



# *Journey of Simplicity*

*2021 Lenten Guide*

*For centuries, Christians have set aside 40 days every year for fasting, praying and living simply that culminates in a celebration of Holy Week. This is a season for us to mirror the generous love of Jesus as we retell his story to our friends and families.*

*Join us in this journey.*

*First, a bit of context...*

*BethanyKids worked with 40+ different authors to put this guide together with a reading and prayer for everyday until Easter. We are a Christian charity that cares deeply about showing the love of Jesus practically across the continent of Africa through compassionate pediatric care. If you have the ability to donate and help us transform lives through medical care this lenten season, we need your help.*

*Learn more at [BethanyKids.org](http://BethanyKids.org)*

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# *Week One*

*Journey of Simplicity*

## THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

*Jasmine Agudelo // California, USA // @theagudeloartisan*

### **READ** *Matthew 1:1-17*

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah...

### **PONDER**

The genealogy of Jesus testifies his humanness. The prophets listed in this passage have lived on this earth, and all were sinners and ordinary people. These prophets were not perfect, and yet, God still chose them. These ordinary people uphold the ancestry and legacy of Jesus: God in the form of man. What an honor to know God chooses the ordinary and sees potential beyond what we could ever imagine among ourselves.

This past Advent season led me to delve deeper and to fully grasp the fact that the God of Heaven and Earth would leave His throne to bring thrilling hope to a hopeless world. God Himself, not needing a single thing from us, but CHOOSING to experience our humanness and to walk with us. It truly reflects how to approach this Lenten season by walking in love with our neighbors, contending for them by being steadfast in prayer and fasting, and allowing God to do work in ourselves.

Lent is a season of fasting and prayer. Let it be a continuation of learning who Jesus is and the God He is in Heaven and the man He was on Earth. Let it be distraction-less so you can hear the Holy Spirit vigilantly, deepen your knowledge of God's own heart, and be filled and content with the Bread of Life.

### **PRAY**

Lord, would you meet me in my fast. I yield to you as we enter Lent, fully giving myself, my thoughts, my actions, my most prized possessions. I may be human and born a sinner, but still, you chose me. Amen.

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Feb 17  
Ash Wednesday

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Feb 18

### **A MERCIFUL ADOPTION**

*Christian Wiley // Ontario, Canada // @christian\_\_wiley*

#### **READ** *Matthew 1:18-25*

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

#### **PONDER**

The story of Jesus coming into the world might seem strange upon first read. At face value, it is easy to get stuck on the science of the “virgin birth” and the marriage rules of the law in that context. What often slips through the cracks of this beautiful story is the reality that the creator makes its dwelling in the middle of a relationship already on the rocks; a potentially broken home.

Joseph was debating whether or not to quietly (and mercifully) divorce his seemingly adulterous wife-to-be. In the midst of his internal struggle, the Lord sends a messenger to speak wisdom into a potentially life altering decision because the impact of this choice is not just for their family.

The openness of Joseph to take on a life of parenting a child that doesn't share his DNA is the exact plot God is trying to communicate with us in his coming to earth. The birth story of Jesus is the announcement that we all belong, are adopted into the same family without prejudice, without backstory, and without conditions. God comes to us first and says come with me, in the most human way possible.

#### **PRAY**

Lord, as we interact and encounter one another, remind us continually that we all belong, we all have a need to be welcomed, and we are the ones to make that happen. May our interactions with people be rooted in an openness and welcoming spirit, continually making space for more.

## RELIGIOUS STRANGERS

Abby Kvistad // Illinois, USA // @abbykay20

### READ *Matthew 2:1-12*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea... Magi from the east came to Jerusalem...

### PONDER

In this passage, we see two very different encounters to the knowledge of Jesus. King Herod, hearing of Jesus' presence became "disturbed." His words and actions indicated jealousy, unfolding into deceit and desire for harm. The wise men, in prophetic revelation, spoke of who Jesus was to be; the King of the Jews. They were overwhelmed with joy to see the star, which marked where Jesus was. Acknowledging his worthiness and holiness, they brought him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

To one man, the presence of Jesus was a threat to his power. To others, it was a sign of hope and deliverance. The wise men had been given divine understanding to see and know who Jesus was. Do you need divine understanding to see who Jesus is? Who resides on the throne of your heart?

### PRAY

Lord, correct our vision to see You and ourselves for what we are. Jesus, give us divine understanding. We trust that You will lead us, as you provided the star for the Wise men's journey to Jesus.

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Feb 19

## FINDING SAFETY IN THE DESERT

*Shanté Grossett // New York, USA // @dailysherpursues\_*

### **READ** *Matthew 2:13-23*

'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you...'

### **PONDER**

The desert isn't the first place I'd think of running to when going through a time of crisis. It's barren, empty and dry. I'd rather stay somewhere comfortable where I can bypass the hardships of life. Yet, this is exactly where God sent Jesus and his family when Herod, the king of Israel, threatened his life. How could a cold, dark, and lonely place provide safety for our savior?

As I sat and reflected on this, I could only come up with one answer: because God was there. Safety isn't found in the desert because the desert is safe in of itself. Instead, safety is found in the desert because God is there.

We can never fully know what threats and obstacles life will bring. But we can know this - God will be with us no matter what and his strong arms uphold us and keep us safe no matter where we are.

### **PRAY**

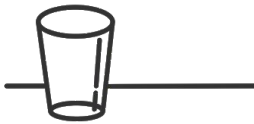
Lord, thank you for being present. We are grateful that you walk with us in the comfortable places and even the hard ones. As we journey through desert land, we pray for your protection and your peace. We ask that you go with us and keep us safe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Feb 20





# *Week Two*

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## POINTING TO CHRIST

*Kelly Goldson // Georgia, USA // @realkellygoldson*

### **READ** *Matthew 3:1-17*

But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.

### **PONDER**

What a beautiful verse! And goodness, it only becomes more beautiful when we read it in context! John, who usually lived in the wilderness and ate locusts (he was kind of eccentric), was traveling the countryside telling people about a Savior who was coming soon to deliver them from their sins. A message like this was unheard of, so crowds gathered to hear the Good News. Well, the religious leaders heard about this and came to see what was happening (and probably to scoff at John a little bit). As soon as John saw them, he called them a "brood of vipers" and I like to imagine that their jaws dropped at the insult. They were used to being treated with honor everywhere they went, but that did not happen here. John would not give them glory that belonged to Jesus alone, nor would he take even the slightest bit of it for himself.

We are called to point people to Jesus. Arise each day and give God your heart, your trust, your praise, and your obedience. If sometimes you wonder if it is enough, rest assured that it is. God is not disappointed with your offering. As you speak of and live for Jesus, those around you will be able to see that His impact in your life is the real deal.

### **PRAY**

Jesus, thank You for loving me. I am not worthy of Your love but that doesn't stop You from loving me anyway. Please search my heart and reveal all of the ways I am still holding back. I want my life to be a love offering that brings You glory. Amen.

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Feb 21

## LIVING FOR GOD ALONE

Brooke Tabor // Texas, USA // @thegorgeousgrace

**READ** *Matthew 4:1-11*

Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.

### PONDER

A common feeling to have in “the place of wilderness” is to think that we are alone or that we are being punished for something. However, here in this passage, we see that Jesus is not alone nor was he being punished for anything. Jesus was perfect and God had a purpose.

You see, the wilderness is a place of preparation. The wilderness is a place of waiting and learning to trust in God's next move. There are many times in scripture where God takes his people into the wilderness as a way of preparing them for what was to come. Noah and his family endured 40 days and nights of rain (Genesis 7:12); Moses fasted 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai while he wrote the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28); the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years awaiting the promised land (Exodus 16:35); likewise, Christians celebrate the season of lent for 40 days to participate in the ministries of Jesus and follow his footsteps to the cross.

While the season of wilderness may feel uncomfortable, it's important that we participate in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13) so that we can be made new and holy, as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16).

### PRAY

Thank you Lord that while we walk through the wilderness, we are not alone and can trust in you. Lord, show me how I might ready myself for this coming season.

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Feb 23

### **FOLLOWING JESUS**

*Sarah Eddy // Illinois, USA // @sarahbetheddy*

**READ** *Matthew 4:12-25*

Come, follow me...

#### **PONDER**

The first few followers of Jesus were fishermen. They were out on their boats doing their thing when Jesus saw them and called out to them, "Come follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" They didn't ask any questions; they just trusted Jesus and went. Jesus didn't give them much explanation either.

These disciples didn't really know Jesus, but they didn't even hesitate when he asked them to follow Him. The disciples left all that they knew - their families, their jobs, their everyday lives - and followed Jesus.

What does following Jesus look like for you? Is there a place in your life that you need to drop what you are doing to be able to better follow Him? It can feel like a scary thing, but when we trust Him with our lives, He will show us blessing after blessing.

#### **PRAY**

God, today I pray that we can do a better job of following you. Help us to drop the things that might hold us back and help us to do what you have asked us to do in our lives.

## ENCOURAGING THOSE WHO ARE LISTENING

Inna Snyder // Colorado, USA // @inna.snyder

### READ *Matthew 5:1-12*

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...

### PONDER

How often do we, as we go through our everyday lives, look for fulfillment in worldly things – good health, happy marriage, well-mannered children, successful career, etc.? And how often do we allow those things to determine our happiness? Yes, it's easy to focus on what we can physically experience in the here and now. But is this real happiness?

When we read through this passage, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, one word jumps out at us right away – *Blessed*. Translated from Greek, *makarais* - blessed - means joyful, and describes the state of contentment and bliss. It cannot be confused with the state of happiness that comes from worldly things, because it's the kind that only comes from the Lord Himself.

When we are right with God, and live our life according to His purpose, we will experience true joy and happiness that only He can provide. This is the kind of happiness Jesus is talking about and promising to us, and that is our greatest reward that is awaiting us in heaven.

### PRAY

Lord, thank you for being a kind and generous God. Thank you for loving us so much that You didn't spare your own Son. Lord, I pray that I'm constantly reminded of your goodness, and the worldly joys of my life never overshadow heavenly ones that are ahead.

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Feb 24

## **RADICALIZATION OF THE LAW**

*Peter Lublink // Ontario, Canada // @peterlublink*

### **READ** *Matthew 5:13-48*

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

### **PONDER**

At some point during his life, Jesus was asked a skill testing question about religious law. The answer to the question was obvious and could have been recited by any Jewish school kid. In short, the expected answer was, "Love God."

What surprised His listeners is that having given this 'right answer' he went on to also say "and love your neighbours." While certainly an important theme in the ancient Jewish tradition, this was not one of the Ten Commandments nor how most experts of the law would have summarized it.

As Jesus fulfilled Jewish law he didn't just fulfill people's expectations of it; but rather radicalized their expectations. Jesus moved the dial of how he expected his followers to treat others from accepting others, to loving others, and finally to loving even those who hurt us.

Beyond just teaching this law of love, he modelled it both in His life and death. In his final act on the cross, all the laws and prophets which preceded Him were fulfilled and could now be fully condensed in two short laws: Love God; Love others.

### **PRAY**

Jesus you are the God of love. Let us look beyond ourselves and our interests to become better ambassadors of your love.

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Feb 25

## AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Bill Schuilenberg // British Columbia, Canada

### READ *Matthew 6:1-18*

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

### PONDER

Jesus reveals a few secrets here and his emphasis is on practicing righteousness without being seen. When we give, when we pray, when we fast, Jesus says keep it a secret. Be discreet, in privacy, in quietness – this is not the part we let shine from the hilltops.

Abba knows us so intimately - our secrets, our whispers of prayer. He sees our compassionate giving in the shadows. He shares our grief as we forgive silently, and He feels our hunger as we forego our needs and turn towards the Word.

We will know the secrets of forgiveness as we give freedom to our offenders.

We will see Him when we stop needing to be seen by others.  
We will hear Him when we no longer need to be heard by others.

We will taste and see that the Lord is good when we quietly let go of our hunger for... [*you finish this line*].

Quietly now, be still and know that He is God.

### PRAY

Our Father who art in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever,

Amen.

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Feb 26

## **SERVING GOD FIRST**

*Vanessa Walker // North Carolina, USA // @vanessajoywalker*

**READ** *Matthew 6:19-34*

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...

### **PONDER**

"Each day has enough trouble of its own" - isn't that the truth? How many hours every day do we spend worrying about things which have no eternal impact? I am guilty of wasting precious time and energy dwelling on details and decisions that aren't important.

When I moved to NYC in the early 2000s, I was intimidated by the big city fashion trends. I spent hours obsessing over what to wear to work events, dinner parties, and even church! Impressing the world around me often took top priority. This quest for validation was exhausting, and the more I received, the more I needed. Does this sound familiar?

As I reflect on 2020, I am embarrassed to think about the moments I wasted in previous years worrying when I could have been hugging loved ones or sipping coffee at a cafe with a friend in need. How different life could be if, instead of seeking first the approval and pleasures of life, I positioned myself at the foot of the cross and sought only the support of the One who promises to never disappoint me; the One who is committed to taking care of the daily details so that I can live a life free from fear?

When we stay focused on Jesus, our eyes are opened to the eternally significant purposes and pleasures of every day.

### **PRAY**

Dear God, help me today to seek first your kingdom and walk in the freedom and pleasures of a faith-filled life. Amen.

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Feb 27





# *Week Three*

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## WHERE ARE WE LOOKING?

Brianne Zelinsky-Carew // Ontario, Canada // @brizelinsky

### **READ** *Matthew 7:1-29*

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

### **PONDER**

In 2020, our world was witness to a movement of the Gospel that Paul could never have predicted. As buildings closed, churches took to virtual pulpits and, through it all, came a global recognition that the house of God is where His people are: scattered.

As I reflect on the past year, I am reminded of my visit to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, where the rock-cut tomb (believed to be the possible location of Jesus' burial and resurrection) is marked by a sign reading, "He is not here." The profound truth is that God has been and continues to be present in and through life all around us.

Most recently for me, He was the healing hands of healthcare workers desperately fighting for life, the broken cries of Black Lives Matter protestors peacefully fighting for life, and the resilient spirit of locked-down communities quietly fighting for life.

God is love personified, hope amplified, and peace ever-present. He fights for life; ask and it will be given to you. He advocates for the truth; seek and you will find it. He offers freedom; knock and the door will open.

### **PRAY**

God, Today, I acknowledge that you are here, moving and migrating with me. Today, I thank you for your assured presence in my life and that of those I love. Today, I ask, seek, knock—help me to see you and see like you do. Amen.

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Feb 28

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 1

### **PURE FAITH**

*Ryan D. // Texas, USA // @ryan4christ*

#### **READ** *Matthew 8:1-17*

Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

#### **PONDER**

What is the true meaning of faith? Is it believing in something you can't see? Having complete trust in someone or something? Pure faith is having the assurance that the things revealed and promised in scripture are true, even if unseen.

In Matthew 8:1-17, there are several examples of people having faith that Jesus will heal them. They didn't see Jesus heal, but they had faith that he would based on what they heard. Today, we have the perfect Word of God in the Bible. We have faith that his Word is true.

As you go through each day, don't just hope that God will be with you; know that God is with you. Expect him to be with you and depend on him. It doesn't mean you will always get the outcome you hoped for, but it's trusting God's plan for your life. He loves you and he is always working for the good of those who love Him.

#### **PRAY**

Lord, help me to have faith even in the things I can't see. Help me to trust you and your plan even when things don't make sense. I have faith in your word and I trust your promises. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **POWER AND AUTHORITY**

*Angela Lawley // Texas, USA // @angelalawley\_ghm*

### **READ** *Matthew 8:18-9:8*

What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!

### **PONDER**

Several scriptures come to mind when I think of the authority of Jesus.

First and foremost: Genesis 1:6-8 where God creates the heavens and the earth. The authority and power that it took to create the depths of the sea, where they will go and how far, lies in the Word of God Almighty! Since Jesus is the Word of God, He carries and IS that power (check out John 1:1).

Then there's this one: Exodus 14:21, where Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord caused it to divide up and create a walking pathing right through it.

Then I think of this one: Genesis 4:7 where the Lord sent rain down on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights.

Each time The Lord told water where to go. It's like it knew His voice; like it remembered it from the very beginning. So when Jesus stood in the boat and commanded the waters and the storm to still (from today's passage in Matthew 8), it remembered its Creator's call. All creation is obedient to the Word of God! Including us.

### **PRAY**

God, when I feel like the winds of doubt and the waves of fear are crashing in, help me remember You created me. May I listen to Your voice and no other. May I trust the One that is the same yesterday, today and forever. The One that even wind and waves obey.

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Mar 2

## ABIDE IN JESUS

Mark Dalley // Ontario, Canada

### READ *Matthew 9:9-17*

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

### PONDER

Each January my wife and I with our three children take the time to pray and seek God's guidance for the year. We encapsulate this time of listening in one word which we paint on small canvases and hang on the wall of our kitchen as a reminder. In 2020 the word God gave me was *Abide* and what a challenging year it has been to abide in Christ.

Abide is defined as: "to accept or act in accordance with." I have often focused on the "acting" and it has led to a working for God instead of with Him. But we must learn that before we can "act" we must first "accept" Him. We must learn to rest in Him, to wait on Him, to abide in Him.

Christ tells us in Matthew He came for sinners, not the righteous. The good news is we are all sinners. We all struggle to abide in Christ. It is challenging for each of us to accept what God has called us to and has allowed to occur in our lives. We are not righteous on our own. But we can abide in Christ because of His righteousness. This Easter cease your striving and abide. Let the righteousness of Christ cover you!

### PRAY

Dear Lord, forgive us for the many times we have walked apart from of You instead of with You. We are sinners in need of You as our Saviour. Help us this Easter to once again abide in You and Your righteousness. Amen!

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Mar 3

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 4

### **HEALING FAITH**

*Joyce Kamanga // United Kingdom // @joyce\_kamanga*

#### **READ** *Matthew 9:18-34*

According to your faith let it be done to you.

#### **PONDER**

In this passage we see four people with impossible situations: the ruler, the woman with the issue of blood and the two blind men. Each of them believed so much that they didn't allow the crowds or their situation to deter them from seeking The Lord.

This is how we must be in our daily lives. How can we achieve this? Well Hebrews 11:6 says, he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. To believe Him, we must know Him. We know Him through His Word.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We must develop a daily habit to read and study God's Word. The Lord went about doing mighty exploits, people heard and their faith grew; so can ours. Another way is by hearing testimonies of how God is working in other people's lives.

Everything is possible with God.

#### **PRAY**

Dear Heavenly Father, give me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You that I may know You deeper in Jesus' name, amen.

## AN INVITATION TO HEALING

*Karmyn Bokma // Ontario, Canada // @karmynbokma*

**READ** *Matthew 9:35-11:1*

Freely you have received; freely give.

### PONDER

When I was in university I had a roommate who had the golden ticket. She had a CAR. The coveted prize for any poor student who wanted to get off campus! And she was so willing to drive us, that I never felt like a burden. The impact of this (besides not needing to walk everywhere!) was her generosity. I decided from that point on, that when I had a resource that could help others, I wanted to model this generosity as well.

While this is a small example, it came to mind as I read today's reading. Jesus (in Matt. 9) had just gone around performing miracles and healings, and we see him giving that same power and authority to his disciples!

Jesus gives them a specific instruction – do this generously. You've received my power and authority, use it freely. Change people's lives. Bring healing. The heart and example of Jesus is to model radical generosity, and life change. I'd like to think the disciples wanted to be this generous too, because of what they'd been given by Jesus.

And the same is true for us today too! Jesus has healing, life change, and the power of his Spirit freely available for you!

### PRAY

Jesus, the example of your power is so evident in this passage. Help me today, to remember that you have those things available freely for me too. Help me to receive from you today all that you have for me. And then help me to have a heart of generosity to share in your name with those around me. Amen.

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Mar 5

## IT'S EASY TO DOUBT

Lauren Ibach // Minnesota, USA // @lauren.ibach

### **READ** *Matthew 11:2-19*

Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?

### **PONDER**

In this passage, John's disciples come to Jesus asking if Jesus truly is the Messiah. Jesus responds by pointing them to the evidence. Who else but the Messiah could perform these miracles?

Still today, it's tempting to question the evidence. Sometimes I find myself wishing I could have been alive back then to witness the miracles. But, if I'm being honest, would I have been convinced Jesus truly was the Messiah? We see throughout the gospels, even those closest to Christ doubted at first.

In 2021, we may not have Jesus here walking among us, but we have something His first disciples didn't have: the complete written word. The Bible has all the evidence we could ever need - eye witness account after eye witness account.

It's easy to doubt, but how we respond is key. Do we allow doubt to pull us away from God or motivate us to grow closer to Him?

### **PRAY**

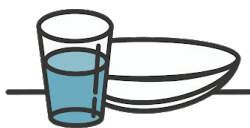
Heavenly Father, You are good and Your Word is true. We confess allowing doubt to weaken our trust in You, but we thank You for Your grace and mercy extended to us through Christ. By the power of Your Spirit, deepen our trust and grow our love for You. Amen.

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Mar 6





# *Week Four*

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 7

### **HOLDING SPACE FOR THE WEARY**

*Dave Heslip // New Zealand // @dav\_the\_rav*

#### **READ** *Matthew 11:20-30*

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

#### **PONDER**

We all get tired, worn down, or even burnt out. We all have burdens and baggage to carry. Whether it's work, home life, or the woes of a pandemic. When we turn to God during these times, he tells us to lean into him and he will give us rest.

What helps you to feel rested or recharged when you're feeling down? Do you make time for this in your life?

As people who are bringing heaven to earth, as representatives of Jesus, we are supposed to look beyond our own fatigue and weariness to show people kindness, just as He does for us. What does this look like for you? To give someone rest; to relieve someone's burden?

This week as you make space for yourself to recharge, think of how you can help someone else who is tired or worn out and make space for them to do the same.

#### **PRAY**

God, we thank you that you are always there for us. That you have promised in your word to give us rest when we are weary. Help us to mimic that in our own lives; to help others to feel rested, to provide space for them to breathe. Amen.

## THE SABBATH AND SIGNS

Naomi Dalley // Ontario, Canada // @naomi\_dalley

### **READ** *Matthew 12:1-45*

I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

### **PONDER**

I think the whole world exhaled a collective sigh of relief when 2020 was finally over. I think I heard the word "unprecedented" an unprecedented number of times throughout the tumultuous year.

In Matthew 14, we see the scenes of Jesus creating good on the Sabbath mashed together with the demands of the Pharisees for a sign. The irony is that the Sabbath *is* a sign. In Exodus 31:13, when the Sabbath rhythm was initially established, God called it a sign that He was the One who makes them holy - not worship, or acts of service, or even strict obedience. All their pious legalism failed to point the religious leaders to God - to make them holy. Rather, their 613 rules and regulations created a culture of fear of the religious leaders themselves, mere humans.

It is not unlike how we have redefined Sabbath in our time to mean church attendance or participation in specific religious rites or activities. But 2020 put a halt to much of that! It is a shocking reminder that if we don't stop the flurry of activity to observe true Sabbath rest - unadulterated communion with God - He can not fill us and ultimately make us holy.

### **PRAY**

Lord, as we approach a season to remember your sacrifice for us, help me to develop a rhythm of rest that creates space in my life for you to make me holy. In your holy name, Lord Jesus, I pray. Amen.

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Mar 8

## THE JOYS OF FAMILY

*Britni Jones // Washington D.C., USA // @forgodandhome*

### **READ** *Matthew 12:46-50*

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

### **PONDER**

What if you could have the most glorious and perfect family ever? How would that change the way you interact with life's challenges, or big wins?

Although we know that we cannot choose our earthly family, we can certainly get excited about having the choice to belong to the Family of Jesus Christ! In His infinite love, wisdom, grace, mercy, peace, and joy we can know what it means to have true love and become unified in His Spirit.

Matthew 12:50 says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." So the truth is that you may already belong to the most glorious and perfect family ever: the family of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

### **PRAY**

Dear Lord, Thank you for your unending love and peace which surpasses all understanding. On behalf of the brothers and sisters of the body of Christ, please help each one of us understand the importance of fellowship, correction, conviction, love, mercy, gentleness, peace and patience as we come to experience genuine joy through You. May You quicken each believer to treasure Your statutes and walk in righteousness toward the will of our Father in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

♥ *BethanyKids*

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 9

## HOW ARE WE GARDENING?

*Cheyenne Perry Suarez // South Carolina, USA // @hospitalprncss*

### **READ** *Matthew 13:1-53*

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.

### **PONDER**

At the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantine last March, my husband and I took an interest in gardening. We scoured the property for the perfect location to start our garden, including broccoli, carrots, peas, lettuce, squash and melon. We quickly learned that we had to meticulously follow the directions on the back of the seed packet. If the seeds are not planted deep enough into the soil, do not receive sufficient amounts of sunlight, and are not watered, the plants will not grow. In some cases, the weeds took over. We were a bit too hasty to uproot what we assumed were weeds, but proved to be the plant instead.

Our gardening experience was similar to The Parable of the Sower and The Parable of the Weeds outlined in Matthew. Like plants, people require just the right conditions to prosper. The field represents the world, and the good seeds are those who seek God's kingdom. The weeds seeds sown by the enemy. While we live in a world of non-believers, we must plant firm roots in Him as to not be overtaken by the enemy.

### **PRAY**

Lord, please allow me to remain strong in You, so that I can be a witness for your name and have my faith be an example to lead others of the world to Your kingdom.

♥ *BethanyKids*

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 10

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 11

## **TWO TYPES OF HONOR**

*Kona Brown // South Africa // @konabrown*

### **READ** *Matthew 13:54-14:12*

A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.

### **PONDER**

Let's be honest, no one likes high school reunions. All that judging and sizing up and comparing! Maybe Jesus felt a bit like that in returning to Nazareth. High school reunions (and boardrooms, and even sometimes church) are places where a certain type of honor is at play. That of reputation, status, background, popularity. We are not so different from Jesus' neighbours in Nazareth, prejudiced to look at things through the lens of worldly honor.

Jesus did not consider worldly esteem as an important part of living out His calling. The primary driver of His calling was a different type of honor, the manifestation of God's glory that drove Him to faithfulness in His calling, even unto death. But we so often lose our way in living faithfully because we "love the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:42-43).

Consider today which type of honor motivates you most deeply in your daily life.

### **PRAY**

Lord help me to understand my motives and repent if I must, so I can live a life of fruitful faithfulness.

## **SOLITUDE BEFORE SENSATIONALISM**

*Rachel Underwood // Ohio, USA // @rachel.helenn*

### **READ** *Matthew 14:13-36*

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

### **PONDER**

Not many of us truly know solitude, and we're not encouraged to know it either. Our lives demand much of us. However, for most of us, it's not even that we don't have the time or space to carve out a quiet moment. Instead, countless distractions pull constantly for our attention. Social media is perhaps the greatest distraction of all. It can turn a day of possibilities into one of utterly wasted time.

I'm convicted when I read how Christ took intentional time to be alone with his Father. Jesus performed amazing miracles, and yet the most important and prized moments of his day were when he was alone with God. How tempting it is to relish in my productivity – my non-stop days of work and accomplishments. Or how exciting it is to be swept up in the latest news or gossip. Yet none of these are eternal or nourishing to my soul.

### **PRAY**

Lord, I pray that our hearts would crave the peaceful stillness of your presence more than the noise of the world around us. May our hearts be more strongly drawn to the quiet prayer our souls need than to the many petty distractions that promise us great entertainment, but leave us no better than before.

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Mar 12

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 13

### **CONTAMINATION**

*Alison Lublink // Ontario, Canada // @alisonlublink*

#### **READ** *Matthew 15:1-20*

Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites!

#### **PONDER**

Think about your absolutely favourite flavour of ice cream. Imagine it in a bowl, filled to the brim, loaded with delicious toppings. You can't wait to dig in, right? For me, that bowl of chocolate peanut butter ice cream sounds heavenly.

Now, think about manure. Yes - manure. A drop of your ice cream has dripped into the manure. Has it contaminated the manure? Nah, not in any real way. The manure is still manure and the ice cream hardly changes that.

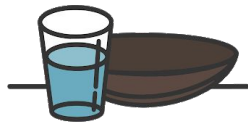
Now think about your ice cream again. A drop of the manure has fallen into your ice cream. Has it contaminated the ice cream? Most definitely! There's no way I'd even touch my precious chocolate peanut butter ice cream if there was even a speck of manure in it!

Jesus was trying to get across the point to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law that often a drop of their traditions (manure) ends up contaminating the entire spirit of the law (ice cream). When we honour God with our lips but not our hearts, we're contaminating the very spirit of our worship.

#### **PRAY**

God, help me to work hard to have a pure and clean heart. Help me to honour you with my words and deeds, and not to get caught up in rules and traditions over love.





# *Week Five*

*Journey of Simplicity*

## JESUS IS FOR THE LOST

Megan DeShazo // Oklahoma, USA // @girl.flourish

**READ** *Matthew 15:21-39*

I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

### PONDER

Just after feeding the 5000, Jesus left Galilee to travel 50 miles on foot to Tyre and Sidon – a gentile region Jews typically avoided.

As soon as Jesus arrives, a gentile woman approaches him right away, begging him to heal her daughter. We realize that she knows who He is and what He is capable of because she addresses him as Son of David.

As both a gentile and a woman, her identity is considered to be of little value; so much so the disciples asked Jesus, "just tell her to go away!" She must have felt awful.

Don't we feel like that sometimes when we offer up our requests to God? *Why would God choose me? I'm not good enough for God.* Yet she didn't let her labels from the world stop her from approaching the King of Kings.

Jesus tests her through conversation and questions and then tells her something he tells no one else in scripture: "Great is your faith!"

Let us be like this nameless gentile woman. Let us persist in our faith – seeking him with everything.

### PRAY

Jesus, thank you that you are a God that seeks us out. You see us, know us, and pursue us. Our worth is not determined by what the world sees as valuable. Our worth is in you. May we live that out today.

♥ BethanyKids

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 14

## TESTING FAITH

*Myunique Inez // California, USA // @instagramforbelievers*

### **READ** *Matthew 16:1-20*

Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

### **PONDER**

We hear time and time again how God is a god of the Hills and the Valley. That He is continuously with us through every high season and low that we experience throughout our life. We often sing songs of worship in which we ask the Lord to test our faith, not knowing what that entails. In this story we read a story of how the disciples had their faith tested. It would be easy for us to read this story and judge how the disciples have responded, but it's a hard reality when we realize we are the exact same.

My favorite part of this passage is when Jesus is speaking to his disciples in verse 9. He says, "Don't you understand even yet? Don't you remember the 5,000 I fed with five loaves and the basket of leftovers you picked up?" In times where our faith is tested, it's really easy for us to forget all that the Lord has done for us already. It is easy for us to forget how he just did the miracle.

Oh how quickly we forget.

In your season of your faith being tested, I encourage you to remember all that He has already done, because He can do it again.

### **PRAY**

Lord, the Bible tells us you are the same yesterday, today, and forevermore. Help us remember that in our testing, that you won't let us down. Let your will be done. Amen.

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*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 15

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## Journey of Simplicity

Mar 16

### THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Stacy Edwards // Kentucky, USA // @stacyjedwards

#### READ *Matthew 16:21-28*

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

#### PONDER

I do not remember her name, but I can still hear her voice. She was giving her testimony at a women's event at our church and she made a statement I can't forget. She said, "I always knew that when it came my time to suffer, I wanted to suffer well for my Savior." The woman was a young widow telling of how the Lord had cared for her during her tremendous loss. I was captivated by her words "*when it came my time to suffer.*"

That is the cost of discipleship: suffering. It will look a thousand different ways for a thousand different people, but we all must pick up our cross and follow Christ. Someone else's cross may look lighter but only because someone else is carrying it. They are all heavy. They are all uncomfortable. They are all burdensome. It's all suffering.

The cost of discipleship is paid in three ways:

1. Denying ourselves
2. Accepting our cross
3. Following our Christ

It's a high price to pay, no doubt. But the reward is Jesus Himself.

#### PRAY

Thank you, Lord, for your example. Give us the strength and grace to suffer well for your name's sake.

## **LISTEN TO GOD**

*Lauren Smith // Texas, USA // @thehonestpursuit*

### **READ** *Matthew 17:1-13*

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!

### **PONDER**

When we pray, that is our opportunity to both speak to God and hear from God. I have never heard God's voice audibly like the men on the mountaintop with Jesus in Matthew 17. However, I hear God when I read an encouraging passage in the Bible that speaks exactly to my situation or when I have peace in the midst of disappointment.

God speaks to me through my wise friends, dreams, or when I am just walking alone at the park reflecting on His creation. I hear God when prayers are answered, or when they are not. God speaks to us through many different ways. He connects to us in our daily lives at home, our jobs, or even when we are alone. Sometimes God will get our attention with signs and wonders, but in the same way, He can lead us with the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit within us.

During this Lenten season, remove anything that seems louder than the Lord. God's voice will always lead to hope, love, and wisdom.

### **PRAY**

Father God, thank you for sending us Jesus as our Savior, and examples of how to live in fellowship with you. May I learn to listen for your voice in my life daily. Amen.

♥ *BethanyKids*

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 17

## POWER AND TAXES

Taylor Ann Dietrich // Tennessee, USA // @atadmorefaith

### **READ** *Matthew 17:14-27*

...how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?

### **PONDER**

It's often in a house that holds an imaginative strong-willed toddler that expectations need to be repeated. And while I have the power in the house to encourage the expectations and help teach them, it's up to my darling girl to decide if she is going to meet them. Which, at some point, she normally does. But there is a true test of parental patience in the waiting.

I can't know for sure, but I can imagine that when Jesus asked "how long shall I stay with you?" He might have been feeling the same thing a parent feels after asking their child to accomplish one little thing. The disciples couldn't drive the demon out of the boy. Even though they knew the power of faith, they rested on doubt instead.

Over and over Jesus showed the disciples the power that comes through having complete faith. But it was up to them to understand what having faith truly meant. To know that nothing is impossible for Jesus to do.

This applies to you and me too. We know Jesus has the power, but it is up to us to trust in all that He can really do. Easier said than done... but not impossible.

### **PRAY**

Dear God, Thank you for sending your son Jesus to show us all the ways you have the power to perform miracles. Help us to put our full faith in you and trust in all that you can do. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

♥ BethanyKids

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 18

## A POSTURE OF HUMILITY

Isabel Ong // British Columbia, Canada // @izzabelle\_co

### **READ** *Matthew 18:1-14*

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

### **PONDER**

We have a deep desire to be known and loved, and our names are a first step towards fulfilling this desire. Just remember the times someone mispronounced your name or misspelled it on a Starbucks cup! Whenever this happens, it makes me laugh, but it also makes me feel like my name isn't worth remembering. And by extension, neither am I.

The disciples had journeyed with Jesus, feasted with Him, and sat at His feet. Jesus didn't just know their names; He knew them intimately. But they started squabbling over who amongst them would be the "greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus' response turned their question on its head. The heart of the matter, which their question revealed, was the posture of their hearts. In seeking status and recognition, the disciples had forgotten that true greatness in God's kingdom lay in humility.

Humility is akin to self-forgetting. It's not a false or shallow denial of our personhood and abilities, but a posture that yields up all we are and all we have to Christ. Humility, too, requires cultivation and commitment. What are some areas in your life in which you hope to grow in humility?

### **PRAY**

Jesus, You know my name and my heart's posture. Help me to humble myself before You, and make me like a child who seeks You above all else.

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Mar 19

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 20

### **RECONCILIATION**

*Andrew Benson // Northwest Territories, Canada // @alongthealley*

#### **READ** *Matthew 18:15-19:2*

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

#### **PONDER**

I have been living in the Northwest Territories for just over one year. If I have learned anything about reconciliation with Indigenous people, it is that if anything is in the way, it is me. I have felt nothing but acceptance and love. Reconciliation is the steps we take down a long winding road. Reconciliation is a community thing. It tells of an unfolding story of grace.

Almost every time I read The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, I think the lesson in this story seems obvious. Massive unpayable debt is forgiven. Then afterward, the person goes looking for their debt owed. Well, that's the wrong thing to do. Is this something that needs to be said? Interesting how the mistakes of others always seem more apparent than our own.

To genuinely understand reconciliation, we must understand the power of forgiveness. Repeated forgiveness holds the community together. When we have been forgiven, we extend forgiveness to others. For us as Christians, this leads us to community life that places Jesus at the centre of all things. I believe this is the heart of reconciliation. To establish harmony in a world divided and to seek peace in our hearts in a world that celebrates war in our hearts.

#### **PRAY**

Creator, God, open our eyes to the things we cannot see in ourselves that you are desperate to reveal to us. Give us humility to forgive and courage to be forgiven. Help us to love you, one another and ourselves. Amen.





# *Week Six*

*Journey of Simplicity*

## LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO JESUS

Keely Powley // Ontario, Canada // @keelylaurenpowley

### **READ** *Matthew 19:13-15*

Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'

### **PONDER**

How often do we act like the disciples in this verse? I bet they saw this group of sticky fingered, loud, energetic children and thought "We've got to get them out of here or the adults won't learn anything from Jesus!"

We often dismiss the children of our churches, seeing Sunday school as childcare so the adults can focus on "real church." 80% of people who come to know Jesus do so before the age of 18. They are the ones we should be investing in because these are the prime years to introduce them to Jesus.

Jesus, of course, sees how important the children are and not only welcomes them, but says Heaven is for those who are like children. He not only wants us to embrace children and see their impact and value, but wants us to be more like them! Full of laughter, excitement, bold questions, open minds and in awe at learning something new.

Let's all act more like children and run up to Jesus, sticky hands and all!

### **PRAY**

God, thank you for how you love our children so much. Help us to embrace and bring out the inner child in all of us.

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*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 21

## **LAST WILL BE FIRST AND FIRST WILL BE LAST**

*Andrew Witthoft // Singapore // @andywitthoft*

### **READ** *Matthew 19:16-20:16*

But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

### **PONDER**

With our world in disarray and many of our lives pushed to the brink, it is practically automatic for a “me first” mentality. Jesus says “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:24) And so with us.

Perhaps perspective may hold the answer to our own insecurity and feelings of helplessness when it comes to our time, wealth, emotional currency, or energy. To experience what others experience and to know how they feel is to empathize. Not just to realize “that’s a hard situation,” or “I can be thankful for what I have,” but instead to have a reaction to reach out. What can be more Christ-like?

It is challenging to go against a behavior we have been trained to operate under, especially when world leaders and corporations are setting the exact opposite example. However, Jesus provides that example that we so desperately need. He promises us that with Him and through Him we can gain strength to do what our earthly heart resists. We can look to Jesus for daily reminders to put others ahead of ourselves.

### **PRAY**

Lord, allow my heart to be softened to the needs of others. Take on my burden of fear, helplessness, and unease of the future. That I may be satisfied with that which I have and make room in my life to aid others.

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*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 22

## BLIND TO THE FUTURE

Caitlyn Stenerson // Minnesota, USA // @StenersonMN

### READ *Matthew 20:17-34*

'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?'

### PONDER

When I was growing up, a question that my friends and I used to love to ask one another was: "If you could get a letter from God telling you everything about your future, would you open it?"

At the time, the answer seemed so easy: of course I would! Who wouldn't want to know the details of their future? As I've grown older, the question has taken on a new complexity.

There is a sort of security in not knowing the future. If I knew it, would I want to change it? Would I be disappointed at the trials, afraid of the failures and missteps, numb to the adventure?

In this exchange in Matthew, I imagine Jesus looking at the group lovingly: He knows the cup He is about to drink is no easy task. If only they knew, wouldn't they shrink back from the very thing that would lead to their salvation?

Instead, Jesus invites them to fix their eyes on the invitation for today: to walk humbly with their Savior, to model the backward nature of the kingdom, and to be compassionate caretakers of what He has entrusted to them.

### PRAY

God, it is so hard to not know the future. At the same time, it is so freeing to not know what awaits us, but instead, to be able to trust that you will be with us in each moment. Help me to see each day as a building block for the Kingdom to come. Amen.

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Mar 23

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 24

### **PRAISE CAN BE FICKLE**

*Kidron Tirey // Texas, USA // @kidron\_tirey*

#### **READ** *Matthew 21:1-27*

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'

#### **PONDER**

It's easy in our day-to-day life to seek praise and recognition from others because self-doubt can be a constant nag.

The chief priests and teachers of the law during the life of Jesus had studied scripture and were among those waiting for the revealed Messiah. Yet they and many in the crowds had a very different view of how their savior would rescue them.

God did not promise them or us that He would provide all of the answers, but we are expected to praise Him in the midst of all that is unknowable.

Those who follow Christ are not to lift up shallow praise so as to overcome self-doubt. Trusting in ourselves or a self-serving view of God is not the life for which God has called His children. Only God is worthy of wholehearted, selfless praise.

#### **PRAY**

God please help me to trust that You can help me know my worth as Your child so that I will not feel the need to look inward or outward for self-approval. Your love for me is enough through every season of life, in both the good and bad days. Thank You for caring for me.

## JUDGEMENT AND OBEDIENCE

*Kelley Brown // Ohio, USA // @kelley.a.brown*

### **READ** *Matthew 21:28-22:14*

For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did.

### **PONDER**

In today's reading we see the struggle of man to surrender and obey. It can be easy to judge those who refuse to follow the commands of their master, but in all honesty there are places of disobedience in each of us.

Jesus tells us these parables not to condemn, but to call us to conversion, so that we can accept His love and mercy. In these parables, those who refuse to obey the Lord are distracted by life, envy, greed and insecurity.

Reading this passage we can pause and reflect on what in our lives may be holding us back from saying "yes." What things do we hold onto that cause us to say "I will do that later" when it comes to the invitations of the Lord in our day?

Obedience to the Father leads to freedom, and as we walk with Him, He sanctifies us so that we can be light and salt in a time where the world can be so dark and in need of His transforming love.

### **PRAY**

Jesus You have called us Lord to do the work of your hands in the fields of this time. Open our hearts and minds to know your will and give us the courage to step into that calling daily. Thank you for the gift of your mercy and forgiveness when we fall short. We love you Jesus, Amen.

♥ *BethanyKids*

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 25

## **LOVE FIRST**

*Amy Kirk // Ohio, USA // @Ahniart*

### **READ** *Matthew 22:15-46*

Love your neighbor as yourself.

### **PONDER**

Jesus knew we would make things complicated. So he wisely took the Ten Commandments and summed them up for his followers into one simple word: LOVE. And then he laid out the game plan: Love God first with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength...and then turn this love outward to those he places in our path.

When we keep this correct order of love it pushes selfishness to the curb. Our vision remains crystal clear and our communion with God the Father keeps in lockstep when we stick to this simple order of love.

Adding or subtracting to this mission keeps us on the throne of our own prideful kingdom and our loving remains shallow and selfish. But, coming to the Lord first thing everyday in a posture of dependency will allow God to rightly order our affections and faithfully equip us to love like him. What a beautiful gift!

### **PRAY**

Lord Jesus, we humbly ask you to enable us to LOVE you and LOVE those around us...not because we will rise to a higher rank with you, or receive anything in return from others, but simply because we long to obey the One who loves us most. Amen.

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*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 26

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 27

### **WOE!**

Kezia September // South Africa // @keezkas

**READ** *Matthew 23:1-24:2*

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

### **PONDER**

During the school holidays we often sleep in late. What bliss it is to have freshly squeezed orange juice without a rush! Serenity and tranquillity were unceremoniously interrupted by a screech from the eight-year-old. "Mom! Your bed is not made yet. Making your bed first thing after you wake is the first accomplished task of the day," she said in a tone that was more a reprimand than a statement of fact.

"Sweetheart, we're on holiday. There is no rush and we are not expecting any guests. It can wait until later. Did you make your bed?" I could see her processing my answer.

My husband and I are constantly stressing to our daughter that there are rules in life that must be followed – and consequences to be suffered when they're not. Was I sending the wrong message? Do as I say, not as I do! It's a huge part of our responsibility as parents to guide and provide our children with life skills, to help them develop good habits and to allow freedom to demonstrate self-discipline.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees wanted to live by the rules, even when it made more sense not to. Jesus, being God, understood the fine balance between the two, and constantly strived to push the boundaries of their understanding.

### **PRAY**

Father, help me not to depend on my own understanding but believe in your name. I pray instead that I can keep my eye on You and live a life that proclaims Your excellence. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.





# *Week Seven*

*Journey of Simplicity*

## THE FUTURE IS HOPEFUL

*Kari Bachle // Washington, USA // @graceremembered*

### **READ** *Matthew 24:3-25:46*

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

### **PONDER**

Waiting with hope is hard. I like to think that I do it well, but more often than not I'm internally throwing a tantrum when things don't happen how or when I want them to. It's in these moments that I realize I'm hoping in my circumstances, not in Jesus himself.

I wonder if Jesus' disciples were throwing their own internal tantrums when Jesus didn't respond how and when they expected the long-awaited Messiah. Instead of charging in on a blazing stallion, Jesus rode in on a humble donkey. Instead of an epic battle plan, Jesus gave them grim signs of the end of the age. And as the disciples struggled to wrap their minds around it all, Jesus instructed and assured them – keep watch. Be ready. Love well. I've got this.

Yes, right now the waiting can be so very long and hard. But while we wait, we can also rest assured that the future is so very hopeful. Things may seem dark and hopeless – but keep watch. Be ready. Love well. Jesus promised, he's got this. And Jesus always keeps his promises.

### **PRAY**

Jesus, thank you that you always keep your promises. Teach us how to wait well, keeping our eyes and hopes fixed on you.

♥ *BethanyKids*

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 28  
Palm Sunday

♥ BethanyKids

## *Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 29

### **THE PLOT THICKENS**

*Kenyon Sivels // Indiana, USA // @kenyonsivels*

#### **READ** *Matthew 26:1-16*

...they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

#### **PONDER**

Cost. For many of us, we cannot remember the cost from the last time we filled up with gas or when we filled up with a cheeseburger. We simply swipe instead of considering the cost of our grande latte.

Judas considered his cost to do an unthinkable act, one many of us could not imagine. It only cost him 30 pieces of silver, a meager reward to betray not only a friend, but the would-be Savior of the world.

An unnamed woman considered a cost as she had a bottle of expensive perfume and knew just what to do with it. Instead of selling it "...for a high price..." she used it to prepare Jesus for His burial. What a deed. What a consideration.

What if we considered cost more often? What if during this Lenten season, we became more aware of the cost of following Jesus, instead of simply "swiping" thoughtlessly?

Jesus considered the cost as well, as He paid the ransom none could afford. We have the opportunity today to reflect on the cost of our salvation, and to examine the gift it is; one we cannot pay.

#### **PRAY**

Jesus, may we always consider the cost of what You gave and could not afford. May we consider Your sacrifice today and always.

## THE LAST SUPPER

*Kate Duncan // United Kingdom // @nurseryrhymeville*

### **READ** *Matthew 26:17-30*

My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.

### **PONDER**

Just imagine, you are going about your daily life when you are approached and told that Jesus of Nazareth - that ambiguous preacher who calls himself the Son of Man - is coming to YOUR house to celebrate the Passover! Maybe you know Him already and are a fervent supporter and so get your house ready with as much haste and vigour as you can. Maybe, however, you had only seen Him from a distance or had never even set eyes on Him, did not know He knew of your existence! The shock would be great!

God KNEW yours was the right house though. GOD knew you could provide the right setting for that pivotal celebration. We don't know if it really looked like Leonardo Da Vinci's iconic painting but we do know that the main elements were there - the bread and the wine that our Lord shared with His comrades, with the powerful words: "Take and eat, this is my body" and "Drink...this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

I, for one, am so thankful that you opened your door to Jesus.

### **PRAY**

Dear Jesus, let ME be as ready, open and hospitable as the 'certain man' who was told you were going to celebrate Passover at his house when you come back! Let my house be open to you and your people, always. Let me appreciate so much more the very act of eating the bread and drinking the wine. And thank you for your sacrifice so immeasurable. Amen.

♥ *BethanyKids*

*Journey of Simplicity*

Mar 30

## THE TRUTH OF DENIAL

*Kris Riseling // Ontario, Canada*

**READ** *Matthew 26:31-46*

This very night you will all fall away on account of me...

### PONDER

Shortly after shoulder surgery, as a result of a bike accident, I returned to work and experienced chest pain and shortness of breath while climbing stairs. I thought I was feeling the after effects of the surgery (denial 1). Instead of waiting to see the occupational nurse, I rationalized that my chest pain wasn't too bad so I went back to work (denial 2).

Since the chest pain didn't resolve, I went to the hospital where I was sent for a CT scan for suspected blood clots in my lungs. As I was waiting alone for my scan, my chest pain intensified with each breath. I tried several things to control the pain without success (denial 3). Finally, I prayed to the Lord for help and those prayers were answered by getting immediate medical attention!

It's unfortunate that it takes us so long to realize our need of the Lord in every detail of our lives. Often, we deny Jesus by doing things on our own. We not only deny Him like Peter did, but also by not including Him in our actions, decisions, successes and failures. The truth is we need Him.

### PRAY

Lord Jesus, remind me that I should not deny you in any way but acknowledge you in all that I do.

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Mar 31

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## *Journey of Simplicity*

April 1  
Maundy Thursday

### **SO MUCH GUILT**

*Min Hwang // New Jersey, USA // @min.j.hwang*

#### **READ** *Matthew 26:47-27:26*

Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken...And he went outside and wept bitterly.

#### **PONDER**

Peter is exuberant and impulsive. Yet Jesus took this rough-hewn fisherman and displayed His transformative power.

Peter walked on water, and made the amazing profession: "You are the Son of God!" But he also couldn't stay awake in the garden, and struck the ear of the servant with his sword.

Thus, Peter's moment of denial was not surprising.

Though with Jesus for 3 years, the hard work of "reprogramming" his habits was not complete. His automatic tendencies were still ingrained in his flesh. However, hearing himself deny Jesus was a gracious gift of God - the gift of seeing himself honestly.

The catalyst to change usually begins with stark, painful self-revelation. Alone, without big talk or a sword. This is a good place to be. For it's when we've been stripped of everything - even our delusions of loyalty - and we return to the boat where it all began, that we can find Jesus waiting on the shore, with breakfast ready.

We know this pivotal moment was not without effect on Peter. Later, God uses the very same mouth which once denied Jesus, to preach the Gospel that begins His Church.

#### **PRAY**

Lord Jesus, I want to be restored to You. Change me for your glory. Amen.

♥ BethanyKids

## *Journey of Simplicity*

April 2  
Good Friday

# THE FINAL BREATH

*Kasey Shuler // Georgia, USA // @kaseybshuler*

## **READ** *Matthew 27:27-54*

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

## **PONDER**

King Jesus slipped secret into our suffering world, surrendering communion in heaven for a cradle. He took His first breath, taking in the oxygen of earth. God Himself was here, with us! Yet we did not receive Him.

He grew up strong in the eyes of man and God until His Spirit stirred us beyond our comfort. We decided He was no longer worthy to share our air after all.

He was stripped, ripped, and condemned on a cross to die. Yet with each step of bodily suffering, he surrendered His spirit. Breathe in suffering, breathe out surrender. Breathe in, breathe out. Until finally, King Jesus gave one final breath and surrendered His own Spirit to the Father. The life of His breath was released from His body into the world to all who would breathe Him in. To all who suffer.

When you breathe in suffering, take in also the life of Christ. Breathe deeply! Take Him all in! Then let it all go. Breathe out your own life in a full exhale of surrender. Keep enjoying this great exchange until you, too, are back in heaven with King Jesus.

## **PRAY**

King Jesus, thank you for the unceasing rhythm of our breath, reminding us that this life is one of repentance and redemption. You gave up your life for us. Let us give up ours for yours, over and over, until we see you face-to-face. We bow our life before you.

♥ BethanyKids

## *Journey of Simplicity*

April 3

### **GRIEF AND LOSS**

*Wesley Woods // Ontario, Canada // @cwesleywood*

#### **READ** *Matthew 27:57-66*

Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock.

#### **PONDER**

It has been six years since my father took his life. I vividly remember the phone call and the blizzard conditions as I drove ten hours home to prepare a funeral no one was expecting. The busyness of the week left me completely unprepared for the grief that would hit me months later. Losing my father, anyone, or anything for that matter is a process of acknowledging who and what is gone. Yet, these six years later grief has a way of sneaking up on me as I continually come to terms with the loss of what will never be.

My kids will never say "grandpa" and know who he was. They will never hear him play the guitar, the piano and sing. They will never see him at their birthdays, graduations and potential weddings. For all that was lost that day there is so much more we will never gain and I grieve.

Today as we sit in the darkness of Holy Saturday I am reminded of this aspect of continual grief because I wonder if Joseph and early church not only grieved the loss of their rabbi, friend and messiah, but the vision of what he represented or the hopes of what he might bring; the Kingdom of God no longer among them.

Will you join me today in reflecting on what you've lost by creating space for acknowledging what will never be?

#### **PRAY**

Abba please meet me in the loss of what has been taken and comfort me as I grieve what now can never be.



## I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

Rachel Stewart // Georgia, USA // @iamrachelstewart

### **READ** *Matthew 28:1-20*

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

### **PONDER**

A lot of times when things happen unexpectedly you tend to feel uncertain about life. Uncertain of what the future may hold or uncertain of what challenges today may bring. Unexpected events lead to uncertainty that can ultimately cause you to doubt that God is even there. You begin to question and doubt God in your life because this is not what you are used to experiencing.

This reminds me of how the disciples must have felt when the angel of the Lord spoke to them through Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. They told the disciples to go to Galilee where they would see Jesus. I'm pretty sure they did not know what to expect, maybe doubting that Jesus would even be there.

And when they met Jesus it wasn't what they expected at all; to discover that Jesus would be leaving them again, after he had just returned. Isn't that unexpected news to hear? Yes, but through it all he promised that he would be with them until the end of time and that is the same promise he made to us. That no matter what happens in life or what's going on around us we can be confident in knowing that he is with us and that nothing can separate us from him.

### **PRAY**

Father I pray that even when we are unsure about life, or afraid of what the future might hold, that we would know that you are "the one who knows all." That if you are with us then we are in perfect hands and don't have to worry about a thing, because we have the one who never leaves. Amen.

♥ BethanyKids

## *Journey of Simplicity*

April 4  
Easter Sunday

*May the Peace of Christ be with you.*

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