



# HEART OF THE DESERT

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# HEART <sup>OF</sup> THE DESERT

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# INTRODUCTION

Last summer our family spent several weeks driving through the desert. The desert wasn't the end goal, of course—we were on a trip, and there were many sights to see and things to do along the way. But the landscape around us was unmistakably desert. Dry and lifeless, sun beating down, and no signs of refreshing anywhere to be seen. I was glad to know that we were just passing through!

It was during that trip that I first started to process how many times the desert was used in the Scriptures as a descriptor for our journey with Christ. From the call of Abram all the way back in Genesis 12 through the four Gospel accounts, the desert features prominently. It's not just a physical location or a landscape, but it's also a metaphorical description that is used over and over again. As I looked at the landscape, felt my skin drying out, experienced the piercing cold of the evening and early morning mixed with the scorching heat of midday, I began to process this odd paradox. How is it that Jesus describes the life He came to bring as "abundant" and "life to the full" (John 10:10, various translations) and yet the image that comes back again and again is this lifeless desert?

It was that question that began the study and meditation which has led to this series and, ultimately, to this study guide. It turns out that Bible is very clear that the abundant life of Christ isn't found simply in the lush green of life. It's not even that it's found *in spite* of the deserts of life in which we so often find ourselves... rather, Jesus seems to have a very intentional plan for the deserts of our lives. In fact, the Scripture seems to make it quite clear that Jesus will, at times, actually *lead* us into the desert. It's there that He does some of His best work.

Over the last several years, I've become increasingly convinced of two main tenets of our journeys with Jesus. The first is regarding the destination of that journey: God's intent is to form us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus. The descriptions of Jesus and the lives of His disciples are not meant to be unattainable ideals, but practical illustrations of what one writer calls the "normal Christian life."<sup>1</sup> As Jesus states in Luke 6:40: "Everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." Paul

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<sup>1</sup> Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, (Christian Literature Crusade, Ft. Washington, PA, 1961.)

says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that “we all, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” Jesus’ words to His disciples throughout His extended interaction with them prior to His death on the cross (recorded in John 13-16) indicate clearly that His expectation is that they will actually obey His teachings and live the kind of life that He modeled for them. James spends the majority of his singular contribution to the New Testament reminding us that we don’t need to simply learn and know the Word, but we need to actually do it. Despite much modern teaching the contrary, the Bible seems to be exceedingly clear that we are intended to *become like Jesus*.

The second tenet is related to the first: this process of becoming like Jesus only happens through an *active* engagement of the *lifestyle* of Jesus. Simply put: the *life* of Jesus will never occur unless we embrace the *lifestyle* of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> This isn’t something that just happens. It’s a journey that necessarily progresses over years of real work, slowly building to maturity in Christ. Just as a marathon runner doesn’t run 26 miles on the first day she gets off the couch, we won’t transform into the likeness of Jesus immediately. And it won’t happen without effort. It’s that effort that brings us to the heart of the desert. In order for us to receive the gifts that Jesus intends for us through our journey in the desert, we need to engage His *lifestyle* in our approach to the deserts of our lives. This engagement, often through what have been known historically as “spiritual disciplines,” become our training plans which form Christ-likeness in us.

This study guide doesn’t simply contain opportunities for gaining more knowledge. I’m hopeful that will also be part of the process, but there are also a variety of opportunities to practice, on a short-term and “baby step” basis, some of these classic disciplines, each of which were a key part of the lifestyle of Jesus. Think of these activities as the “mile repeats” and the “distance blocks” that make up marathon training. When we faithfully engage them over a period of time, we’re suddenly able to run in a way that we never could have before.

The desert is an invitation to the life of Jesus. I pray you would accept it.

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Brian Kannel  
York Alliance Church

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<sup>2</sup> I’m grateful to both Dallas Willard for his writings as well as John Mark Comer’s teachings through [www.practictheway.org](http://www.practictheway.org) on these subjects.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the 2018 Lenten sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passages for that week. You will receive most benefit from this study as you utilize it in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and regular connection with a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend one of the Sunday morning gatherings for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at <http://www.yorkalliance.org/sermons/>

Please be aware that studying the Bible can be a challenging endeavor. Of course, there are very few worthwhile things in life that don't require some effort on our part. But beyond the difficulty of study in general is the fact that we have a very real enemy who is actively opposed to our understanding of the Word of God. Paul tells us that our battle is not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) Therefore, if you find yourself feeling discouraged, frustrated, or unable to understand something, I strongly encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to guide your heart and thoughts and to give you understanding. If, after prayer, you get stuck along the way, you should feel free to skip a section and move to the next one.

Also, don't do this study in isolation. While most will complete the actual study individually, I would encourage you to get connected to someone else who is doing this study and to connect with that person each week to talk about what you're learning. Along the way, if you have frustrations or are confused about something you're studying, that person can provide encouragement and guidance as you journey through the study together. In addition to having another person with which to engage this study, it might be helpful to have a small group of people who can encourage one another. The first of the practices will give opportunity to develop this sort of connection, and I would encourage you to consider staying connected to group like this regularly throughout the study.

This particular study guide has a few unique features to help you grow as a student of the Word as well as a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, a few notes may be helpful as you begin your study using this guide:

- Each week will be divided into two study portions and a “practicum” activity. The week begins with the practicum because the exercise is intended to be engaged throughout that particular week.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, you’re encouraged to read that section first, and then to engage the two study sections as your schedule allows throughout the week.
- The first of the studies each week will focus on the primary “desert story” and some of the key aspects of that text. The second study will highlight a parallel story in the Scriptures where God worked in a similar way through a different “desert” experience.
- I encourage you to read each Scripture passage in multiple translations. Remember that every translation is just that—a translation. Unless otherwise noted, this study will use the English Standard Version, which is a literal “word for word” translation. The New Living Translation is a “phrase for phrase” translation that is very readable but also quite accurate. Read key passages in both translations when possible. Both translations, along with dozens of others, can be found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).
- Included with each study are blank sermon note sheets (for use on Sunday mornings and/or with the sermon audio available online) as well as set of application questions, which will hopefully be useful throughout discussions with others that are engaging this journey with you.

If you have questions about how to best utilize this study guide, have comments on what you’re finding in it, or just want to report your experiences with using it, all are welcomed! Email me at [bkannel@yorkalliance.org](mailto:bkannel@yorkalliance.org).

*Lord Jesus, we know that You are in control of our lives, and that our circumstances are not surprising to You. There are times in life when we find ourselves in the midst of what we can only describe as a desert experience. During those times, would You make Your presence and Your purpose known to us? May we trust You to achieve Your purposes in us through our desert experiences, and throughout our journeys, may we find ourselves being transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus. As we study these ancient texts and engage these ancient practices, we pray that You would make both our study and our practice relevant to our lives today. May we glorify You as we are changed increasingly into Your likeness. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

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<sup>3</sup> See the next section, “The Heart of the Practices” for more information on this aspect of the study guide.

# HEART OF THE PRACTICES

There are many reasons that we in the American church don't look very much like Jesus. However, I think we all must admit that it's not for a lack of information. We are inundated with teachings about Jesus and the Bible, through just about every medium imaginable. Consider:

- The best preaching in the world is available for free each week via podcast. If you follow the recommendations closely, you can even choose preaching that remains within your chosen "flavor" of Christian theology. (Imagine the reaction from the poor Arminian who accidentally downloads a John Piper podcast!)
- Many church members, including those at York Alliance, have access to a massive video library through "Right Now Media."
- Those who are not able to view through "Right Now Media" have a significant percentage of that same material available through YouTube and other sites.
- Devotional thoughts, Biblical interpretation through the lens of culture, news about the global church, and information on just about every other subject imaginable is available to receive daily in your email inbox. For free.
- Those who miss their own weekly church celebration can access the teaching through their own church's weekly podcast.
- Scripture as well as truth about Jesus is interpreted artistically through a booming music industry. And growing film industry. And other art and "art" of various kinds created by Christians and for Christians.
- Worship "concerts" are a massive global business, headlined by some of the best songwriters in the church today.
- And, of course, the Christian publishing companies are churning out hundreds of millions of good, old-fashioned books. And if you don't want to be bothered with paper, you can get them in electronic form. Or, if that's too much, you can get them *read to you* in audio form.

The only thing left seems to be opening up our skulls and depositing the truth directly into our brains! (And I'm sure some enterprising young developer is working on that...) There has never been a time in history when more teaching about Jesus is available, and it's never been easier to access. What's more is that, statistically, Christians are consuming it at an overwhelming rate, moving books, podcasts, music, and movies to the top of their respective charts.



But has anyone stopped to ask the obvious question:

*Is any of this making us more like Jesus?*

The answer, given the direction of our culture and the statistical analysis of the lifestyles and behaviors of those who claim Jesus as Lord, is an overwhelming “NO.” We, of course, should understand this at a very basic level. I “know” intellectually that eating Turkey Hill “Double Dunker” ice cream<sup>4</sup> at 11:00pm is terrible for me. I also “know” that the best way to eat all snack food is to place a small portion in a bowl or on a plate and then put the container away. Both of these pieces of knowledge very rarely stop me from eating “Double Dunker” directly out of the container at 11:00pm, immediately before I head to bed. Why would I do such a thing if I “know” better? Because, of course, we all understand at a fundamental level that knowledge doesn’t necessary transfer to behavior. How would I stop such behavior? Not through more research and understanding, but through the *disciplines* of eating healthy, setting and enforcing appropriate boundaries, and developing healthier bedtime routines. In short, I would stop such behavior by developing new *practices*, not by increasing knowledge.

This is the heart of the “Practicum” section of each week’s study. One of the classic disciplines will be unpacked, and you will be given a “bite sized” way to engage that discipline for a single week during the Lenten season. Each of these small practicums are designed to give you a taste of the disciplines. One week isn’t enough to revolutionize your behavior or produce great gains in Christ-likeness. However, it is enough to give you an experience of the discipline, and how it might tie to your journey with Jesus.

My encouragement is that you use Sundays as your “feast” day each week, when you stop engaging the discipline from the previous week and prepare to engage the new discipline on Monday morning. As you read the “Practicum” section on Sundays, plan your week accordingly, determining when and how you will engage the discipline (as well as the two additional studies) during the course of the next six days. Then, as you reach Sunday, pause once again, celebrate the goodness of Jesus, and prepare for the next week. You will likely have a harder time with some than with others—don’t let that dissuade you from trying! You’ll find that some of these practices “stick” a bit more than others, and you may even find them being incorporated into life beyond a single week!

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<sup>4</sup> The uncontested best ice cream in the world. Don’t even try to disagree with me on this one.

# **Week One: The Call**

## **Genesis 12:1-3**

There are times that God calls us into the desert. These journeys have several commonalities: He is the Author of them, we don't know the destination ahead of time, and part of the goal is our personal blessing and the subsequent blessing of the world. At its heart, the journey into the desert is a call to trust Him.

## Week One Practicum: Eucharist Meals

### *The What*

The word *eucharist* literally means “thanksgiving” or “grateful.” In many traditions it is a word reserved for the communion celebration, usually within the setting of the gathered church. However, for our purposes this week, we will be talking about the *eucharist meal* in its broader sense: a meal that is an intentional place to share the grace of Jesus with others.

The meal itself doesn’t need to be anything special. There is certainly no reason for it to be fancy, formal, or costly. Paper and plastic are more than acceptable if that’s the desire of the host! Each guest can bring food to share or a few can provide the meal for everyone. The point is not the setting of the meal or the substance of the meal—the point is the *subject* of the meal. The goal is to gather at a common table to share lives with one another, at least for a few hours, over the course of the week. Therefore, intentional conversation is a vital aspect of the meal. It certainly doesn’t need to be “churchy,” but it should be substantive. It shouldn’t be a Bible study or a sermon application discussion—in fact, there may be several around the table who are not connected to York Alliance and/or are not yet followers of Jesus. The goal is to slow our lives down, at least for an evening, and to be intentional about both listening and being heard.

There isn’t a “right number” to make this meal work, but ideally, the conversation should be manageable as a single discussion primarily, not as multiple simultaneous smaller discussions. Therefore, roughly eight adults or teens work well. Children are invited to the meal itself, but in most cases, they will want to be excused to another room for games, movies, etc. during the conversation. However, it’s certainly appropriate to take the conversation along with the children to a different “common” space after the meal in order to have supervision for and engagement with the kids.

### *The Why*

There are dozens of “one another” commands in the Bible. The vast majority of them, of course, will require proximity, intentionality, and actually *knowing* one another. However, our fast-paced, surface-level lives are not shaped for that sort of knowing. One meal a week is a great starting point. It’s a manageable time built around something that we all need to do: eat dinner! The context of a single meal

provides time and space for asking questions, hearing each other's stories, bearing burdens together, and celebrating the everyday victories that so often pass us by.

### *The How*

Choose at least one meal over the course of the next week that you will designate as your *eucharist meal*. It will likely be a dinner, but even a lunch or brunch on Saturday or Sunday works great. Then, determine a plan of action: What will you prepare? Will you provide the whole meal, or just the main dish and ask others to bring sides, salads, and desserts? How many will fit comfortably in your space? Do you engage better in larger groups or smaller groups? Determine, based on your space and personality, how many people is the "best" number for you to invite.

Next, prayerfully develop an invitation list. Don't just invite your closest friends, who you would likely engage with anyway, but sprinkle in those you don't know as well, or those you would like to get to know better. Strongly consider neighbors, and even consider bringing together a group of neighbors who might now even know one another well. Your group can certainly be made up of those who are both connected with and not connected with York Alliance, and those who are followers of Jesus and those who aren't yet followers of Jesus. Pray intentionally and ask God to show you the right group. As you make a list, put some "alternates" on the list as well, as it's very likely that some will already have previous commitments and won't be able to make it. Do your best to fill out the ideal number that you have determined would work best for you!

When you gather, work hard to not be formulaic. As the meal is ready to be served, it's appropriate for you to invite the group to join you as you pray a brief prayer of blessing and thanks. If you know some are unbelievers in your group, or if you aren't sure, a simple word of explanation would be helpful, such as "We believe that everything we have is a gift from God, including this food, and including each of you. We'd just like to take a moment to thank Him before we eat." During the meal, be prepared to ask open-ended questions about one another's lives.

Some ideas:

- "How many brothers and sisters did you have, and what was your family like growing up?"
- "Can you think of a key event that really impacted your life, or even changed the course of your life?"

- “What are some of the things that are really important to you and your family?”
- “What are you excited about right now in your life?”
- “What phase of your life was your favorite so far and why?”
- “What are you hoping for or planning for in the next 10 years?”

These are just a few suggestions among many options. As the host, it would be good to have at least a half a dozen questions or so prepared. It’s unlikely you would need them all, but it’s important to keep the conversation focused on the substantive, not just the trivial. Also, keep an eye on the clock—better to wrap up early than drag on too long! The “right” time depends on day of the week, expectations of your guests, and so on, but determine the best “end” time before you begin and do your best to stick to it. Near the end of your time, ask something like “What’s one thing that you are really grateful for these days?” This is a great way to end the evening.

While you don’t want to kick your guests out, it’s good to give them a cue that the evening is wrapping up. Saying something like “It was really good to be together tonight. I’m/We’re glad you came.” This gives a cue that the evening is wrapping up. Throughout the evening, but particularly at the end of the evening, pay close attention to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to pray with someone, to follow-up with someone on a comment made or a burden shared, or just to invite someone into another aspect of your life. These pivotal moments will often come at the end of the evening.

Different than the rest of the “practicum” experiences in this guide, consider extending this discipline throughout the Lenten season! As a once a week commitment, versus daily or multiple times a day, this is an easy one to extend for six or seven weeks, or even beyond. One *eucharist meal* often only whets the appetite for more! Consider whether inviting this same group to continue to have dinner together weekly would be a good option, or maybe switching the group up each week would work better. Or certainly a combination of both could work. Either way, consider planning a meal like this at least once a week during the Lenten season.

# Eucharist Meal Planning Page



## The Context: Genesis 12:1-3

There are some choices that are absolute. By choosing one option, all other options are left behind and forsaken forever. Marriage is one such choice. One of the statements in most marriage ceremonies is “Do you give yourself completely, forsaking all others as long as God gives you life?” After a deep breath, the “I do” is spoken and the choice is joyfully made. That covenant promise is intended to be binding when both spouses feel like it (as they do at that moment of newly wedded bliss) and also when they don’t feel like it, which certainly happens sporadically over the course of two lifetimes.

When God speaks to Abram, He speaks using this kind of absolute, covenant language. Read Genesis 12:1.

- What three things does God ask Abram to leave behind?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Where does God say the land is to which He will lead Abram?

A journey of several hundred miles, by foot, was certainly sufficient to separate Abram from his past. His decision to follow God was a decisive, permanent, absolute choice of faith—he would forsake the limited security and blessing of the known for the unlimited blessing and joy of following God into the unknown. At this stage, Abram doesn’t know anything about the destination other than the promise and the One who will be guiding him. In order to get any more information, Abram must first obey. “Without the separation, there will be no further revelation.”<sup>5</sup>

Read the following passages, noting Jesus’ call to those He’s speaking with:

- Mark 1:17-18

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50, BST*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL, 1986.), pg. 30.

- Matthew 8:21-22
- Luke 5:27-28
- Luke 18:18-23

What do these passages have in common with God's call to Abram in Genesis 12?

Now, read Genesis 12:2-3. Look back at what God has asked Abram to leave. Then, look at what He's promised him. How do they relate to one another?

Read the conclusion of the story from Luke 18, focusing on vs. 29-30. What does Jesus promise to those who will leave everything behind and follow Him?

**Application:**

- What do you struggle with leaving behind for the sake of the call of Jesus? What does it look like for you to "forsake all others," even though you're not taking a literal journey?

## **A Parallel Journey: Acts 15:36 – 16:10**

When we read of Paul's life, just as when we read of Abraham's life, it's vital for us to avoid two pitfalls. First, we must remember that, while the letters of Paul that have become part of the canon (the collection of books that are a part of our Bible) are certainly divinely inspired and, as such, inerrant, Paul's life, decisions, and actions are *not* inerrant. While Paul was a great man of God and greatly used by God in his generation, his own words in Romans 7:14-23 indicate to us that he wrestled with sinful thoughts and behavior, just as we do. The same, of course, is true for Abraham. While he was called by God in a powerful way and used by God for the blessing of the world, he also made many bad decisions that reflected his sinful heart. Therefore, when we read the history of Paul's life in the book of Acts, we must recognize that Luke (the author of Acts) is recording for us what actually happened and is not necessarily saying that Paul's life and decisions are perfect, just as the author of Genesis is showing us with Abraham.

Read Acts 15:36-40.

- What was the cause of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas?
  
- After the disagreement, where did both of them end up, and with whom?

Read Acts 16:6-7.

- What does Luke records happened to Paul when he was in Asia?
  
- What happened to Paul when he attempted to go to Bithynia?

- We aren't told why these things happened, but what guesses do you have as to why the Holy Spirit would do that?

Paul must have felt defeated after two "no's" from God in a row! He must have felt the frustration of desiring to do the right things but not being "allowed" by God to do them. In many ways, this must have been a "desert" experience for Paul.

Read Acts 16:9-10.

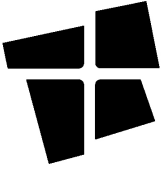
- How does Paul react to this vision and this call?
  
- Why do you think he may have reacted this way?

It was this call to Macedonia that would lead Paul to Philippi, where he would have a very fruitful ministry and establish a powerful church. In the letter he wrote to that church, after these roadblocks essentially "forced" him to Philippi by way of Macedonia, he called the Philippians to imitate him. (3:17) That seems odd for someone who had such a desert experience on his way to Philippi.

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:1. How does Paul clarify this command?

### **Application:**

- Where in your life or in the world around you do you know that God is working? Are there areas that you're trying to engage that God may *not* be working?



# **The Call**

## **Genesis 12:1-3**

Sermon Notes:





## **Application Questions**

1. Has God ever called you in a way that you knew He was calling, but you didn't know where you were going?
2. In what area of your life is it most difficult to fully trust God?
3. Have there been times in your life when God has either asked you to do something that didn't make sense *or* didn't seem to allow you to do something that really made sense?
4. What are some of the things that are most difficult to "leave behind" as you follow the call of God?
5. In what areas of your life can you most clearly see the blessing of God?
6. How might God desire to use the ways that He's blessed you to be a blessing to others?

# **Week Two: Desert Shaping**

**Exodus 13:17-18**

There are times in our lives when we feel like we're completely lost. Sometimes it can even seem like God Himself is lost. However, there are times that He leads us the long way around on purpose, because His detours are always formational. As we journey in the desert, God is shaping us into His people, and is preparing us for the portions of the journey that still lie ahead.

## Week Two Practicum: Desert Reading Plan

### *The What*

There is little to no debate among followers of Jesus that daily Bible reading is an important discipline. However, that doesn't mean (a) that it is practiced or (b) that it is done in a meaningful and life-giving way. Often, Bible reading as a discipline is something that gets "checked off the list" if it is done at all.

God's purpose, however, is far different. Every portion of the Bible tells us one or more of these three things:

- *What God is like.* The Bible reveals to us the nature and character of God, which is far more complex than the simplistic concepts that we tend to use to summarize and stereotype. Yes, God is Love. But God is also Justice. He is both merciful and wrathful. The God who is so far above us and distinct from us cannot be easily summarized, and the Word of God reveals the beautiful complexity of who He is.
- *What I am like.* Our human nature is also more complex than we'd often like to admit. While we might act a certain way, good or bad, at any moment in time, our nature is not limited to that. The reactions of the human characters throughout the Scriptures remind us of our propensities and our virtues, and how they can get mixed up so quickly.
- *How life is supposed to be.* The Bible also describes for us a vision of the life that God desires for us to live. Through the law and the heart that is behind it to the moments of righteous decision and action, we are given a vision of what life fully submitted to Jesus could be. This vision gives us a standard by which to measure our lives as we engage the journey of becoming more like Jesus.

During this week, we are going to investigate the way that all three of these areas of revelation work together in the story of the Israelites. We're told in Exodus 13:17-18 that God is not leading His people by the most direct route because they aren't prepared for battle. Instead, the journey He leads them on is intended to form and shape them into the people of God who are ready for battle. It stands to reason, then, that the stories that follow reveal to us a "basic training" of sorts for God's people. From Exodus 13 to Numbers 15, the people of God are formed through circumstance, experience, and interaction with God and the leaders He called to lead them.

### *The Why*

The Word of God is given to both form us (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and transform us (Isaiah 55:10-13). Unfortunately, over time, Bible reading has all too often become a rote exercise that lacks in power and intentionality for either formation or transformation. The goal of this week's practice is to engage the Word with these goals in mind: that we would be taught, reproved, corrected, and trained in righteousness, so that we would be equipped for every good work.

### *The How*

Over the course of this week, we are going to read through the narrative highlights of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. There's much more to the story than we will be able to cover this week, but we will be able to read the key narrative events by using the following six day reading plan:

Monday: Exodus 13:17 – 15:21

Tuesday: Exodus 15:22 – 17:16

Wednesday: Exodus 18:1 – 20:21

Thursday: Exodus 24, 32:1 – 34:35

Friday: Leviticus 8-10

Saturday: Numbers 9:15-23, 11-13

Each day before you read, take just a few moments to clear your mind and heart. Put away any distractions and focus on this time. For some it can be helpful to have a notepad and pen available so that when something unrelated to your Scripture reading comes to mind, you can write it down so you know you'll be able to get back to it later. This is one of the key distractions that keep us from engaging the Word! After your mind is clear and distractions are removed, simply ask God to speak to you through His Word.

As you read, note anything that jumps out to you. Very specifically ask the questions: (1) What does this tell me about God? (2) What does it tell me about me, and the rest of humanity? (3) Are there ways that this passage gives me insight into the way that God intends life to be? Another question that can be helpful through these passages is: (4) What is God trying to teach His people through this story?

Using a journal of some kind, write down your thoughts and comments on the passage. I would encourage you to find someone that you can share your thoughts with a few times this week as you read and process God's Word and work.

## The Context: Exodus 13:17-18

One of the earliest principles of geometry that most of us learn is the simple maxim: The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. We learn it early because it's not just a math principle, but because it's a life principle as well. In many cases, the best and most efficient way to achieve something is to work toward that specific objective. The best way to communicate a truth to someone is often to speak that truth directly. And, of course, the fastest way to get from the car to the door is right through the grass, which is why the grass always seems to be dying in a straight line across my front yard...

But what about when efficiency isn't the goal? God is often not as concerned about how quickly something gets done as He is about it being done *effectively*. That was certainly the case during the escape from slavery in Egypt and the journey to the land that God promised to His people.

Read Exodus 13:17-18.

- What does God say that He's *not* going to do in leading the people to the Promised Land?
  
- What is the reason for this?

Look at a map of the path that God led His people on. You can find dozens of them by searching "Map of the Exodus journey" online.<sup>6</sup>

- Find "Goshen" on the map. This is roughly where the journey began.
- Now find Jericho. This is where they arrived after a roughly 2 ½ year journey.
- Find Mt. Sinai. This was the most southern point of their journey. They stayed in this region for roughly 2 years, not progressing at all toward the Promised Land.

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<sup>6</sup> A good one can be found at [http://dailyprayer.us/images/maps/exodus\\_route\\_hammond.jpg](http://dailyprayer.us/images/maps/exodus_route_hammond.jpg)

In our modern-day terms, this journey would be like walking from York, PA to New York City, but going by way of Orlando, FL. It just doesn't make any sense!

Look at Numbers 13-14.

- Once they get to the Promised Land, even with the indirect route, what happens?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Look at Numbers 14:11. What is God's response?

Even with the longer journey and the equipping God gives them by seeing the power and faithfulness of God firsthand over and over again, the people still refuse to engage the battle. However, once God's judgment is pronounced and enacted, they change their minds again.

- What do they decide to do in Numbers 14:40?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the result?

**Application:**

- Read Ephesians 6:10-20. How do these commands of Paul parallel this journey? In what ways does your response to these commands mirror or differ from the response of the Israelites?



## A Parallel Journey: Luke 10:1-20

In order to be effective at a task, we can't just be assigned the task... we need to be equipped for it. For instance, with my current level of knowledge and expertise, I can't walk into a new house and wire it like an electrician! I might be "sent" to do the task, but there is no way for me to accomplish the task because I don't know how to do it. There's a still a 3-way switch in our house that only turns on the light when the "perfect" combinations of up's and down's are miraculously struck. A whole house like that would be a huge problem!

Exodus 13 is a story of God determining that equipping would be necessary, and then prescribing what seems to be an unusually long equipping period—the 11 day journey morphs into 2 ½ years, at the end of which the people still aren't prepared to do what they've been sent to do.

On the other hand, Luke 10 describes what seems to be the exact opposite process.

Read Jesus' instructions to the 72 in Luke 10:1-12.

- List the *action* verbs that the disciples are told to engage in.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Are there any on that list that strike you as different from the others? Why?

Going, eating, and telling don't sound too bad, but being sent to "heal the sick" as simply another directive in a list of commands seems a bit presumptive! How could these 72 be prepared to heal the sick?

Read vs. 17-20.

- What was the demeanor of the 72 when they returned? Why?

- How does Jesus respond to their exuberance?
  
- Read vs. 20 again. What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate to the disciples?

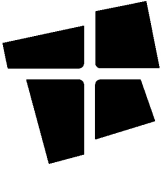
Paul seems to communicate something very similar in his famous passage on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-13.

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31. What gifts does Paul tell us that we should desire?
  
- Now, read 1 Corinthians 13. Remembering that there weren't chapters and verses in the text as it was originally written, what gift(s) do you think Paul was stating were the greatest?

There are times that we get caught up in the "awe" of the supernatural, which seemed to happen with the disciples as they experienced the healing power of Jesus flowing through them. However, Jesus is far more concerned with the healing of the eternal than the healing of the temporal.

**Application:**

- Are there things that God has called you into that you don't feel like you've been equipped to do? What would it look like for you to trust God and attempt to do what He's called you to do in faith?



# **Desert Shaping**

## **Exodus 13:17-18**

Sermon Notes:



## **Application Questions**

1. Has there been a time in your life that you felt like God didn't know what He was doing in your life? What was that like?
2. How do you handle situations in which you need to depend on other people? What about when you need to depend on God?
3. How can learning to trust other people help you learn to trust God?
4. Are there experiences that you've had in your life that, when you remember them, help to build your faith? Like what?
5. As you think about where God is calling you in the next few years, what are some things that God might be seeking to build into your life right now?

# **Week Three: Learning to Hear**

**1 Kings 19:1-18**

It's only when we are emptied of ourselves that we can be filled with the Spirit of God. As long as we have the option of trusting in our own strength, most of us will. While we long for God to meet us in the dramatic and the miraculous, the majority of the Christian life is lived in the midst of the ordinary.

## Week Three Practicum: Solitude and Silence

### *The What*

Our lives are filled with noise. There's lots of external noise, of course, like television, radio, podcasts, other people's voices, etc. From the noise of the alarm in the morning to that last Facebook video that you play before bed (or the sound of the 11:00 news on the television) most of us live in a constant state of noise. Our children make demands, our parents make demands, our spouses make demands, our employers make demands, and we recognize, of course, that our lives are very demanding. But probably even more difficult to avoid than all of noise around us is the internal noise. Most of us have lives that are moving at such a rapid pace that even when the external is quiet, our minds and hearts are racing. Sabbath is a lost art for the vast majority of us, which means that our minds and hearts never go on "mute." The noise never stops.

It's into this world that the twin disciplines of solitude and silence can make a powerful impact. Just a few minutes each day of real solitude and pure silence can be like a warm blanket, soothing the soul. It's in the silence that God can and does speak re-orientation, direction, comfort, and peace. However, often, He doesn't need to speak at all. In the quiet, we know what He's already told us, and we can simply be reminded about what's true.

From a cultural perspective, silence and solitude are refreshingly inefficient and unproductive. We can be convinced of the productivity of prayer, although we rarely practice it as we should, but silence and solitude are a step removed even from that. It's not a time to pray, read, make prayer cards, listen to worship music, or read a psalm. It's a time for... nothing. In the midst of world that seems to be stuck on fast-forward, this is a time to pause and just *be*.

### *The Why*

As has often been quipped: "If God feels distant, guess who moved?" A few moments each day of intentional silence and solitude can be all we need to move back to center again. The demands of life in the day to day can draw us far away from the source of life and peace. By developing the practice of times of silence and solitude, we can push back into the heart of God instead of just going with the cultural flow that can so easily pull us away.

As Dallas Willard so clearly states:

Solitude well practiced will break the power of busyness, haste, isolation, and loneliness. You will see that the world is not on your shoulders after all. You will find yourself, and God will find you in new ways. Joy and peace will begin to bubble up within you and arrive from things and events around you. Praise and prayer will come to you and from within you. With practice, the “soul anchor” established in solitude will remain solid when you return to your ordinary life with others.<sup>7</sup>

### *The How*

The practice, while not easy, is incredibly simple. Commit to spending 5-10 minutes at least once a day alone and in complete silence. For many the best and most logical time is the first thing in the morning, but for others midday or evening might be better options. Some may choose to try multiple times a day as a re-centering exercise. The key is to choose at least one time and then commit to it over the next six days.

When you get ready for your time, you should be looking for a space with minimal distractions. Smaller spaces are typically better than larger ones, but any place you are comfortable and that is free from distraction will work. And, of course, it should be completely silent. No music, no Bible, no journal, and of course, no one else. Just you and God. If you'd like to have a journal to record thoughts after your time is finished, that's fine, but it's best to have nothing with you during this time.

For some, focus during times of silence comes a bit more naturally than for others. Many have found that “breath prayers” can be helpful in focusing your mind and heart on Jesus. Words and phrases such as “Grace” (while breathing in) and “Peace” (which breathing out) or “Jesus Christ” (breathing in) and “Son of God” (breathing out) can help to calm your body and focus your mind and heart.

Of course, you will get distracted during this time, particularly at the beginning when this is a new practice for you. When you find your mind wandering, just pull it back in using one of the breath prayers or simply a brief prayer that focuses on Jesus and asks for His help to be silent. Don't be discouraged when this happens! It's normal for everyone. For most who practice silence and solitude, the overwhelming word descriptor is “peace.” During this time, keep your expectations and agenda small, but expect His peace to meet you in the quiet.

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<sup>7</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, (HarperCollins e-books, 2006), pg. 36.



## The Context: 1 Kings 19:1-18

When are you most likely to truly hear the voice of God? In my life, I'm recognizing that I tend to hear Him best when I'm *desperate* to hear Him. When I'm able to manage things on my own, or when I'm just moving through life in a "normal" way, His voice can often seem silent. However, when I reach the point where I have no other option, He is right there to meet me.

This is Elijah's situation in 1 Kings 19. However, the events leading up to this crisis couldn't have been more radically different.

Read 1 Kings 18:16-46.

- What are the two events that Elijah experiences?
- What are some of the emotions that Elijah might have felt after these events?
- How might have Elijah hoped that Jezebel would have reacted to such a miraculous display of God's work?

Read 1 Kings 19:1-9.

- How does Jezebel actually react?
- Why might this contrast of expectations and reality have caused Elijah's extreme reaction, even more than fear of Jezebel?

Our English translations place the article “a” in front of “cave” in vs. 9. However, the Hebrew text literally reads “He came there to *the* cave.” (Emphasis mine)

- What mountain is Elijah on at this point?
- Read Exodus 33:21-23. What might “the cave” be referring to?<sup>8</sup>
- Read Exodus 33:14-17. What is Moses’ request that God is affirming in this story? How might that parallel the situation that Elijah is in?

Read 1 Kings 19:9-18

- How does God finally speak to Elijah?
- How is this different from what He might have expected based on his experience in 1 Kings 18? Why is that important for him?

**Application:**

- What are some of the “normal” things in your life where you might hear God speak to you?

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<sup>8</sup> This connection is made in R.D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988.), pg. 149.

## A Parallel Journey: Revelation 1:9-18

For all of the desperation and hopelessness that Elijah felt, the book of Revelation opens up with John in a far worse predicament.

Read Revelation 1:9.

- Where is John when this vision occurs?
- Based on this verse, why is John on this island?
- How does John describe himself to those to whom he is writing?

While Elijah felt hopeless because of a threat that had not yet come to fruition, John was experiencing the result of persecution as a prisoner on this rocky island off the coast of Asia Minor. It seemed however, that his *expectation* was one of suffering—not just for him, but for all those who were faithful to Jesus! His phrase “partner in the tribulation” indicates that he believes that all believers will be persecuted.

Read the following:

Acts 14:22

John 16:33

Luke 9:23

1 Peter 4:12

James 1:2-4

- What do all of these passages seem to say about followers of Jesus?

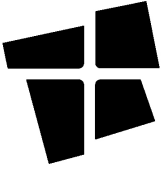
When John sees Jesus, what is it that he sees? Read the following verses, and then the parallel verses to try to understand some of what this vision meant:

- Read Revelation 1:13b. What type of clothes was Jesus wearing?
- Now read Exodus 28:4 and Leviticus 16:4. What similarities do you see?
- Read Revelation 1:12-13a. What are the objects that are surrounding Jesus?
- Now read Leviticus 6:12-13. What connection do you see between this activity and the vision in Revelation 1?
- What aspect of the work and ministry of Jesus do these images point towards?
- Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What image does the writer use to describe the work of Jesus?

John's vision of Jesus must have reminded him that Jesus had come as a priest to atone for the sin of His people, and that the light of the Spirit would continue to burn brightly, even amidst the persecution. How could he *not* be encouraged?

**Application:**

- How do you handle times where things seem hopeless? Is there an aspect of Jesus that you cling to in those difficult situations?



# **Learning to Hear**

## **1 Kings 19:1-18**

Sermon Notes:



## **Application Questions**

1. Think about the last several years of your life. What were some of the lowest, most difficult points? How do you think God views you during those times of desperation and hopelessness?
2. When you think about those difficult times, what sustained you and your faith as you walked through them?
3. How do you best hear God's voice? How do you best hear God's correction? How do you best hear God's encouragement? Are those three answers different? Why or why not?
4. If God is telling you to do the "normal" things in life with His presence and His purpose going with you, how would that look different than the way you lived life last week? How might it look different as you go into next week?

# **Week Four: Real Identity**

**Mark 1:4-11**

We live in a world where our identity is determined by what we've accomplished. Jesus's model is the opposite: His declaration of love for us happens prior to anything we do and is never based on our performance. Rather, who we are is based solely on who He's made us to be.



## **Week Four Practicum: Scripture Memory**

### *The What*

For many of us, Scripture memory is a lost art. After all, in the world of Google, why take time to memorize? The entire canon is just a few clicks away! However, memorizing Scripture isn't simply a matter of knowing more about God or about the Bible. For instance, read Psalm 119:11.

- What does the psalmist say one of the byproducts of Scripture memory is?

Memorizing the Word puts an array of the promises of God deep into your consciousness. When faced with struggle or temptation, these promises become a solid rock on which we can place our feet. In fact, it's notable that Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan in the wilderness by quoting the book of Deuteronomy!

### *The Why*

Another way that memorizing Scripture can be a powerful tool is with the internal dialogue that is so often happening in our heads. When faced with false concepts of who we are, the truth of God's Word is an important reminder of what's real. The Bible has so much to say about who we are in Christ and memorizing these truths can act as our "true north," reorienting us back to the truth when we get off course.

### *The How*

Over the course of this week, you'll have the opportunity to memorize up to six verses that declare the identity that we have as believers in Jesus. You are encouraged to memorize at least one over the course of the week. However, if you are able to memorize that first one, you can add a second one, and so on through the week. However, it's best to not attempt more than one per day—otherwise, it's likely that you won't remember it for the long-term.

You will find the verses listed on the next page. Read them all over, and then choose the first one that you'd like to memorize. Choose a method that works best for you: writing it out, making a voice recording and listening to it again and again, using a series of notecards that increasingly drop out words in favor of blanks, developing a simple melody so that you can "sing" the verse, or quizzing with another person are all methods that have worked. Whatever method you use, strive to memorize one or more verses over the course of this week!

## **Identity in Christ Scriptures**

2 Corinthians 5:17 – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

1 Peter 2:9 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Galatians 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

John 15:15 – “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

John 1:12 – “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Romans 8:17 – “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.”

Colossians 3:3 – “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Galatians 3:26 – “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”

Romans 8:1 – “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:20 – “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 12:27 – “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are God’s masterpiece, created to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Ephesians 4:24 – “And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

## The Context: Mark 1:4-11

Who we are, or even who we *understand* ourselves to be, has an incredible influence on our actions. Jesus, while being completely God, was also completely man, and seemingly was just as dependent on an understanding of His identity.

- As you look at Mark 1:1-20, there are two direct statements of the identity of Jesus. The first is made by Mark himself, and the second by God the Father. Who is Jesus according to these statements?
  
- What else does God the Father say about Jesus at His baptism?
  
- At the moment this declaration is made over Jesus by His Father, what ministry had He done? What had He accomplished? What might that mean for our understanding of our true identities?
  
- Read vs. 12. What two events does the word “immediately” tie together?

When Mark’s original readers, particularly Jewish ones, would have seen this connection, they immediately would have thought about an ancient story that had been passed down through the Israelite people. Look at the following passages, and see if you can see the parallel events in Mark 1:

- Exodus 13:17-18                      Parallel Event:
- Exodus 14:21-22                      Parallel Event:
- Exodus 19:5-6                         Parallel Event:

However, you might have noticed that Exodus 19 is not an exact parallel. Re-read Exodus 19:5. What phrase is dramatically different than the declaration that the Father made over Jesus at His baptism?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, where Paul gives some basic interpretation of these events. Look closely at vs. 5. Do you see the similar but very different language that is in Mark 1:11? What's the difference?

Finally, read 1 Peter 2:9-10. While the language is very similar to Exodus 19, there is no longer a qualification! Our identity is no longer dependent upon our activity, nor our success in the wilderness. What's it dependent on, according to vs. 10?

We no longer need to *qualify* for our identity, but rather, we are called to simply *live* in it! That doesn't mean that we won't experience the desert, but it does mean that our status as sons and daughters of God isn't dependent upon our success in the desert. We can rest in who God says that we are alone.

**Application:**

- Do you live with an understanding of the pleasure of God toward you? How might that effect the way that you live? How might that change the way you approach the "wilderness" experiences of life?

## A Parallel Journey: Acts 9:1-19

The journey of Paul from Jerusalem to Damascus was even more of a change in identity than a change in location. He left Jerusalem “breathing threats and murder” against any belonging to “The Way” and left as a follower of Jesus (also known as “The Way”) filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 9:17)

How did this transformation happen?

First, read Acts 7:58-8:1.

- What is the first impression that we get of Saul/Paul?
- How does Acts 9:1 continue that same story?
- What small word is used in 9:1 to describe how Saul is “breathing threats and murder?”

The word “still” (or “yet” in some translations) indicates “continuity in an attitude in spite of something.”<sup>9</sup> Luke, the author of Acts, seems to be indicating that despite forces to the contrary, Saul was intent on wiping out the followers of “The Way.”

Read Acts 9:1-9 and Acts 26:12-18.

- What additions can you find in Jesus’ words as Paul recounted them in Acts 26 which were not in Acts 9?

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<sup>9</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *Acts of the Apostles* (Pickering & Inglis, London, England, 1924.), pg. 176.

The commission of Paul is recorded later in the Acts 9 story, spoken by Jesus to Ananias. It certainly makes sense that God would have spoken those words both to Paul and Ananias, and Luke simply edited one version out.

- In what way does the other omitted sentence help to interpret the “still” in 9:1?

It seems that there were several forces that should have driven Saul in a different direction, but he was fighting against them.

- Read Acts 6:8-9. Is there any conflict that you can see with the Pharisees listed here?
  
- Read Acts 9:1b. Who did Saul need to get letters from?

Morgan notes that Saul would have been receiving permission from a Sadducean high priest, which would have been “sacrificing his own deepest religious principle.”<sup>10</sup> And yet, he was *still* seeking to destroy the church!

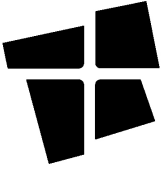
There are times that we fight against our identity for various reasons, and yet, as with Saul, God apprehends us and helps us to see who we really are.

### **Application:**

- Are there aspects of your identity that you “fight” against, whether consciously or unconsciously? Why do you think that is?

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



# **Real Identity**

## **Mark 1:4-11**

Sermon Notes:





## **Application Questions**

1. The Israelites trusted their ethnicity as proof of their right-standing with God, and John asked them to repent of that. What are some things that we trust in for right standing with God apart from Jesus?
2. What do you think God thinks when He thinks about you? Why?
3. Do you live with an understanding of the pleasure of God toward you? How might that effect the way that you live?
4. How might understanding the identity we are given in Christ impact the way that we engage the “wilderness” or “desert” experiences of life?
5. How does truly believing Romans 8:28 help us become willing to engage the desert?

# **Week Five: Affirming Identity**

**Luke 4:1-13**

Temptation is rarely about the sin itself, but rather, about the heart that is ready to engage that sin. Jesus, after having His identity affirmed by the Father, has that identity challenged. Through the temptations to be relevant, popular, and powerful, Jesus affirms that He is indeed who God says that He is.

## Week Five Practicum: Fasting

### *The What*

Richard Foster begins the chapter on fasting in his classic work *Celebration of Discipline* with the following statement: “In a culture where the landscape is dotted with shrines to the Golden Arches and an assortment of Pizza Temples, fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times.”<sup>11</sup> Forty years have passed since those words were published, and they’ve only become more accurate. Oddly, this practice, which is mentioned over and over again throughout Scripture and has been one of the central disciplines throughout the history of the church, is almost completely disregarded in our day.

The concept behind fasting is simple: Stop eating for a designated period of time. There are some who have adapted the practice of fasting to not eat *certain* foods for a period of time. For instance, fasting from chocolate or sweets, or popular “cleanses” such as Whole 30 are adaptations to fasting. Each of these can have both physical and spiritual benefits. However, I don’t think it’s too much of a stretch to say that these are also a bit of capitulation to our culture. Most of us have believed the cultural “truth” that if we don’t eat three meals a day, along with nutritious snacks in between, our bodies will start to break down and we will find ourselves on the verge of starvation. However, it’s simply not true. Our bodies can go an extended period of time without food (usually around 40 days) before starvation sets in. The “hunger pangs” we feel when we miss a meal are nothing more than psychological signals that happen at certain times each day due to years of conditioning. This isn’t truly hunger. As Foster says, it’s the griping of a spoiled child. “In many ways, your stomach is like a spoiled child, and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline.”<sup>12</sup>

### *The Why*

While fasting, and particularly extended fasting, has numerous physical benefits, the goal is an intensely spiritual one. Fasting, like all other disciplines, must center on God. With food removed, and the time that goes with preparation, consumption, and clean-up, time is freed for prayer and meditation. In addition, the removal of food doesn’t simply expose our physical hungers, but it also reveals the other things that control us. Fasting can be a powerful tool to expose and break

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1978), pg. 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 50

down idolatry and engage in deep prayer. Our hunger often also sensitizes our spirits so that we can hear more clearly from God.

### *The How*

Over the course of this week, you are encouraged to engage in a fast. Several choices for the fast are listed below, and each person should choose the one that makes the most sense to them based on their previous experience with the discipline of fasting. However, unless health precludes it (pregnancy, diabetic, heart problems, etc.), you are encouraged to engage in a complete food fast for at least a period of time. Use this time to intentionally engage in prayer, worship, and spiritual conversation with others who are fasting.

Option #1: (for those with health concerns) Choose a specific kind of food and fast from it for a period of at least 1 full day, or more if you choose. One good way to do this is the “Daniel Diet,” eating only fruits and vegetables, dressed in or cooked with only “quality oils” (olive, avocado, sesame, coconut, grapeseed, peanut, etc.) and seasoned only with salt and pepper.

Option #2: Engage a partial 24 hour fast, usually lunch to lunch, skipping two meals. During this time, drink water or fresh fruit juices.

Option #3: Engage a full 24 hour fast, again usually from lunch to lunch, skipping two meals and drinking only water, not fruit juices. If you don’t like the taste of water, add a small amount of pure lemon juice.

Option #4: Engage a full 36 hour fast, which would entail not eating for one full day between dinner the night before the fast and breakfast the following day. During this time, you should only drink water.

Option #5: *Only attempt this if you have experience with fasting and engage fasting on a regular basis!* Engage a 3-7 day full fast. During this time, you are encouraged to pray and journal as much as possible, paying attention to your body and how you feel. Fasts with this timeframe (3-7 days) engage the most difficult part of fasting—detox. If you continue to fast past the 6-8 day timeframe, you will move past the difficult portions of fasting and begin to find it very enjoyable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> As cited above, Richard Foster’s chapter on fasting in *Celebration of Discipline* is an excellent resource for engaging both short- and long-term fasts.

## **The Context: Luke 4:1-13**

One of the great constants in our spiritual journey is that when we have truly engaged and internalized Truth, Satan will seek to undermine it. We commit to fasting and an unbelievable meal offer comes up. We enter into the discipline of simplicity, and the best new gadget in years shows up in the news. We get into an early morning rhythm with God and a few late nights in a row threaten to derail us. And, of course, we start to truly rest in the love and pleasure of God, and our insecurities start to gain steam and become larger than life.

Jesus' experience as both fully God and yet fully Man was no different. Emerging from the waters of John's baptism, He heard the beautiful booming declaration assuring Him of the love and pleasure of the Father. Mark's Gospel states that "immediately" He was driven into wilderness (desert) to be tempted by Satan.

Read Luke 4:1-4.

- How did Jesus get into the wilderness?
- What is the statement that Satan makes?
- Why is this significant, based on Luke 3:22?
- How does this specific temptation, turning stones to bread, point to the desire to be liked and well-regarded by the rest of the world?

Read Luke 4:5-8.

- What would Jesus get if He accepted the offer that Satan gave Him?

- Read Genesis 3:5. How does the original temptation relate to this one?

Henri Nouwen, in his meditation on the temptations, notes why the draw to power is so strong. "Power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life."<sup>14</sup>

Read Luke 4:9-13.

- What is different about the method Satan used to tempt Jesus this time?
- Nouwen defines this temptation as the temptation to be spectacular.<sup>15</sup> How might doing what Satan asked have gained Jesus followers?
- When Satan departed from Jesus, when does Luke say he will return?

At the root of many, if not all, of our temptation is the temptation to deny or disbelieve our identity in Christ. That which is promised is never as satisfying as that which is sacrificed, just as happened with Jesus. Unfortunately, our victory over temptation is only ever temporary on this side of heaven; Satan is always on the lookout for an opportune time to return.

### **Application:**

- As you look at the temptations, does the pull to be relevant, powerful, or spectacular have a stronger pull for you? Why?

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<sup>14</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, (Crossroad, New York, NY, 1989.), pg. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pg.38.

## A Parallel Journey: Genesis 22:1-19

From the time of his birth in Genesis 21, there are a striking number of parallels between Isaac, the son of the promise, and Jesus, the Promised Son. However, none is more striking than the account in Genesis 22. While Isaac doesn't undergo the temptation, he *becomes* the temptation for Abraham, and in doing so, he nearly becomes the sacrifice as well.

Read Genesis 22:1-14.

- What is the name of the land where Abraham is to take Isaac for the sacrifice?
  
- Now, read 2 Chronicles 3:1. Where is the temple of the Lord located?

Incredibly, Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac on the very same mountain that the temple would eventually be built!

- What are the only words from Isaac that are recorded in Genesis 22?

James Boice observes that this same question was asked throughout the entirety of the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> The principle of substitutionary atonement was clearly taught to the people of Israel through the sacrificial system. However, for those who thought deeply, they must have understood that there had to be more to the story. Read Hebrews 10:1-4.

- What image does the writer to the Hebrews use to describe the law?

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<sup>16</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, Volume 2: A New Beginning*, (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1998), pg. 691.

- What is his ultimate verdict regarding the effectiveness of the law and the sacrifices to remove sin?

Because the annual sacrifices were unable to truly remove sin, there must have been points of clarity throughout Old Testament history when men and women asked, along with Isaac, "Where is the lamb that's needed for the sacrifice?"

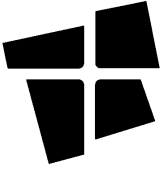
- Read Exodus 32:30. What is Moses looking for as he approaches God?
  
- Read Psalm 51:15-17. What does David realize God is looking for?
  
- Read Malachi 1:8-10. What is God demanding from the people?
  
- Read John 1:29. What does John announce Jesus to be?

After years of asking "Where is the lamb?", the lamb that Abraham was ultimately looking forward to appeared.

**Application:**

- Are there areas of your life in which you don't see Jesus sacrifice as sufficient?





# **Affirming Identity**

## **Luke 4:1-13**

Sermon Notes:



## **Application Questions**

1. Are there times that you have experienced spiritual victory, and then soon after, experienced greater temptation?
2. Based on Jesus' responses to Satan, what is one significant way that we can prepare to resist temptation?
3. As you look at the temptations, does the pull to be relevant, powerful, or spectacular have a stronger pull for you? Why?
4. What are some of the "opportune times" in your life that Satan would likely return? How does knowing that help you to be prepared?
5. Read Ephesians 6:10-20. How do Paul's commands help us to guard the identity that we've been given in Christ?
6. Are there ways that the community around us can help affirm the identity that we have in Christ? Are there ways that the community can be counter-productive to that end?

# **Week Six: Remembering Identity**

**Mark 1:35-39**

Success and affirmation can easily detract us from the heart of God that He develops in us while in the desert. However, by regularly retreating to His presence, we are able to come back to the core calling of our lives.

## Week Six Practicum: Daily Office, or Fixed Hour Prayer

### *The What*

One of our biggest challenges that we have in truly being with God is very simple—we forget. The pace of daily life is such that it can be difficult to remember that God is in control and that He can handle our lives even better than we can. For many of us, we begin the day with a time of focus on the love of Christ for us, and then we've forgotten all about Him by the time we get to work in the morning, only to reconnect our hearts the following morning... 24 hours later.

Historically, this challenge was met head on through a practice known as the Daily Office, or Fixed Hour Prayer. Those who are practicing this discipline “pause” multiple times throughout the day in order to intentionally focus their hearts back on the presence and work of Jesus. In some traditions these hours are firmly fixed eight times per day (or even more often), and have liturgies and directed prayer that accompany them, shorter or longer dependent upon the hour. Other adaptations give greater flexibility in both number of prayer times throughout the day as well as the practice that occurs during those times.

### *The Why*

Fixed Hour Prayer is a powerful tool to keep our hearts connected to the presence of God throughout the day. As the hymn writer said: “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.”<sup>17</sup> Fixed Hour Prayer arrests us in the midst of our wandering and quickly pulls us back to the heart of God. When practiced consistently over a long period of time, the Daily Office begins to give way to a nearly constant awareness of the presence of God.

### *The How*

Each day this week, you are encouraged to completely stop and focus your attention on the God of the Universe six different times each day. That means (but is not limited to!) the following: turn off or close the computer, put the phone and tablet away, no texting, turn off the radio/music/podcast/mp3/etc., excuse yourself from all conversations, turn off the television, walk out of the movie, and so on. You will quite likely find that these “pauses” hit at difficult and awkward times, which is exactly the point—work to remain faithful to these fixed hours for this one week. These pauses should last between 2 and 5 minutes each, although you may find

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Robinson, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. 1757, Public Domain.

yourself combining them at some points throughout the day with additional Bible reading and prayer, which is certainly acceptable. In those cases, they will obviously be longer.

Pause at the following times<sup>18</sup>:

6:00am (or when you get up)

9:00am

12:00pm (noon)

4:00pm

7:00pm

10:00pm (or before you go to bed)

During these pauses, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where have I been defensive, either outwardly or in my spirit?
2. Have I been aware of the presence of Jesus today?
3. Are there opportunities that I've had to love people? Have I taken those opportunities, or have I missed them?
4. Are there any wrongs that I've committed that I need to make right with other people? Do I need to ask forgiveness or extend mercy?

After asking these questions, take about a minute to pray through the Lord's Prayer, phrase by phrase, allowing the Spirit to help you process each concept and request in the light of your day.

During this time, you might find yourself desiring to jot notes in a journal. While that's certainly appropriate, it's best to use an old-fashioned pen and paper journal, so as to avoid the distractions that are most certain to come while engaging electronic devices. However, be careful to limit the length of these times so that they are manageable over the entire week! The first and last pause of the day will likely be a bit longer as you intentionally pray into the day that is coming and then process the day that's been. For those two pauses specifically, you should look at the entire day—however, for all of the other pauses, work to simply be concerned about the period of time since the last pause, and until the next one.

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<sup>18</sup> These are roughly equivalent to, but not exactly the same as, the daylight offices that have been historically practiced.

## The Context: Mark 1:35-39

The plan of God doesn't always make sense. Often, the next logical step in a series is indeed what God has called us to—but there are times, as Jesus is encountering here in Mark 1, when God's plan runs counter to all logic. However, unless we are willing to spend that time alone listening to God, we will always miss the illogical step that makes no earthly sense but falls completely in line with the will of God.

Read Mark 1:16-34.

- What are the events that immediately precede Jesus' time in prayer in Mark 1:35?

Jesus' ministry was off to overwhelming success: healing and amazement from the crowds, with a deep regard for His authority. Everything seemed to be going right. Jesus rises before the rest of the disciples and heads out to pray. Might He too have been anticipating another full day of healings ahead? But by the time Peter finds Him, the agenda is changed.

- What does Jesus declare His mission and purpose to be after spending that time with the Father?
  
- Look back at 1:14-22. Do you think this was a "re-direction" for Jesus, or was it a return to God's original intent for Him?

The Greek word translated "desolate" wouldn't have truly described any of the land around Capernaum, which would have all be cultivated at that point. However, it does seem to recall His wilderness experience, just as it does in the two additional

places that Mark uses the phrase. It seems that he is directing us back to Jesus original commissioning the wilderness.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, Jesus at prayer is relatively rare occurrence in Mark's gospel. It is only seen in two additional places. Look up these verses, and read the context in which they are found:

- Mark 6:46
- Mark 14:32-42

What might these two additional references to Jesus praying have in common with the one that we find in Mark 1?

There are many ties to be seen, but at minimum, Jesus is clearly wary of being driven by success more than purpose. In every instance, His time with the Father re-centers Him on His true calling and purpose and keeps Him on track.

**Application:**

- Do you find yourself re-centered by your time with the Father? Why or why not?
  
- Jesus rose very early to pray, making time in a very busy schedule. What's a time slot that you could commit to in order to pray?

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<sup>19</sup> William Lane, *NICNT: The Gospel of Mark*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1974.), pg. 81.



## A Parallel Journey: Luke 24:13-35

Success can be an intoxicating draw, pulling us away from what is right and true. Failure and loss can do the same thing. When our world falls apart around us, we begin to question all that we once held secure. It's the latter situation we find in one of the most loved resurrection narratives found in Luke 24.

Read Luke 24:13-24.

- What name are we given for one of the disciples?
- Look at John 19:25. Several women are noted, but only one husband. What is his name?

Could this be the same person? Some scholars think so. "The spelling of names often varied in antiquity, and here the two names undoubtedly refer to the same person."<sup>20</sup> If that's the case, it's very likely that the "other disciple" is Mary herself.

- What are some of the evidences of the resurrection that this pair, likely Cleopas and Mary, state themselves as they are talking to Jesus? (vs. 22-24)
- Even with the several stories and eye witness accounts, they were still sad. (vs. 17b) Why do you think they didn't give credence to Jesus having been raised from the dead?

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<sup>20</sup> James Boice, *The Bible Study Hour*, (Evangelical Foundation, <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/the-bible-study-hour/read/articles/the-way-to-emmaus-12292.html>, 1975.), referenced 2.7.18.

It would be fair to say that this pair was “closed” to the idea of Jesus’ resurrection. That seems to be the point that Luke is trying to communicate as he then records three different ways that Jesus “opens” what was previously closed to them.

Read Luke 24:25-35.

- What did Jesus “open” in vs. 27, which is referenced by the pair in vs. 32?
  
- What did Jesus “open” in vs. 31?
  
- Read 2 Corinthians 3:14-16. What is a possible explanation for how they missed the resurrection even with the evidence with which they began the journey?

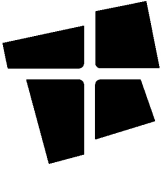
For the third opening we need to go a bit further into the story, when Cleopas and Mary had returned to Jerusalem once again. Read Luke 24:45.

- How does this opening fuse the other two together?

This is a great reminder to us that reading and studying the Bible isn’t simply an intellectual endeavor, but a spiritual one as well. These disciples seemed to know the Scripture and they had evidence of the resurrection, but they didn’t have the spiritual understanding and the faith to believe. It was only in the presence of Jesus that they were re-oriented back to the truth!

### **Application:**

- What are some events or situations that can tend to disorient you? How do you re-orient back to the truth in those situations?



# **Remembering Identity**

## **Mark 1:35-39**

Sermon Notes:



## **Application Questions**

1. Do you feel that you are more disoriented from your true identity by success or failure?
2. What are some of the “good” things in your life that could easily take the place of the “best?”
3. Do you have a specific time slot devoted to prayer? Why or why not? How might you improve on this in the coming weeks?
4. What are some of the aspects of your life to which you know God has called you, and therefore, need to be a priority for you?
5. What are some situations or events that could tend to disorient you, either positively or negatively? What are some ways that you can re-orient in those kinds of situations?

# **Week Seven: The Miracle of Relationship**

**Hosea 2:14-16**

The promise of the desert is that, when Jesus calls us there, we will stop relating to Him simply in religious terms, but as our loving Father and Husband. The empty grave means that we no longer ever need to approach God on the basis of religion, but we can always approach Him on the basis of His finished work.

## **Week Seven Practicum: Celebration**

### *The What*

Far too often, joy is missing within the Christian life. The Bible boldly proclaims that “the joy of the Lord is our strength,” (Nehemiah 8:10) and that Jesus came to bring us full and abundant life. (John 10:10) Joy is listed among the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22) Celebration is the outward expression of this inward joy that is an unmistakable mark of Jesus’ presence and work. This doesn’t mean that we deny suffering and brokenness, or pretend misery doesn’t exist. On the contrary, celebration engages suffering directly and seeks to transform these experience through the remembrance of the promise of the grace and power of Jesus.

Celebration, however, must have an object. We are called to celebrate the transforming work of Jesus that is occurring through our engagement with Jesus: being with Him, becoming like Him, and doing the things that He did. A great reminder of this is a statement from Jesus that we looked at earlier in this study from Luke 10:20: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” While circumstances can certainly be worth celebrating, they are not the ultimate and lasting focus of our celebration. If they were, joy would come and go in seasons based on the external. We also must avoid pretending to celebrate when the spirit of celebration isn’t in us. How often do we thank God for food that we then complain about, or rejoice in provision that we immediately declare is not sufficient for what we need? When we “pretend” to celebrate outwardly but are not truly recognizing the grace and goodness of God, our inward spirit is conflicted, and we are no longer able to truly engage the presence of Jesus.

At the core, the discipline of celebration is about not being anxious for anything, but instead, trusting Jesus to care for us. This is a repeated command of Scripture (Matthew 6:25, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7, and others) but a difficult discipline to engage in a culture that tends to overly emphasize our control. The non-biblical but popular proverb “God helps those who help themselves” is the antithesis of celebration, placing the weight of the world around us squarely on our own shoulders. Celebration recognizes Jesus sovereignty and ability and rejoices in it.

### *The Why*

Richard Foster’s classic work is titled “*Celebration of Discipline*” and the discipline of Celebration is the last one in the book, which he says is a reminder that joy is the

natural outcome of the practice of the disciplines and pursuit of Jesus. “Without a joyful spirit of festivity, the Disciplines become dull, death-breathing tools in the hands of modern Pharisees... Without joyous celebration to infuse the other Disciplines we will sooner or later abandon them.”<sup>21</sup> Celebration helps us not to take ourselves too seriously, and to remember that in the midst of the faithful pursuit of Jesus with all our lives, we’re still first and foremost His kids. (1 John 3:1)

### *The How*

Practicing the discipline of celebration can be a tricky endeavor. On a personal basis, celebration should be woven in to each day, and each aspect of each day. However, for this practicum, you are encouraged to undertake a very specific and tangible celebration: Making up a new holiday. That’s right—get a group of people, either your family, a group of friends, some neighbors, or whatever group makes the most sense in your context. Decide on something that you’d like to celebrate, choose a date, and plan a celebration! The occasion is completely up to you, but you’re encouraged not to make it churchy. Something like “National Paperback Book Day” or “Grill Day 2018” would work just fine. Be creative!

When you’ve decided on something to celebrate, spend some time figuring out how to celebrate. Be creative, and if there are children in your group, this is a perfect time to rely on them! Brainstorm a bunch of different ideas about how you can celebrate your new, made-up holiday... and then put them into action! Homemade gifts for guests can be lots of fun, as well as games, singing, food, music, and food. It’s a great touch to decorate the host home/yard in a way that celebrates your new holiday as well. And, of course, take lots of pictures and video!

When your new holiday is over and everything has been “well celebrated,” take some time to thank God for joy and the freedom you’ve been given in Him to celebrate.

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA, 1978), pg. 164.



## **The Context: Hosea 2:14-16**

Sometimes the things that we dread the most can bring us the most joy. Several years ago I needed to attend a conference, and I wasn't looking forward to it. I had attended several like this in the past, and they had always been dry and felt like a colossal waste of time. Honestly, I figured this one would be the same. However, as He so often does, God surprised me. Just about every aspect of those four or five days were drenched in Holy Spirit activity. From conversations to sessions to worship times, even to free time, God met me there. All of a sudden, the dry and difficult destination felt like an oasis.

Read Hosea 2:14-16.

- Where does God say that He is going to "allure" His beloved?
- Would you immediately think of that as a positive or negative destination?
- As you read the promises of vs. 15-16, does God intend that location for cursing or for blessing?
- How does God say that He will speak to His beloved? (vs. 14)
- Read vs. 8-13. Why do you think that God is not speaking in the same way in the section immediately preceding this promise?

The promise of vs. 16 is a fascinating one. Take some time to look it up in several different translations ([www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) has dozens to choose from!) and fill out the following table:

<u>Version</u>	<u>"you will now"</u>	<u>"you will no longer"</u>
ESV	My Husband	My Baal

- As you look through these various translations, what is the general sense that you are getting of what God is promising?
- How does seeing God as "Husband" seem different than "Master" as it relates to the nation of Israel, or to us within the church?

The promise of God through Hosea is one that moves us from a dry religion to a relationship with God. Jesus gave us a window into this transition when He taught the disciples to pray beginning with "Abba" or "Papa." The desire of our heavenly Father is not that we submit to Him out of fear or duty, but that we lovingly engage Him. And He uses the desert to make that happen.

**Application:**

- If there was a scale from 1-10 with 1 being "Master" and 10 being "Husband," how would you say that you relate to God? What are some of the events in your life that have formed that relationship?

## **A Parallel Journey: John 21:15-19**

The promise of Hosea 2 plays out in the lives of many on a very regular basis, but perhaps nowhere is the process played out more clearly than in the life of Peter. Called by Jesus to follow Him, Peter was not only one of the Twelve, he seems to have been the leader of the bunch. He was part of Jesus' most intimate circle, witnessing events like the Transfiguration and the agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was as deeply devoted and deeply committed to Jesus, it seemed, as anyone on earth.

Read Matthew 26:30-35.

- Peter doesn't simply state his devotion to Jesus but uses a comparison. To whom does he compare his commitment?

Read Matthew 26:69-75.

Can you imagine a more desert experience than that? From that evening on, Peter must have felt the weight of his denial of Jesus, and the pain and regret that went along with it. With these stories in mind, read John 21:15-19.

- Based on Matthew 26:30-35, who or what might "these" be in Jesus' question in vs. 15?
  
- Why might Jesus have asked Peter roughly the same question three different times, based on your understanding of the whole story?

Peter's third answer, while reading the same in English, is a slightly different Greek word. The word *ginosko* means "knowledge gained through experience."<sup>22</sup> Up until that point, he had used the word *oida*, which implies the general knowledge of a fact.

- Why might Peter have made a slight change like that?
  
- What is Jesus' final command to Peter in this section?
  
- Read Matthew 4:18-19. How might this final command be another way that Peter is being reinstated to ministry by Jesus?

This is another phrase that doesn't speak as fully in English as it did in the original Greek. "Follow me" in vs. 19 "is a present imperative, which literally means "Keep on following me."<sup>23</sup> Jesus may be reminding Peter that he had already made this commitment at some point in time, and that he needed to continue in it. However, he might also be pointing out to Peter that his obedience and faithfulness would still need to cost him something, as he was going to face a similar fate to Jesus'.

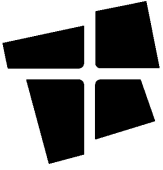
### **Application:**

- As you think about Peter's situation and Jesus' gracious response, are there areas of your life that you know you need to confess to Jesus so that He can bring healing and restoration?

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<sup>22</sup> Merrill C. Tenny, *Expositor's Commentary Vol. 9*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981.), pg. 202.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



# **The Miracle of Relationship**

## **Hosea 2:14-16**

Sermon Notes:



## **Application Questions**

1. When you find yourself experiencing a desert in your relationship with Jesus, do you ever think He might be calling you into that desert? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the ways that you tend to engage Jesus on the basis of religion?
3. What are some of the ways that you tend to engage Jesus on the basis of relationship?
4. What words would best signify your feelings toward Jesus? Is “love” a word you would use? Or is “commitment?” a better word for you? Or “respect?”
5. Has there been a time that you’ve walked through a desert, and had your relationship with Jesus changed? Why do you think that happened?

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I didn't realize that I had gotten so out of the habit of writing these study guides. However, the challenge of writing this one, and the difficulties that accompanied it, were like none that I can remember! I'm finishing this on a very late night, after a series of very late nights, well past my planned completion date. However, all of that said, I do enjoy this process, and I continue to pray that it's as helpful for the church as it is for me!

This message series, as noted in the Introduction, was born during my sabbatical time last summer. While I was encouraged to stay away from writing and other tasks that were more often "work" associated, my reading, meditation, and prayer kept leading me back to the desert. I went into sabbatical praying Hosea 2:14-16. I came out of it continuing to pray the same prayer, and I still continue to do so to this day. I'm realizing that engaging Jesus in intimate relationship is an ongoing growth process, and my prayer is that, by the end of this series, we will have all moved a few steps down that path.

There are so many people to thank every time a book is completed, and this one is no exception. I'll try to make it as brief as possible. A huge thank you to Chris Horsman for the cover design and graphics. Epic and beautiful, and excellent as always! These books wouldn't happen without a significant step back in my other duties for a period of time, so thank you to the staff for filling in the gaps, and to the Elders for continuing to have the foresight and vision to give me the margin to write these. And, last but certainly not least, thank you to my family for putting up with the late nights and preoccupied mind that comes with this process. I especially want to thank Amanda for hanging with me and supporting me through what has been a tough few weeks this time around. I love you.

Grace and peace,

Brian Kannel  
February 8, 2018



**Dry. Barren. Lifeless.**

**The desert can be a difficult place. And yet, the Bible will constantly describe our relationship with Jesus using either the physical desert as a backdrop or the metaphorical desert as a descriptor for our journey. How is it that Jesus describes the life He came to bring as “abundant” and “life to the full,” and yet the image that comes back again and again is the dry, barren, lifeless desert?**

**Some of the best plans of God unfold in the desert. It turns out that God isn't always interested in getting us out of the desert as quickly as possible... In fact, the Scriptures seem to make it clear that Jesus has an intentional plan for the deserts of our lives, and that it's in the desert that He does some of His best and most important work.**

**This study parallels our Lenten journey to the cross by looking at the story of the desert. Through both an engagement of our minds as well as practices we engage with our lives, our goal is to not simply gain more knowledge, but to begin to explore what it looks like to embrace not just the teachings of Jesus, but the lifestyle of Jesus. The call into the “Heart of the Desert” is not a call to simply study the Word. It's a call to engage the God about whom that Word speaks, and to be changed by Him.**

**The desert is an invitation to the life of Jesus. Will you accept the invitation?**

