor? In a stroke of divine irony, this story shows us that the natural heirs of the kingdom of God least resemble the righteousness of God, and the avowed enemies of the heirs of the kingdom are lifted up as the exemplars of God’s righteousness.

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus, 1. Expert, o.

And just when Jesus could really excoriate the guy (like he did a couple of days ago with his rant against Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum), he has mercy on him with a word of grace. Listen to him . . .

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

It's not a question of who is or is not my neighbor. The question is, What kind of neighbor will I be?

Do good, and always remember that goodness is as goodness does.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a
son/daughter.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

On a scale of 1–10 (10 is highest), where do you rate yourself on needing to justify yourself before others? Are you a person who needs to be right most of the time—in a conflict or argument?

Beware of Self-Serving Service

LUKE 10:38–42 | As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Consider This

A woman's place is in . . .

For centuries this text has been used to create a dichotomy between prayer and action; to show how the contemplative life is better than the activist life; to extol the life of prayer over the life of busyness. To shame Martha and champion Mary.

I'm going to cut to the chase here and try to make the case for a better interpretation of the passage.

The big issue is hospitality. On the face of it, one would expect Martha to win the prize. I mean she is hustling around

like a crazy woman who just found out a dozen men and the Son of God invited themselves over for dinner.

On the surface, Martha appears like the hostess with the most-est. Note, though, the key word from today's text: *But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*

There it is. The difference between Mary and Martha isn't really about contemplation versus activism. It's about attention and distraction.

I contend that Martha's problem isn't what she's doing but how she's doing it. Sometimes hospitality is about the guest, and other times it's about the host. Notice the personal pronouns in Martha's words to Jesus.

She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

There it is. Me, myself, and my and one more me. This time, it looks like the hospitality was more about Martha, the hostess, than Jesus, the guest. Martha was seized by worry and anxiety, which always turns whatever focus we had on others right back onto ourselves. Listen to him: *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

So what one needful thing did Mary choose? It's right there in the text a sentence or two back. *She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.*

Do you see it? Mary chose the one necessary thing: *listening to him.* Remember Transfiguration Mountain and that Word from God? This is that.

Mary, 1. Martha, 0.

It's more than an aside, but I want to reference the radical move Jesus makes here. Jesus basically tells us that a woman's place is not in the kitchen but in his presence. Mary was a woman, doing what men would customarily do in the first century (i.e., sitting at Jesus' feet); that's the thing that wouldn't be taken away from her as much as Martha might have wished it. And that's an aside within this aside—sometimes the greatest enemies of women taking their rightful place of discipleship and authority in the church (and in the world) are other women.

Perhaps this is conjecture, but I think Jesus is not dissing Martha's hospitality as much as he is critiquing it. There is a way of serving one's self under the cloak of serving others. It's all about appearances, perfection, and performance. Perhaps Martha's sense of self and worth were all wrapped up in properly performing her role while Mary's sense of herself was all wrapped up in her relationship to Jesus.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a
son/daughter.*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

Have you discovered yet how your service toward others can be more about you than them? Why is that?

7

Learn the Prayer—It’s Better than Yours

LUKE 11:1–4 | One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“‘Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.’”

Consider This

As I have tried to listen to Jesus through these days of Lent, I am learning things I have never understood before. The interesting thing about understanding is there’s always more to be had. The life, words, deeds, miracles, signs, moves, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is ever revealing more truth and releasing more meaning. Remember, he reveals in the midst of relationship.

Today’s text brings us to the famed Lord’s Prayer. Let’s work to listen to him as he teaches us to pray.

I used to think the measure of a prayer was the sincerity of the one praying. While sincerity is surely a good thing, I now

think the measure of a prayer is its substance. This prayer Jesus teaches us is so stocked and layered with substance, I am convinced we will never exhaust it all.

I want to share some insights that are coming to me as I try to listen and learn from Jesus in this prayer.

He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father . . .

Prayer begins with knowing what to call God. There are so many names by which God is called in Scripture. He is Yahweh, Elohim, Jehovah, Adonai, and on we could go. My late grandmother-in-law once gave me a book entitled *The 365 Wonderful Names of Our Wonderful Lord*. The interesting thing we learn from Jesus is how Jesus doesn't call God by name but according to their relationship: Father. He invites us into his extraordinary relationship with his Father which graces us to say, "Our Father." In life, we call just about everyone by their name, except when it comes to our parents. As my children are growing up, life is constantly changing. Our relationship seems to change by the day as they mature. What most pleases me is what hasn't changed. They still call me "Da-Da." That's not a name. It's a term of profound endearment. Jesus actually used the term *Abba*, an exquisitely intimate and endearing term.

So he teaches us to address God in terms of our relation to him and not by a name, and then, interestingly enough, he says this: "*Hallowed be your name.*" We are about to find out just who our Father happens to be. The God we are privileged to call Father, actually has the most holy name ever uttered. In fact (if I am remembering right), the people of Israel so lived

in awe of the name of God they would not speak it except by the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. By teaching us to hallow the name of God, Jesus reminds us that though we call God by this intimate term of relationship, we must remember that our Father is the King of the universe, the Creator of all that is, and the righteous Judge, who lives in heaven. This God, who is our intimate Father, happens to be the high and exalted Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Watch what happens now. What I have always understood to be a series of essential petitions, I am now beginning to see as so much more. Rather than a series of asks, this prayer is a full-court celebration of our entire relationship with God. Because God is our Father, everything else that God is becomes a gift to us.

When we say, “Your kingdom come,” we are declaring our Father as the King of the universe.

When we say, “Give us each day our daily bread,” we are declaring our Father as Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider.

When we say, “Forgive us our sins [or trespasses],” we are declaring our Father as merciful Judge and a gracious healer.

When we say, “Lead us not into temptation,” we are declaring our Father as Mighty Deliverer and Protector.

I am beginning to understand the Lord’s Prayer not so much as a collection of petitions but as a profoundly powerful declaration of faith.

And it all comes together in the word *Father*. In fact, when we speak this term to God in prayer, we are saying all of this and more. Not only does Jesus teach us to call God “Father,”

he shows us exactly what a true and loving Father looks like. For the many whose fathers served as a source of brokenness, Jesus reveals a Father who will heal with blessedness. Jesus brings all the attributes, character, roles, and names of God under the covering of a perfect Father.

Rather than a rote recitation, the Lord's Prayer is a revelatory declaration. If I will really listen to him, this is how I will now pray. I will rely more on the substance of Jesus teaching and training than on my best efforts at sincerity. In fact, I think this is the substance that creates true sincerity.

Closing thought: Jesus is teaching us to pray with divine substance. When we put substance ahead of sincerity, our faith will begin to form our feelings. When we put sincerity ahead of substance, we will depend on our feelings to form our faith.

The Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a son/daughter.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a saint.

The Question

Where are you in your relationship with God as Father? Is it real or religious-ish? What would help you grow here?