

THIRTY DAYS OF EPIC FAITH
SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAM

Dr. Marty Meyer

Thirty Days of Epic Faith: Spiritual Fitness Program

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Published by Epic Publishing

94 East Prospectors Dr., Cascade ID 83611

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ISBN 978-0-9677850-2-8

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Introduction

My name is Marty and for the next thirty days I will be your *faith coach*—a personal trainer for your walk with God. If just getting started in your faith I'm sure you will appreciate a little coaching. Yet even if you have walked with God for a while, you'll probably agree that we can get lazy, spiritually flabby, and need prodding to get whipped back into shape! Even seasoned pros benefit from trainers to help achieve their goals. Regardless of level of conditioning in your journey with God, I trust that you will find this faith-training manual both challenging and beneficial.

When I wrote *Epic Faith*, I wanted to share foundational faith-lessons that Jesus has taught me during my journey. I shared my stories with raw honesty. Some of their lessons were forged in the furnace of pain while others emerged as joyful discoveries. Yet other lessons I am still applying, working to get right. If *Epic Faith* provided inspiration, then the workbook you now hold will require perspiration!

In *Thirty Days of Epic Faith*, my purpose is to dig deeper into true, biblical foundations of our faith and to challenge you to practice these principles in practical ways.

This will be intense. If you had set a goal to lose ten pounds and improve your physical shape in just thirty days, it would be entirely possible but would require some uncomfortable life adjustments, such as an hour daily at the gym. In like manner, I challenge you to take one hour each day for the next thirty to work into the best spiritual shape of your life. Think of it as an intensive training phase to bring you to the next level.

Remember: such commitment is worth it! The Bible declares that our faith is more valuable than gold that has been refined by fire. Spending an hour toward developing your faith is the most valuable investment of time you will make in your day.

Let me explain what our daily workouts will look like. You will follow a consistent format so that within a few days it will flow naturally.

Day: There are thirty days in this program. If you miss a day or two, don't sweat it: just pick it up where you left off. If you find that it takes two days to finish some lessons, that's acceptable. By contrast, some over-achievers may at times hammer out two workouts in one day. Either approach is fine; just pace yourself. There are multiple spiritual lessons here that take time to sink in and even more time to practice. Regardless of your pace, though, it's important that you try your best to continue the program without days off, because the continuity, at any pace, will imprint a positive habit of devotion in your life. You have to master 30 before you can tackle 365!

Title & Introduction: Each day launches with a title and brief introduction. This should focus your attention and reveal where we are headed in the lesson.

Reading Assignment & Questions: The warm-up for each day is to read one chapter from *Epic Faith*. You can use the thirty-day workbook by itself, but I strongly encourage you to use both tools together. A few questions then follow the reading assignment, to help you engage the material purposefully rather than passively.

Word of God: Study: This will be the core of your workout: quality time to focus on the Word of God. Have your Bible handy and be prepared to look up key scriptures and thoughtfully press in. Attempt to fill in the blanks and respond to all questions. If you get stuck or want reinforcement, make use of the answer key at the end of the lesson.

Voice of God: Listen: Here we take a pause from reps and work on the core. I hate doing abdominal exercises such as “planks” but I acknowledge their necessity for strengthening one's core. To toughen our

spiritual core we must give Jesus our undivided attention. Like isolating a specific muscle group, our spiritual tone is increased by learning to focus on Jesus and listen to him. Be prepared to take a deep breath, relax, and invite Jesus to speak to your heart. Take a minute to reflect on each question before you respond.

Character of God: *Abide*: Epic faith requires redirecting our focus. We will secure some time in each lesson to contemplate the nature and character of God. The more we know God, the more we will love and adore him. This section teaches us to know God and abide in him.

Pray: Our prayer life is paramount in spiritual development. In the next thirty days we will learn to integrate the Word of God, the Voice of God and the Character of God within our prayers of faith. Invest some time each day on your “Epic Prayer Strategy” and pray with expectation. You will see God move!

Faith in Action: Spiritual growth is not measured by how much of the Word you know but rather by how much you put into practice. “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (Jam. 2:17) This section will encourage you to take small steps of faith each day. The more specific you can be, the better.

Don’t get discouraged when facing some annoying setbacks along the way. We are likely to blow it. But our failures can become learning experiences. Be prepared to meet with God and allow the Holy Spirit to transform your life through success and setbacks. You will discover the life-changing impact of epic faith.

A Note from Coach Marty: I’ll be cheering you on every step of the way! At the end of each workout I’ll share an encouraging word related to this training process.

For more personal encouragement, I highly recommend signing up to receive thirty free, daily coaching emails, complete with a brief video clip. Visit www.epicfaith.net to sign up *now*. In this way “inviting me over” to give you a pep-talk before the workout—the lesson you’ll be covering each day.

Preparation Day: Epic Faith

An “epic” is a long narrative poem or story that includes a hero. God invites us into his story through faith: a beautiful story of transformation, renewal, goodness, life, and profound love. When we come to the cross of Christ, our story dramatically changes and becomes pregnant with epic potential. Our life’s ambition is no longer to glorify ourselves but Jesus, who saved us—the ultimate hero. Yet paradoxically, Jesus calls us to follow his example while embracing our own heroic calling. Few of us feel like heroes and many may even be intimidated or repelled by the idea. But I believe that your greatness in him is embedded in the theme of the story God is writing: A story that includes us, his faithful followers.

Embracing our part in this story requires faith. Faith is confidence in God that transcends any evidence available through our natural senses. “For we live by faith, not by sight.” (2 Cor. 5:7) Jesus came to seek and to save the lost and then he called us to do the same thing. (Luke 19:10, John 20:21) That sounds like superhero-stuff to me. He does not leave us without guidance. Hebrews chapter 11 includes a list of biblical heroes who have gone before us to show us the ropes.

In a singular Bible chapter, we encounter a grand summation that inspires mere mortals to great actions through lives of faith. The examples offered therein teach us, not through rhetoric, but with an historical recounting of real individuals' actions, initiated not for themselves but for their creator. These heroes of epic faith proved a focus not temporal but eternal. They honored the Word of God and in some cases transcribed it. They followed the voice of God, practicing obedience to his promptings. They knew God intimately and based their faith on his character.

Now, I’m not promising that you will achieve spiritual superhero status in just thirty days. But you will learn faith principles that, when put into practice, will enable you to do progressively greater things for the kingdom of God—and bring ultimate fulfillment to your own life. In these next thirty days you *will* grow in your faith, and that alone is more valuable than anything I could offer—“more precious than gold” (1 Pet. 1:7).

Read: “Introduction,” *Epic Faith*

“As you begin to walk through these pages, I want you to be aware that when God looks at you, he sees an epic hero of faith in the making. Brace yourself for an adventure!” (p. 4)

Based on the reading, fill in the following blanks.

It is not the size of our faith but the _____¹ of our faith that makes the difference.

Our faith is focused on _____² alone.

God-focused faith is based on his _____³.

God-focused faith is based on his _____⁴.

God-focused faith is based on his _____⁵.

Faith that is _____⁶ on God and obedient to his calling is inherently epic!

Epic faith _____⁷ great things with God.

Lives of epic faith are _____⁸.

Word of God: *Study*

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.

What does this scripture say about the value of *faith*? ⁹

What is the end result of faith? ¹⁰

Read Matthew 17:1-20.

What did Jesus reveal to three of his disciples on the mountain? ¹¹

What explanation did Jesus provide for the disciples' failure to cast out a demon? ¹²

What size of faith did Jesus say that we should have? ¹³

Jesus uses irony to reveal that the focus of our faith, not the size of our faith, makes the difference. Picture the funny scene of Jesus saying, “Your faith needs to be this big,” while pinching and holding up a tiny mustard seed.

How can you sharpen your faith-focus on Jesus? ¹⁴

Read John 14:12-14.

Clearly, Jesus is the focus of our faith. What does Jesus promise to those who put their faith in him? ¹⁵

How do these promises challenge you to grow in your faith? ¹⁶

Read Hebrews chapter 11. This chapter surveys characters not for us to idolize but to emulate. When reading of them, the Spirit provokes us to live accordingly, so that in like manner, his story is also being written through us.

What is faith? (v. 1) ¹⁷

How do you think that faith brings understanding? (v. 3) ¹⁸

What is required to please God? (v. 6) ¹⁹

Record a few of the faithful mentioned in this chapter by name and indicate what they did by faith. ²⁰

How does this chapter challenge you to live by faith? ²¹

Voice of God: *Listen*

A man once said to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help me overcome my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24) Identify some roots of unbelief that might limit your ability to trust God. Invite Jesus to reveal such areas of unbelief. Record what he shows you.... (When God does not answer our prayers in the ways expected we can become disappointed with God and conclude that we can't trust him in the future. This is just one way that unbelief develops.)

Take a moment to repent of your specific unbelief and ask Jesus to replace unbelief with God-focused faith.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is the Author and Perfecter of Faith!

God initiates faith in our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit, and he is the one who brings it to completion. God delights in building up our faith as we keep our focus on Jesus.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2)

Like the disciples who pleaded, “Lord increase our faith,” (Luke 17:5b) we can ask Jesus to refine our faith-focus.

“These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Pet. 1:7)

Invite the author and finisher of faith to develop your precious faith as you progress through this study in the next thirty days.

Pray

In preparation to pray, read the story of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52. “Bart” teaches us three key principles for prayer.

1. Cry out to God
2. Run to Jesus
3. Respond in Faith

In this story, When Bart comes face-to-face with Jesus, he is offered a simple question: *What do you want me to do for you?* The man was blind. Wasn't it obvious to Jesus that the man wanted to see? Yet Jesus asked to hear it from Bart, and he wants to hear it from us. Speaking out words is a valuable part of our faith response.

Now picture *yourself* face-to-face with Jesus. Jesus is asking you a very simple question: *What do you want me to do for you?*

Now, write four very specific prayer requests:

1. Jesus, I want you to...
2. Jesus, I want you to...
3. Jesus, I want you to...
4. Jesus, I want you to...

Next, find the "Epic Prayer Strategy" pages at the back of this book and record these four requests in the space called "prayer need." We will employ this prayer list for the next thirty days, building upon it progressively. As you write each request, make it a prayer to Jesus. Then, pray with me using the words below:

Jesus, I confess that I have been a little hesitant to trust you completely. I know that I've tried to walk with you and I've failed. I realize that I've been disappointed in the past when things didn't work out the way I expected. At times, I may have even blamed you. I know that those disappointments have made me skeptical of faith and limited my ability to believe. I want to start fresh. Jesus, I want to trust you completely and recognize my need for you to work in me. I invite your Spirit to stir and renew faith in my heart. Father, I want to be a part of your story and embrace the calling that you have for my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Faith in Action

Your action step for today is to simply be aware that God is with you. Open your spiritual eyes to see how he is at work in your life throughout today's happenings and transitions.

Tonight, before you retire to bed, write a simple prayer in the space below, acknowledging God's presence and expressing your appreciation for his involvement in your life:

A Note from Coach Marty:

You just completed your first spiritual workout of this thirty-day training program. Great job! The first few days are critical for developing a healthy spiritual habit. So, set your alarm for tomorrow morning because we have more work to do.

Answer Key:

- ¹ focus ² God ³ Word ⁴ Voice ⁵ Character ⁶ focused ⁷ accomplishes ⁸ fulfilling
- ⁹ Faith is more valuable than gold. ¹⁰ The salvation of our souls.
- ¹¹ The glory of Christ, Moses and Elijah, the voice of the Father.
- ¹² That they had such little faith. ¹³ The size of a mustard seed.
- ¹⁴ Realize that it is not the size of my problem but the size of my God that matters.
- ¹⁵ If we have faith in Jesus, we can do the very works that he did. We can ask for anything in his name.
- ¹⁶ I realize that I still have a long way to grow in my faith walk.
- ¹⁷ Faith is our confidence, assurance, and evidence for things unseen.
- ¹⁸ We can have a simple childlike faith in what the word of God says. By faith God can bring revelation, even into mysteries of which the world is ignorant because they deny the existence of God.
- ¹⁹ Faith. Believe that he exists.
- ²⁰ Abel offered a pleasing sacrifice, Enoch walked with God, Noah built an ark in the absence of any confirming evidence, and so on....
- ²¹ When I consider what these heroes did by faith, it makes me ask the question, "What will I do by faith?" I want to step out to do something great for God because he is worthy. I'm challenged to live for eternity rather than for this present age.

Day 1: Worship God

The encouragement to “worship God” may seem obvious and overly simplistic, yet it is basic in the foundational sense—a life of faith rests upon this footing. To worship simply means to adore, love deeply and treat with the utmost respect. There are many ideas and objects competing for our worship—for a piece of our heart. According to the Bible, when anything (other than God) takes a primary place in the heart, it becomes an idol. So, our focus today is to remove our gaze from our idols, behold God instead, and in doing so recapture our foundational love for him.

Read: Chapter 1, “Golden Idols,” from *Epic Faith*

“Idols have a fatal way of taking our eyes off God, where our true faith is found.” (p. 10)

In this chapter Marty recalled formerly going to church as an obligation, and that his actions were inconsistent with his beliefs, resulting in feelings of hypocrisy. In what ways can you relate to that part of the story?

What was Marty’s “golden idol”? ¹

How was that idol literally crushed? ²

What are some of the idols in your life that need crushing? ³

Word of God: *Study*

It’s not about rules, it’s about relationship.

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” (Matt. 15:8-9)

At times we hold the false notion that God is perfectly content with getting a sliver of our attention on Sunday morning. We approach it as “Hey, it’s better than nothing.” In truth, the living God is notably unimpressed with half-hearted, lukewarm Christianity. Father God wants so much more; he loves us and desires to have a relationship with his children.

Read Revelation 3:14-22 and answer the following questions:

How does God feel about lukewarm faith? (v. 16) ⁴

Jesus calls out our inconsistency, when we say one thing but do another. (v. 17) How can you identify with that? ⁵

Jesus counsels us to acquire “gold refined by fire.” (v. 18) What is he referring to? (See 1 Pet. 1:7) ⁶

Why do you think the Lord says in verse 19, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline”? ⁷

Jesus wants to enjoy relationship with us. (v. 20) What could you do to make your heart more welcoming to him? ⁸

The Kind of Worship We Need and God Desires

True worship tunes our hearts to the melody of heaven. Ultimately, worship is about God, not us, though affecting us deeply. Jesus said, “...true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24) True worship transports us into a union with the Lord that is life-giving and fulfilling. But what we get out of worship is a byproduct—not the focus.

Read the following scriptures to fill in the blanks.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:1-2)

Our worship is _____ ⁹ on God!

Worship should not entertain us. It’s a reserved time and an action to redirect our focus...to remove our eyes from self and onto Jesus. When our eyes are fixed on Christ and his sacrifice for us on the cross, we intuitively live with purpose in response to his love.

At a church gathering, do you ever think, “What am I going to get out of this?”

How would your attitude shift if you worshipped simply to honor God?

“*Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.*” (Psa. 115:1)

Worship is not centered on _____ ¹⁰.

Our worship gives glory to God. It’s about getting our eyes off ourselves.

Love is, by definition, unselfish. God demonstrated unselfish love for us by giving his life so that we could live a new life. Our worship flows from hearts of gratitude for what God has sacrificed for us.

Worship is a holy reverence for the only One worthy of praise.

“Oh come, let us worship and *bow* down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.” (Psa. 95:6)

In worship our hearts _____¹¹ down before the Lord.

When we bow or kneel, it’s a posture of submission. We recognize that our lives need surrender to our Lord. True worship is a life bowed and surrendered to God.

One of the Hebrew words for worship, *shechah*, means “to bow,” as in prostrating one's whole life to the Lord. Abraham used the identical word translated “worship” in Genesis 22:5 when he was prepared to offer his son Isaac in obedience to God. God did not actually require this of Abraham but was testing his heart, revealing it totally surrendered to him. Abraham passed the test, and in doing so foreshadowed the one Father who *did* sacrifice his only son for the sins of the whole world.

Worship encompasses more than simply singing; it is submitting your whole life to God. From this perspective, we worship God while doing the dishes as an act of service just as much as in raising our hands in praise at church!

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living *sacrifice*, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Rom. 12:1)

Worship is our _____¹² to God.

There is a difference between simply believing in God and living out a faith that worships God. Worship becomes our life’s response to the sacrifice that God made for us.

I realize that this may sound radical—worship marking our whole life, passionately surrendered to God. Yes, it’s radical, but also quite liberating! Don’t hold back. What have we ever gained by going through the motions, practicing lukewarm Christianity?

God is calling each believer to take an epic leap of faith and surrender one’s entire life to him.

“You are *worthy*, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” (Rev. 4:11)

God is _____¹³ of our worship.

Our worship reveals our values. God is worth worshipping.

The literal origin of the English word *worship* has to do with ascribing worth to something. From its Latin root, “worship” means “worth-ship.” We worship that which we value. Likewise, we identify our own value through that which we worship.

In what do you find your value? ¹⁴

We get a strong indicator of what we worth-ship (worship) by evaluating how we spend our time and money. When we give value to, or find our worth, in things other than God, those things increasingly become idols in our lives.

Crushing the Idols that Distract Us from Genuine Worship

We must keep in mind that worship is an expression of our wholehearted love for God. He deserves nothing less. Anything we love more than God is called an idol.

When God gave his people the Ten Commandments as a pattern for life, a warning against idolatry led the list. The first commandment declares “You shall have no other gods before me” and the second mandates “You shall not make for yourself an idol.” (See Deut. 5:6-21)

But notice that when Jesus was asked the question, “What is the greatest commandment?”, he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5:

“Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matt. 22:37-38)

Jesus re-stated the first commandment in the positive. He emphasized not the avoidance of idols, but rather the pursuit of our passionate love for God. When we love God with all our heart, we will not value any idols before him!

In the reading from *Epic Faith* for today, I shared the story of how I began to worship two idols: acceptance and my golden Toyota. When a train crushed that Corolla, my first utterance was “Oh my God, my car is ruined.” Those words revealed the true, pathetic condition of my heart. I valued a vehicle more than my relationship with God.

Read Isaiah 44:6-23 and consider how foolish it is to clutch onto idols we have created or collected for ourselves.

If we are honest, each of us has pursuits, objects, or persons that are sabotaging our close walk with God. What captures your heart's attention in such a way that God is pushed to the back? (You will list those things in the next section.)

Voice of God: *Listen*

Let's take a moment to quiet our hearts before the Lord.

In the calm, simply acknowledge to Jesus that which has been offered first place in your heart. (Legitimately good things, endeavors, or individuals may even make your list, because they may have come between you and your love for God.) Tell God you are sorry for breaking the first commandment by putting other gods before him.

Invite the Holy Spirit to show you the idols in your life from God's perspective. We can confess things that we've done wrong but may not suffer any real remorse about them. We may, in fact, plan to continue these behaviors after confessing them. When Holy Spirit does his work of conviction, however, we begin to see our sin from God's perspective. When we are convicted of sin we are moved to repentance—an actual turning away from that sin.

As the Holy Spirit continues to bring conviction, make a list of some idols in your life that you have placed before your love for God. (And imagine yourself turning away from each, toward a richer, life-giving focus.)

Offer the following prayer:

Father God, I am so sorry for putting other things before you. In my heart I know that these idols are nothing compared to your love for me. I surrender my idols to you. I would prefer that you would crush these idols rather than allowing them to steal one more day of my pure devotion to you. I ask for your empowerment to restore Jesus to his rightful place in my life. I invite your Spirit to do whatever it takes to remove these idols from my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Jealous

Not out of insecurity but because of his quality of love, God strongly desires the love of those who are his. God is a lover, longing for the *exclusive* worship and faithfulness of his people.

“They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols.” (Psa. 78:58)

“Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Ex. 34:14)

It’s outright crazy to consider that the God who created the universe wants more out of each single human relationship than we have been willing to give. But this follows naturally from his intense love for us. He knows that only in loving him without reservation will you and I be truly fulfilled. Whatever you are withholding from God—in that, specifically, you will find yourself lacking and insecure.

Pray

Today, let’s make our prayer time an occasion of worship unto the Lord.

Read Psalm 103 aloud as a prayer to God.

Think of some of the ways that God has been active in your life and thank him for what he has done.

A declaration of who he is: Think about how wonderful God is and praise him by writing a few statements that begin with, “God you are...”

God you are...

God you are...

God you are...

Revisit your Epic Prayer Strategy from yesterday and determine if some of your “God you are” statements align with some of your prayer needs. If so, add them to the Character of God section connected to that prayer need.

Faith in Action

Actions of faith always start simply, right where you are. Amid my self-absorbed, indulgent lifestyle, I acknowledged my hypocrisy. In like manner, humbly come to God from your current place, and invite him to do a new work in your heart. You may not feel that you are ready, willing, or able to give him your whole

heart. So, admit that; be honest. Can you at least invite him in? Will you ask him now to initiate a work within you that will ultimately result in genuine worship?

Look at the list of idols you made in the Voice of God: *Listen* section.

Can you name something that you could symbolically toss in the garbage right now, as a declaration of turning your heart's attention and worship back to God? If so, identify it straightaway:

Do something out of the ordinary today to declare your love for God.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Congratulations on finishing your second workout. This was a tough one! It can be grueling confronting attitudes and actions that you are not proud of, but it is well worth it. Hang in there: you're going to love tomorrow's lesson!

Answer Key:

¹ A shiny gold Toyota Corolla. ² It collided with train locomotive.

³ Here you should include things in your life that draw away your attention from God.

⁴ It makes him sick. He would rather have us be hot or cold.

⁵ Perhaps something such as saying that you love God, yet failing to demonstrate it by loving his children.

⁶ He is referring to faith that has been tested by trials.

⁷ It is from the Father heart of love that God brings correction to his children, because he knows that this is best for us.

⁸ Invite him in; set aside time to spend with Jesus.

⁹ focused ¹⁰ self ¹¹ bow ¹² sacrifice ¹³ worthy

¹⁴ You might find value in success, popularity, body image, etc.

Day 2: Reconcile with God

To reconcile means to end a conflict and restore a friendship. The first step toward reconciliation is to admit that a problem exists and to humbly take responsibility for one's own part in it. In our broken relationship with God, the responsibility we must accept is a full 100%. Yet he is eager to forgive, always longing for a deeper relationship with his children. The relational conflict may persist, though, because we often run away from him rather than to him. Our sin caused and continues to break relationship.

“Don't think that the Lord is too weak to save you or too deaf to hear your call for help! It is because of your sins that he doesn't hear you. *It is your sins that separate you from God* when you try to worship him.” (Isa. 59:1-2 GNB)

It is good news indeed that God has made a way for us to be reconciled to him. We can enjoy friendship with God because of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since *our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son* while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.” (Rom. 5:8-10 NLT)

Regardless of where you stand in your relationship with God, today you are going to move a step closer. A renewed relationship with God awaits you.

Read: Chapter 2, “My Best Friend,” from *Epic Faith*

“Simply having knowledge of God's Word is not enough. God was preparing my heart to encounter the Author of Life. I would soon discover a radical relationship with the Word.” (p. 10)

Have you ever felt lonely? Misunderstood? Isolated? How do those feelings intensify your need for friendship?

How did Marty come to know Jesus as his friend? ¹

Consider this quote from your reading: *“Jesus is a friend who loves you no matter what happens in life. You can get to know him by reading the Bible.”* What necessary steps have you taken to initiate or develop your friendship with Jesus?

God spoke to Marty through John 15:13-15. How do these verses speak to you?

What kind of friend have you been to Jesus?

How can you renew your relationship with God?

Word of God: *Study*

In Chapter 2 of *Epic Faith*, I described my path of becoming best friends with Jesus. Today, more than thirty years later, I can honestly say that my friendship with Jesus has become even richer and deeper. Jesus is more than enough, and his friendship truly satisfies my soul. Is your quality of friendship with God growing deeper, or has it stagnated? Allow the Word of God prod your relationship to the next level.

Salvation is Not a Place Where We Go: It's a Person We know

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.’” (John 14:6 NASB)

According to this verse, to where is Jesus the way? _____²

We often think of salvation merely as a path to heaven. Yet more importantly, Jesus came to restore our relationship with the Father.

This is eternal life, that they may *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3 NASB)

How does Jesus define eternal life? _____³

Salvation is about having a relationship with God. When we say “yes” to Jesus, we begin a lifetime of getting to know him. That relationship will carry into eternity.

Broken Relationship

“You’re cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way. And do you suppose God doesn’t care? The proverb has it that ‘he’s a fiercely jealous lover.’ And what he gives in love is far better than anything else you’ll find. It’s common knowledge that ‘God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble.’” (Jam. 4:4-6 MSG)

Would you rather be a friend with God or a friend with the world? ⁴

In whatever areas we allow sin to remain, our relationship with God deteriorates.

We Need to be Reconciled to God through Faith in Christ

“And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no

longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!'

"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ." (2 Cor. 5:18-21 NLT)

This gospel message is all about returning to God. In what areas of your life do you need to come back to God?

How Do We Enter This Relationship That Brings Life?

First, we must understand that we *cannot* save ourselves!

"For by grace you have been saved through *faith*; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of *works*, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9 NASB)

We are saved by *faith*. And faith does not result from *works* or our own righteousness.

Jesus has made a way for us to be reconciled—to restore our relationship with God.

Read these scriptures and fill in the blank to identify our part in the restoration process:

_____.⁵ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NASB)

_____.⁶ "If you *confess* with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Rom. 10:9-10 NASB)

_____.⁷ "Therefore *repent* and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19 NASB)

_____.⁸ "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will *receive* the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38 NIV)

If you have never opened your heart to God in this manner, do it right now! If you have received him in the past, then make the following prayer an authentic reaffirmation (say each part aloud in your own words):

Believe: Tell Jesus that you believe he is God's son who came to take away the sins of the world.

Confess: Simply acknowledge that you have sinned and that your sins have created a division between you and God. Tell God that you are sorry and specifically confess those sins that have burdened you.

Repent: Consciously turn away from your sins and invite God's empowerment to do so.

Receive: Only by the Holy Spirit can we walk with God. Invite God's Spirit to make his home in your heart. By faith, receive forgiveness of sins and the Spirit of God.

Accepting God’s grace is just the beginning. This is no mere “ticket to heaven,” rather, it’s about entering a dynamic, fulfilling, life-giving relationship that begins the moment we receive Jesus as Savior—and continues until we meet him face to face.

A New Relationship with God

If you now prayed to receive forgiveness through Jesus, you have entered a new relationship. It’s a bond that changes everything—starting with you!

In our faith life, everything flows from relationship—friendship with God and others. If you intend to build your faith, you must fortify your connection with God. Then, your bolstered faith in God will impact your relationships with others.

When we receive Jesus as our Savior, we begin to understand that he invites us into the family of God. It’s not about following religious rules; it’s about growing in a loving relationship.

Read the following scriptures to discover the life-giving connection we have with God.

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15)

Jesus is our _____.⁹

When Jesus becomes your friend, and deservedly your best friend, then that’s also the way that you will trust him. You will intuitively trust him in the big and small things that matter to you. Like a friend, you will expect him to come through for you.

“See what great love the *Father* has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)

God is our _____.¹⁰

Our hearts have always longed for this relationship, because it is the purpose for which we were created: to be sons and daughters of God, enjoying intimate fellowship with him. In knowing God as our Father, we discover our true identity. As adopted children of God we find peace and enjoy belonging in his family.

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will *teach* you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.” (John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit is our _____.¹¹

One of many benefits of knowing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is that he instructs us. In fact, the Bible teaches us that we cannot even comprehend spiritual truth without the help of the Holy Spirit serving as our teacher. (1 Cor. 2:6-16)

My explanation and appeal here simply cannot capture the full meaning of our new reconciled relationship with God. In discussing it, we only scratch the surface of the blessing of intimacy with the Creator. The complete beauty is in spending the rest of our lives discovering and walking in the fascinating friendship with God that is available to us who believe!

God wants to enjoy a relationship with us. From the first man and woman in the garden to you and me, we have been created to be God’s children—created in his image. This is the relationship that Jesus restored to us through the cross in order to bring us back to God. We have a lifetime to dig into the depths of understanding God and his love for us.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Communication leads as one of the most important factors in any healthy relationship. If we want to grow in our relationship with God, we must both talk and listen. Many would argue that the most crucial factor is *listening*.

Talk to God and listen to his voice right now. You just now read some scriptures that described the wonderful benefit of living a loving relationship with him.

Try talking to God out loud, or in a whisper.

Thank Jesus for what he accomplished for you on the cross...

Tell Father God how much you love him...

Ask Holy Spirit to be your teacher...

Next, take time to listen. (And write down your impressions.)

Jesus, are you really a friend that sticks closer than a brother?

Father God, how do you feel about me?

Holy Spirit, what do you want me to know?

As speaking and listening to God become increasingly natural, we will expand our relationship with him. Keep practicing!

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Both Savior and Friend

In fact, the name “Jesus” means “savior,” or more literally, “the Lord saves.” Jesus is the Savior because he has redeemed us out of sin and darkness with the sacrifice of his own life.

“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11-12)

Though surely our Savior, God also wants to be our friend—a constant companion who will never leave us or forsake us.

“And the scripture came true that said, ‘Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.’ And so Abraham was called *God's friend*.” (Jam. 2:23 GNB)

“Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a *friend*.” (Exodus 33:11 NLT)

Moses found a special place to meet with God and cultivate that friendship. God invites us to do the same. Right now, you are making a great start in developing the daily discipline of meeting with God.

Pray

Dear Jesus, I cannot fully express what it means to me that you have not only saved me, but that you call me your friend. Forgive me for the times I've not been a very good friend to you. I'm sorry for the times I've ignored you. I want to walk closer to you and invite you into every area of my life: even the parts of my life that are still messed up. I need your help to become the person you have created me to be. Thank you for being my friend. Amen.

Today, go back to your own Epic Prayer Strategy and approach Jesus as a friend who is also fully capable to meet every one of your needs. Ask for his help, just as you might seek the help of your best friend.

Faith in Action

Friendship with Jesus will ultimately help us befriend others well. Think of a few friends that could benefit from encouragement today. Use whatever form of communication comes naturally for you and reach out to them.

Tell your friends that you value them and remind them of their high value to God.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Another session completed! So, how do you feel? You may find it somewhat awkward to talk with God as a best friend, but the more you engage active communication, the more natural it will become. Keep pressing in to acquire all that God wants for you.

Answer Key:

¹ He did so by reading the Bible and asking Jesus to reveal himself through the Word of God.

² The Father. ³ Knowing God.

⁴ It's a necessary choice, because we can't have it both ways.

⁵ Believe ⁶ Confess ⁷ Repent ⁸ Receive ⁹ friend ¹⁰ Father ¹¹ teacher

Day 3: Surrender to the Lordship of Christ

Barges and Battleships: Reading my Bible, I came across this verse: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46) I thought about the ways I had called Jesus “Lord,” yet often failed to obey his words. I began to contemplate what it means to make Jesus the Lord of my life.

Immediately, the Lord gave me a picture of two different types of ships, representing two different kinds of Christianity. The first ship was a barge—a large vessel for transporting goods from one location to another. This represented those Christians who think their faith in Christ is good only to transport them into heaven one day. It may carry them there, but it’s a long boring trip—so inferior to what God intended.

The second vessel was a battleship. The ship illustrated purpose and discipline. Each person on board displayed a unique uniform. Everyone fulfilled an assignment and moved about purposefully, confident in significance. The battleship had a great mission that everyone understood, and one in which everyone participated.

As I took in this visual, Jesus asked, “On which ship would you rather be?”

“Oh, that’s easy. I want to be on the battleship,” came my quick reply.

“I require only one action to participate on my battleship: absolute surrender to the commander-in-chief.”

I knew instantly that Jesus was referring to himself as Lord. I realized that in a military post, there is no question of whether to obey one’s commanding officer. Should we not offer the Lord Jesus the same respect? In that moment I reconfirmed my commitment to the lordship of Christ and offered him my complete devotion.

While sharing this vision at a conference, I called on a young man who had raised his hand to offer a third option: “How about a comfort cruise liner. You know—the kind that has unlimited food and beverages, and endless entertainment on board. Why can’t we choose that option?”

I quickly realized that the young man was not joking; he was absolutely serious. Why *not* a “Carnival” cruise?

Sadly, both the barge *and* the cruise ship represent knock-off brands unrecognizable to authentic Christianity, and many unsuspecting travelers are climbing aboard. Jesus said, “You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way.” (Matt. 7:13 NLT)

In this lesson we want to explore and discover what it means to make Jesus the Lord of our lives.

Read: Chapter 3, “The Lord of My Life,” from *Epic Faith*

“Friendship with Jesus requires obedience, because he is God! He desires friendship but requires lordship.”

Marty regarded himself in control of his own life. How can you relate to that idea?

While laid up in a hospital bed, the Lord led Marty to read 1 Peter 5:5-7. What is the key point of that scripture? ¹

What was Marty's response to that verse? ²

How will you respond to that same scripture?

Word of God: *Study*

Jesus the Fiery King:

I love the word-pictures in the Bible that paint Jesus as the good shepherd. What a peaceful and comforting image. I also appreciate the representation of Jesus as friend, as we explored in the previous session. How reassuring to know him as the "friend of sinners." I draw confidence in knowing that he is always with me and will never let me down. But another aspect of our shepherd and friend shows up, one that we often overlook: Jesus the fiery king!

Read Revelation 1:9-18. (Remember, this is a *revelation* of King Jesus.)

Write some descriptive words that come to mind as you ponder this picture of Jesus: (If you'd like, you could even sketch a picture.)

If you wrote words such as awesome, powerful, majestic, or even scary to describe this role of Jesus, then we are on the same track. Yet these describe the same person with whom the disciples shared a table during the last supper. And furthermore, the person describing this scene *is* John, the beloved disciple who rested his head on Jesus' shoulder as they dined together. Yet here, even John falls on his face in fear.

Both pictures are painted true: Jesus the gentle shepherd-friend, and Jesus the fiery king. Jesus remains our dearest friend, but we must never forget that he is the universe's sovereign king!

Jesus, the King of kings and the Lord of lords invites you now on an exciting adventure. He is calling you to climb aboard his battleship and begin living the destiny to which he has called you.

Seven Steps to Walk with Jesus as Your Lord

We discover our true destiny under the lordship of Christ when our path and priorities emulate Jesus. Here are seven steps in walking with Jesus as the Lord of your life. You will notice that each one begins with a call to action. Find the **bold** word in each description to write in the action required for each step.

Step One: _____³ **the Call.** The call of Jesus is crystal clear, but can you **hear** it? Jesus wants us to reach the world with the gospel!

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matt. 28:18-20)

The call of Jesus is both for the whole church and for each of us as individual believers.

The call is urgent! I have experienced many places of which the people lack the Bible in their own language: regions with no church nor individual believers, because no one therein has even heard the name of Jesus. We must hear this call and respond.

What is God calling you to do specifically to make a difference?

Step Two: _____⁴ **your Destiny.** Will you **accept** the plan that God created for you? Perhaps you’ve watched the “Mission Impossible” movies or the original TV series. The super-secret spy receives some dangerous assignment culminating with the solemn words, “This is your mission if you choose to accept it.” In a like manner, God has an important assignment for each of us, but *we* choose to *accept* it.

If you are a little reluctant, that's okay: you're in good company. Look up the following verses to find out who made each of these quoted statements when challenged by God to accept his or her destiny:

1. _____: ⁵ “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.” (Exod. 4:13)
2. _____: ⁶ “Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak: I am only a child.” (Jer. 1:6)
3. _____: ⁷ “Here am I. Send Me!” (Isa. 6:8)
4. “I, _____, will accept the destiny you have for me Lord!” (Write your name in the blank if you are willing!) “Whatever you ask, Lord, the answer is ‘YES.’”

God’s plan for your life is *always* the best. It may prove more difficult than other paths. It will require greater self-sacrifice, but the plan that God prepared for you emerges so superior to anything you could conceive. You just need to trust him!

Step Three: _____⁸ **the Vision.** God wants you to **see** his vision for your life. It is a vision perfectly suited to how he uniquely created you. His plan for you also lines up with his ultimate purposes.

The Father’s vision as seen in Revelation chapter 5 is that all peoples of the world will give glory to Jesus by receiving redemption through his blood. Then, in chapter 7 we encounter a picture of that grand vision fulfilled.

“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.’” (Rev. 5:9)

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” (Rev. 7:9)

How can you visualize yourself playing a role in fulfilling the Father’s vision?

Remember that God will always use the gifts that he has given you. How can your abilities be used for God’s glory?

Step Four: _____⁹ **the Command.** Walking in destiny is about surrender. Are we willing to **obey** God and his word?

Jesus put it this way, “Whoever loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him. Whoever does not love me does not obey my teaching. And the teaching you have heard is not mine, but comes from the Father, who sent me.” (John 14:23-24 GNB)

Obedience is like giving Jesus a blank check. “Whatever you want Lord, the answer is yes.” It’s amazing to read the Bible that way. After each truth, ask yourself, “How can I obey Jesus in this?”

The challenge of radical obedience is so simple that it leaves little wiggle room. (Reinforce this simplicity by filling in each blank with the appropriate **bold** word.)

Am I willing to _____ what God wants me to **Do**?

Am I willing to _____ what God wants me to **Say**?

Am I willing to _____ who God wants me to **Be**?

Am I willing to _____ where God wants me to **Go**?

Keep these questions freshly in mind, as we will revisit them in the “Faith in Action” section below.

Step Five: _____¹⁰ **the Promise.** The Bible is loaded with amazing promises. We activate those promises when we **believe** and obey.

“Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” (Rom. 4:20-21)

Here are three key promises on which we can rely—in order to fulfill God’s call:

1. The Promise of His _____¹¹ **the Promise.** Moses was so dependent on the **presence** of God that he told the Lord that he would not go without it!

“The Lord replied, ‘I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.’”

“Then Moses said, ‘If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don’t go with us? For your *presence* among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.’

“The Lord replied to Moses, ‘I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name.’

“Moses responded, ‘Then show me your glorious presence.’” (Exod. 33:14-18 NLT)

Jesus promised that he will never leave us and that he will be present with us always. You and I will need to believe the promise of his presence to face the challenges of walking with Jesus as the Lord of our lives.

2. The Promise of His _____: ¹² We have been given a great task but even more so, a great means to accomplish it, the **power** of God.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the *power* that works within us.” (Eph. 3:20 NASB)

“And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the *power of God*.” (1 Cor. 2:4-5 ASV)

When Jesus has asked me to do things that I considered impossible, I have learned to rest assured that they will only be accomplished by his power. Learn to believe that this power is available to you.

3. The Promise of His _____: ¹³ We have a saying, “Where God guides, he **provides**.” Whenever the Lord has called me to step out in faith, God provided what I needed to accomplish his purpose—every time.

Read Matthew 6:25-34. This passage speaks about God as our provider and his ability to care for our needs. List here some of that advice: ¹⁴

You will find *four* directives against worrying. Worry is the opposite of trusting in God as a provider. The section concludes with this famous verse:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt. 6:33 NASB)

When we put God first, he promises his provision—and that is something we can believe!

Notice that this section is preceded by the Lord's instruction concerning prayer. Read Matthew 6:5-15. The Father knows our needs and *wants* to provide; he simply requires us to ask. We are often plagued by worry either because we don’t ask, or don’t believe that God will actually provide. We are so busy trying to manage it on our own that we forget about our ever-present, powerful, generous God inviting us to look to him, to trust him, and to allow him to provide.

What are some things about which you worry that you need now to turn over to Jesus?

Step Six: _____¹⁵ **the Price.** Many believers seem unaware of the price we must **pay** to follow Jesus. Walking with Jesus as Lord means surrendering our rights. This is the cost of following Jesus—and it’s worth it!

I have been laughed at to my face and I’ve faced danger for being a believer, but those things are trivial compared to the persecution that Christians face throughout the world.

Every single day around the planet Christians are slain for the “crime” of believing in Jesus! These martyrs are paying the ultimate price: their own blood. Additionally, every hour our brothers and sisters in Christ are tortured, raped, and sold into slavery simply because they follow Jesus.

In more insulated countries we have a difficult time gripping this reality. Many have never considered the implications of these words of Jesus:

“Jesus said ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” (Luke 9:23)

Will you *choose* to follow Jesus no matter what the cost?

Jesus is our example. He showed us his love for others, authenticated by his willingness to give his own life.

“The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.” (John 15:13 GNB)

This great statement of Jesus is followed by a teaching on suffering. Read John 15:18-25. What does this scripture say about paying the price? ¹⁶

Step Seven: _____¹⁷ **the Reward.** The surrendered life is its own reward! We will **receive** far more that we will ever give in service to the King.

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and *share your master’s happiness!*’” (Matt. 25:21)

The faithful followers of Jesus will someday also hear these words. Jesus is pleased to reward those who follow him. See what he has to say toward those who surrender something for the sake of the gospel:

“Then Peter spoke up, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’

“‘Yes,’ Jesus said to them, ‘and I tell you that anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, will receive much more in this present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and persecutions as well; and in the age to come he will receive eternal life. But many who now are first will be last, and many who now are last will be first.’” (Mark 10:28-31 GNB)

To me the greatest reward in following Christ is the reward of lost souls found. I look forward to being greeted in heaven by those present because of my witness. And more than anything else, these are the treasures that I want for you to receive!

“Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are.” (Matt. 6:19-20)

Let us strive to make King Jesus the Lord of our lives and follow him into the destiny that he has for us!

Voice of God: *Listen*

Take a moment to quiet your heart before God. Close your eyes and picture Jesus as the fiery King. As you freeze that image in your mind, acknowledge that Jesus is the King and Lord of your life.

While picturing the King of Glory, ask him a simple question.” Jesus, how do you want to use my life?”

Record your impressions here:

Character of God: *Abide* - God is King

God was, is, and forever will be the sovereign ruler of all that exists. There is no one like him and he has no equal. Indeed, he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

“Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates, and lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.” (Psa. 24:8-10 NASB)

“The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” (Psa. 103:19)

Pray

Jesus, forgive me for treating you only as a buddy and not as my Lord. I'm sorry for thinking that I was the one in charge and that I could tell you what to do. Today I give you control of my life. I recognize that you are not only my Savior—you are the Lord of my life. I want you to take over. I give myself to you.

Take a few minutes to pray over your Epic Faith Prayer Strategy epic prayer list and ask the King if you need to modify your list in any way.

Faith in Action

In the reading today, I recalled a time when I thought I held control of my own life. That day on a curving mountain road in Idaho, I had a date with destiny. I found out the hard way that as long as I attempted control, I would inevitably make a mess of things. As a result, I gave Jesus jurisdiction of my life and this has impacted every step since then.

Let's revisit the questions of radical obedience. Earlier, you were asked to consider your willingness. What might that obedience look like? Take time to respond to each one.

What does God want you to **Do**?

What does God want you to **Say**?

Who does God want you to **Be**?

Where does God want you to **Go**?

What steps will you take **today** in order to obey?

A Note from Coach Marty:

I wouldn't be surprised if, about this time, you are thinking of giving up. The devil will muster whatever he can to oppose our spiritual growth. You've been dealing with some powerful stuff in the past few days. Satan will question the truthfulness of what we have been learning. If you get ideas like, "You don't have to listen to this... God would never ask you to be this sold-out for him..." you can bet that it's an attack on your spiritual growth. One surefire way to put the enemy in his place is to simply press on, regardless of how you are feeling. Don't give up. And be encouraged: tomorrow's session will be like a drink of cold water on a hot day.

Answer Key:

¹ Jesus is the Lord and we are to submit our lives to him.

² He choose to give Jesus complete control of his life and follow him as Lord the rest of his days.

³ Answer ⁴ Accept ⁵ Moses ⁶ Jeremiah ⁷ Isaiah ⁸ See ⁹ Obey

¹⁰ Believe ¹¹ Presence ¹² Power ¹³ Provision

¹⁴ Do not worry—even about your basic needs. God loves you and will care for you even more so than he cares for the smallest of his creatures. Seek him and his kingdom above all things.

¹⁵ Pay

¹⁶ We can expect to encounter persecution just as they persecuted our Lord Jesus. When we stand for Jesus and his righteous standards we will be rejected by the world and its value system.

¹⁷ Receive

Day 4: Cultivate a Passion for God's Word

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psa. 42:1-2)

How can we develop that kind of thirst for God in our own lives? I've found that the more consistently I am reading the Word every day, the more I desire it. Satisfied, I recognize how much I needed that spiritual nourishment and want to drink it in even more.

I am about to share with you one of the most important keys to entering into greater faith in God. It's so simple, but requires commitment and, yes, some discipline. Here you go: *Choose one book of the Bible, read one chapter each day, and record your primary discovery in a journal. Continue daily until that book is done and then choose another book of the Bible. And do this for the rest of your life!*

I told you it was simple. Granted, I've missed days and even had a few dry seasons, but I've continued to do this for over thirty years. A few years ago my friend José needed some encouragement. We decided to read the Bible together, one chapter per day, and exchange emails to one another with our main insights. We did this every day until recently, when my friend unexpectedly died. I'm back now to writing in my journal (rather than in an email) but each day I'm reminded of my friend José. Together we consumed half the Bible in a year-and-a-half simply by reading daily chapters.

I call this simple devotional method “PB&J,” like the trusty sandwich. Instead of peanut butter and jelly, this snack is made with **P**rayer, **B**ible, and **J**ournaling. Each nutritional event is literally sandwiched between prayers, before and after. We all need the daily spiritual nourishment that this PB&J provides. In the study section below, I'll give detailed instruction on how you can regularly make yourself a sustaining and satisfying PB&J.

Read: Chapter 4, “A Passion for the Word” from *Epic Faith*

“*Epic faith learns to walk in intimacy with God. Knowing the Word is simply the pathway to knowing him.*” (p. 24)

What life-decision was Marty wrestling with? ¹

What do you do when you have a difficult decision to make?

How does the Word of God influence the decisions we make? ²

What is Marty's "secret" for understanding the Bible? ³ How could you put that into practice?

In this chapter, Marty rediscovered a very important lesson about the purpose for reading the Bible. What is that principle, and how can you apply it in your life? ⁴

Word of God: *Study*

The Word of God is our moral and spiritual compass. We find a direct correlation between our vitality in societal, church, and personal lives and our view of scripture. If we hold the Bible in high esteem, believing it to be God's authoritative word to us, then we will permit it to speak into every aspect of our lives. If we hold a low view of the Word of God, then we will feel free to make our own judgments, competent to determine what is right in our own eyes, and act accordingly. I believe God has called us to a higher standard than our own invented precepts, or the fallible words of others. Ultimately, we read the Bible to know Jesus, and then to follow his example. Let's make the Word a priority by reading it every day.

Marty's Famous PB&J Recipe: To make this spiritually nutritious sandwich, start with a healthy slice of **prayer**. Then apply equal parts of **Bible** and **journaling**. Top it off with another slice of **prayer**. This PB&J packs enough spiritual nutrition to maintain your strength throughout the day. This process can take a relatively easy thirty minutes. Let's put it into practice right now:

Prayer: (5 Minutes) Begin your time with God in prayer. This will activate your spirit and connect you with God. Prayer makes us aware of his presence. If possible, pray out loud. It will help you to keep focus. Prayer is simply having a conversation with Jesus. Use the acronym "ACTS:" Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Adoration: Tell Jesus why you appreciate him...

Confession: Cleans your heart by telling him you are sorry...

Thanksgiving: Every good thing comes from God. Describe to him what you are thankful for...

Supplication: This word means "requests." We will close with this type of prayer, so for now, just pray: "Jesus, I ask that you reveal yourself to my heart as I read the Bible. I want to know you better and I believe that you will show me your truth in the Word."

Bible: (10 Minutes) Now read John chapter 1. As you do, I suggest underlining key words and writing your initial insights in the margin of your Bible.

Journal: (10 Minutes) I suggest keeping a separate journal or notebook for this daily practice, but for today simply use the space provided below. Reflect on the words of John chapter 1 and record your insights and how they apply to your life:

Prayer: (5 Minutes) I like to finish my PB&J with another round of prayer. Remember the “S” from “ACTS”. This is a good time to break out your “Epic Prayer Strategy” from the back of this workbook and talk to Jesus about each one of the issues you listed there.

Practical Tips

Set a time and place. This is like setting an appointment to meet with Jesus. Making it routine will make it happen.

Get yourself a good study Bible. This could be the best investment you'll ever make. Most study bibles come equipped with cross-referencing, maps, timelines, a Bible dictionary, concordance and footnotes. Electronic Bible programs and smartphone apps are convenient, but I highly recommend a good paper version.

Select a book of the Bible. Working through individual books of the Bible provides a context for your daily reading. Most study Bibles have an informative introduction to the book to help you understand the human author, his audience, his purpose, and the main themes of the book. Sticking to one book will also provide continuity for your daily reading.

Write in the margins. I am compelled to write in the margins of my Bible. It makes my Bible personal, and a personal record. My mother Milly used this practice, filling margins and gaps with timely notes, her thoughts often spanning pages and running all directions. Her Bible is now a family treasure. Through her dying will, she intentionally passed her Bible to her children, and we now take turns reading through it. No matter what Mom and Dad were going through, they found that God's word spoke to every need. Milly's cursive scribbles became a diary of God's faithfulness.

Equal time for reading and journaling. I mentioned this above, but I want to underscore the importance of keeping a spiritual journal. If you have limited time for the PB&J be sure to take five minutes to read a portion of scripture and use another five minutes to record how it speaks to you personally.

Ask the question: “How can I obey Jesus through what I have learned today in his Word?” This question helps us develop the habit of putting the Word of God into practice.

Voice of God: Listen

“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” (Psa. 119:97)

Today our faith focus will be an exercise in meditating on the Word of God, asking Jesus to speak to us as we do so.

Biblical meditation invites us to think deeply about one truth by turning it over and over in our mind. Use the scripture below as the basis for today's meditation. Read it through five times, asking Jesus to reveal deeper understand with each pass.

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37b-38 ESV)

Record your insights here:

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Wise

God is wise beyond our own understanding. He always knows what is best, possessing perfect perspective.

“He made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.” (Jer. 51:15)

“To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Rom. 16:27)

“Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” (Prov. 4:7)

God freely imparts his wisdom as we read and meditate on his Word. Through patient meditation, his truth emerges as a foundation and guide for our lives.

Pray

Jesus, you are the way, you are the truth, you are my life! I desperately desire to know you intimately. I believe that the Bible is true and is the best foundation for my life but I struggle to make knowing it a priority in my life. Holy Spirit, I invite you to cultivate in my heart a passion for God's Word. Make me hungry for the Bible and open my mind to understand it. I pray that the more I love you, the more I will love your Word. Amen.

Faith in Action

One of my favorite pictures of meeting with God is found in Exodus 33:7-11. Moses set up a special place and called it “the tent of meeting.” Onlookers noticed when Moses went to meet with God, and this intimacy was an example to others. God was faithful to meet with Moses and is likewise faithful with us, to encounter you and me at our designated times and places. We can meet with God as we would with a dear friend. Importantly, the tent of meeting was available to *anyone* who wanted to meet with God, as is the case still today.

Now that you have made meeting with God and knowing his Word a priority, make a plan to read it daily. If you use a smartphone or computer calendar, set it up as a daily recurring event:

Time: When will you meet with God?

Place: Where will these meetings occur?

Book: With what book of the Bible will you begin? (If this practice is new to you, I suggest a gospel book such as Matthew or John.)

A Note from Coach Marty:

You may have already noticed that today's lesson could easily serve as your go-to daily spiritual workout. Bookmark this lesson and return to it regularly. After you have completed “Thirty Days of Epic Faith” use this to pattern your own long-term fitness program.

Answer Key:

- ¹ The question of what vocational direction he should take, specifically whether God was calling him to become a minister of the gospel.
- ² It should be our standard for decision making, but that requires knowing the Bible.
- ³ Before he began reading the Bible, Marty would ask Jesus to reveal himself through the Word.
- ⁴ Marty found that he could read the Word in order to know God. Pray that your Bible reading will cultivate intimacy with Jesus.

Day 5: Desire the Holy Spirit

Growing up, I believed in God but had an unshakable feeling that there was much more to him than I had experienced.

Our church seldom spoke of the Holy Spirit. We, of course, believed that the Holy Spirit belonged to the Godhead. I can still recall the words of the Nicene Creed recited as a child on Sundays:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified...

Yet despite many recitations, I knew very little about this mysterious Person of the Divine Trinity. It didn't help that he was usually referred to as "the Holy Ghost," allowing my young mind to fill in the blanks with misconceptions.

I did not understand it at the time, but the longing I felt for "something more" could only be satisfied by a deeper work of the Holy Spirit in my life. Today, I've observed that confusion, skepticism and even fear persist regarding issues of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. Some believers seem to decide "for" or "against" the Holy Spirit and his gifts, as if this were a question for mortals to debate.

We can trust that God is good and likewise, his gifts. Rather than with uncertainty or controversy, I think we can approach this topic with bright-eyed wonder and joyful anticipation, discovering new aspects of God as we explore the Holy Spirit and his work in our lives. Let's move in faith as we discover what the Bible says about the Spirit of God.

Read: Chapter 5, "There Must Be More" from *Epic Faith*

"I desperately wanted to be close to God. Although I knew little about the Holy Spirit and his gifts, I had a feeling that this was a key to the 'more' I was looking for. I began to pray that God would simply bless me with the Holy Spirit and any gifts that I needed to know and serve him better." (p. 26)

In this chapter, Marty had an aching feeling that there was more to God than he was experiencing. How do you relate to that feeling?

How did Marty's sister Julie impact his quest to find that "something more"?

When Marty prayed to receive a specific spiritual gift, how did God answer his prayer? ¹

What can we learn from the story of “Power Dave” and the prayer for his rock band? ²

“*Though unperceived, Holy Spirit was becoming a vibrant person in my life.*” (p. 27) How can you cultivate a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit in your own life? ⁴

Word of God: *Study*

This study begins with faith—faith based on the Word of God. We will consider many scriptures about the Holy Spirit and his work in our lives. Faith regards as true what the Word says about Holy Spirit, regardless of experiences or teachings we’ve heard suggesting the contrary.

We rely on the Bible as the basis of truth rather than to develop doctrine based on our experience. Neither do we develop doctrine based on our *lack* of experience. Just because one has not known a certain encounter with the Holy Spirit does not prove the Holy Spirit inactive. Let the Word of God establish truth. Then invite the Spirit of God to confirm that truth in a personal way. If the Holy Spirit is available and his gifts are good, then it is only logical to desire him and his work in our lives.

I invite you, Holy Spirit, to enter my heart and to teach me. Illuminate the scriptures I read and bring a fresh breath of revelation. I desire a deeper relationship with God and welcome you to create that hunger in my heart. Holy Spirit, I believe that you are the “more” I have been longing for. May you do a work in me that will bring glory to the Father and the Son through your deep work in my heart. Amen.

Holy Spirit 101: Who is the Holy Spirit?

Let’s start with some basics: Find the word in **bold** to fill in each blank.

The Holy Spirit is part of the Divine _____⁵:

I’ve always loved the old hymn that proclaims:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed **Trinity**!

We worship God for who he is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a foundational understanding of the Christian faith. Let us never forget or overlook the Holy Spirit as one of three members of the trinity, one God in three persons.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son *and of the Holy Spirit...*” (Matt. 28:19)

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship *of the Holy Spirit* be with you all.” (2 Cor. 13:14)

The _____⁶ is given to all who believe.

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the **Holy Spirit**.” (Acts 2:38)

“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his *Spirit* in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” (2 Cor. 1:21–22)

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised *Holy Spirit*...” (Eph. 1:13)

Not only is the Holy Spirit given to all who believe, but he is the down-payment that guarantees our eternal life with God. We have assurance that we belong to Jesus because he has given us the Holy Spirit as his seal of approval.

The Holy Spirit is a _____⁷ from the Father and the Son.

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the **gift** of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.” (Acts 10:44–45)

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good *gifts* to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13)

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matt. 3:11)

God is good, and we can rest assured that his gift of the Holy Spirit is given to benefit our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the revealer of _____⁸.

“But when he, the Spirit of **truth**, comes, he will guide you into all *truth*. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” (John 15:26; 16:13)

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” (Ephesians 1:17)

The Holy Spirit always bears witness to the truth. He brings vibrancy to our lives by revealing Jesus more intimately.

The Holy Spirit is our _____⁹.

“But the **Counselor**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

It’s comforting to know that we have a personal counselor always alongside us. Regardless of our circumstances we can lean into the Holy Spirit to find wisdom, guidance, and understanding.

The Holy Spirit is our _____¹⁰.

“...for the Holy Spirit will **teach** you at that time what you should say.” (Luke 12:12)

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing *teaches* you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has *taught* you, remain in him.” (1 John 2:27)

The Holy Spirit is quite literally our teacher. If there is something you don’t understand, ask the Spirit to instruct you. I have found that he brings examples to mind and confers clarity to issues when I have humbled myself and asked him to teach me.

The Holy Spirit _____¹¹ within us.

“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who **lives** in us.” (2 Tim. 1:14)

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own...” (1 Cor. 6:19)

“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” (Rom. 5:5)

One of the most amazing and mind-boggling biblical truths is that God resides in us through his Spirit. We are containers that somehow “hold” the most precious substance in the universe—God. With God indwelling us, we are surely capable of radiating his love to the world around us that desperately needs him.

What is the Work of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit begins by doing a work *in* us. Then he does a work *through* us.

First, let’s find out what the Holy Spirit wants to do *in* us. Fill in the blank by finding the **bold** word in the scripture below it.

We are filled with _____¹² through the Holy Spirit.

“At that time Jesus, full of **joy** through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” (Luke 10:21)

“And the disciples were filled with *joy* and with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 13:52)

Joy indicates the Holy Spirit's presence in the lives of believers! Our joyful hearts prove to the world that the Spirit of God lives within us. Ask Holy Spirit to give you his joy right now!

God gives us a new _____¹³ by his Spirit.

“I will give you a new **heart** and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ezek. 36:26–27)

This is fantastic news! God trades out our old stone-cold heart for a new, warm heart that beats for him. This is not something we could ever accomplish by our own strength. It is a creative and surgical work the Spirit does *in* us and *for* us.

The Holy Spirit brings conviction of _____¹⁴.

“When he [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to **sin** and righteousness and judgment...” (John 16:8)

I am so thankful for the Holy Spirit’s work of conviction. Not to be confused with a general feeling of guilt, his conviction brings specific revelation of how our sin is wrong. Conviction leads to repentance—a walking away from sin and a march toward pure freedom. Sin brings bondage; Jesus provides forgiveness and freedom.

We are made holy by the _____¹⁵ work of the Spirit.

“[You] have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the **sanctifying** work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood...” (1 Pet. 1:2)

To sanctify means to consecrate, set free from sin, and make holy. It's wonderful to realize that it's not our work to make ourselves holy but simply to yield to God's spirit, allowing him to do his sanctifying, holy-making work in us. If you have been struggling to "get" holy it's time to switch thinking and "let go and let God" perform that work in you.

God brings spiritual _____¹⁶ by the Holy Spirit.

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and **renewal** by the Holy Spirit..." (Titus 3:4-5)

It would be appropriate now to pause and pray: *Thank you Holy Spirit for the new life You bring. Thank you for washing me and making me holy. I long for the deep-down heart renewal that only You can accomplish. I desire You and the renewal You want to perform in me. Amen!*

Holy Spirit helps us _____¹⁷ the Word of God.

"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may **understand** what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:12-14)

My dear friends Don and Judy were life-long believers but knew very little about the Holy Spirit. One evening they attended a special meeting in which they opened their hearts to the Holy Spirit. They didn't feel anything special but the next morning, Don woke up with a hunger for the Word and an ability to understand the Bible as never before. Don and Judy have been examples of Christian vitality ever since! They serve as clear evidence of how the Holy Spirit brings illumination to God's Word!

The Spirit makes us aware that we are _____¹⁸ and daughters of God.

"Because you are **sons**, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'" (Gal. 4:6)

God's Spirit confirms that our core identity flows from being the children of God. This inner spiritual work liberates our hearts by making us mindful that we belong to God and are members of his family.

Now that we've seen the wonderful work that God's Spirit does *in* us, let's find out what he wants to do *through* us!

God's Spirit _____¹⁹ and guides us.

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit **lead** me on level ground." (Psa. 143:10)

Read Acts 16:6-8. Here we see the Holy Spirit keeping Paul from going one place and then leading him to go to another. *Ask Holy Spirit to clearly guide the steps of your life also.*

The Holy Spirit enables us to _____²⁰.

"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and **pray** in the Holy Spirit." (Jude 1:20)

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to *pray* for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Rom. 8:26)

“And *pray* in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Eph. 6:18)

We are powerful instruments of prayer when we yield our hearts to be used by God’s spirit. As you invite the Holy Spirit to pray through you, your prayer life can become both powerful and effortless!

The Holy Spirit can _____²¹ through us.

“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you **speaking**, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:11)

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *spoke* the word of God boldly.” (Acts 4:31)

Many believers are intimidated by the prospect of witnessing, yet with the Spirit’s empowerment we can speak the heart of God to the lost. According to Acts 4:31, speaking the Word of God boldly is an evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Through the Holy Spirit we have _____²² to be witnesses for Jesus.

“But you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

God’s power is God’s promise to us who believe. We cannot live for Christ out of our own strength, but with the Spirit of God flowing through us, we can live for God with power and confidence.

The prophesy from Isaiah 61 was fulfilled through Jesus. He read this from the sacred scrolls in the temple and proclaimed it fulfilled! (Luke 4:18-21)

Read this scripture and underline all the things that the Spirit empowered Jesus to do.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

“He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’S favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

“They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.” (Isa. 61:1–3)

Now, consider this: Jesus calls you and me to follow his example. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the very things we just underlined!

What is the Fruit of the Spirit in our Lives?

Read the following scripture and circle the nine things identified as “fruit of the Spirit”:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22–23)

This fruit will be joyfully and effortlessly evident in our lives as we flow with the Spirit’s power.

Read Mathew 7:15-20. How will you recognize those who belong to God as compared to those who don’t? ²³

Look at the nine attributes you circled previously. Underline the ones you most need to grow in. Invite Holy Spirit to produce that specific fruit in your life. He will!

What are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the giver of _____ .²⁴

“Now about **spiritual gifts**, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” (1 Cori. 12:1)

“God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and *gifts* of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” (Heb. 2:4)

“When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” (Acts 19:6)

Remember the Holy Spirit is God, and God is good! Therefore, all his gifts are good also. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 we are admonished to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts.” *Tell Holy Spirit that you desire his good gifts and are open to everything with which he wants to bless you.*

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-12. List the different kinds of spiritual gifts given to the body of Christ:²⁵

Notice these words in verse 11: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and *he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*” Who determines which spiritual gifts you should have?²⁶

Read Romans 12:6-8. What other spiritual gifts do you find listed here?²⁷

Circle the five ministry gifts that are listed in Ephesians 4:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” (Eph. 4:11–12)

Of these five, with which one do you most personally identify?

This by no means has been an exhaustive teaching on spiritual gifts, but I pray it will whet your appetite to earnestly study what the Word of God teaches on the subject. I simply want to encourage you to keep your heart open and welcome the Spirit and his gifts to work freely through your life.

Voice of God: *Listen*

“And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (John 20:22)

Picture the scene of which this scripture refers. Jesus had died and then had resurrected, but his disciples remained afraid and confused in hiding with the doors locked from the inside. Then Jesus supernaturally—yet physically—entered that place of fear and spoke peace to their hearts. He said to these daunted disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Jesus knew that these faint-hearted men were not up to the task so he breathed the breath of Holy Spirit upon them... and they received courage and strength as they breathed in God.

In fear you may have locked up some rooms in your life, but doesn't restrict Jesus. He wants to breathe upon you the Holy Spirit's breath. Identify some of your fearful places:

Now, Invite the breath of God to fill you and revive you.

Jesus, I want to be filled. Let me breathe in the Spirit of God. Jesus, speak to the dark and fearful corners of my life and speak your peace to me....

Record here what you sense Jesus saying to you:

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Spirit

The Spirit of God has eternally existed in a perfect, loving, unified relationship with two other unique persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son.

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23–24)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:17–18)

Pray

In our prayer time today we will freestyle as the Spirit leads.

Start with this simple prayer:

Holy Spirit, I worship you as God and welcome you to empower my prayers. I invite you to pray through me. I yield my heart to you and ask that you would bring to mind anything that the Father would want for me to intercede. I am available. Use me as an instrument of prayer.

Now pray for whatever the Holy Spirit brings to thought, even if it seems out of place, such as something you just saw in the news. Pray for it; pray about it; just pray! Then say, “What's next?” and pray for the next thing that God brings up.

List the issues and individuals for which the Holy Spirit had you pray:

(Continue to remember to pray for these things throughout the day.)

Faith in Action

I want you to take a small step of faith today. Contact those that Holy Spirit had you pray for. Write an email, message, or text, or make a phone call that simply says, “Hey, I felt led to pray for you today. Have you anything specific that I can be praying about?”

You will be amazed. So often when I’ve taken this action step people will say, “How did you know I needed prayer?” and proceed to detail the specifics of the need my prayer addressed. Take that step today and make it a practice in your life.

A Note from Coach Marty:

This was a big lesson and may have pushed you a bit. But at the same time, I’m guessing that you are starting to feel more spiritually alive. I’m reminded of two-a-days at the beginning of every football season. We went to practice early in the morning and again in the late afternoon. It was brutal, but it quickly whipped us young bucks into shape. If you need more time, consider doing part of your thirty-day spiritual workout in the morning and the other half in the evening. Before long, you will be hitting your stride and feeling a whole new vitality in spiritual life. You can move forward with confidence because now you have the best coach ever—the Holy Spirit.

Answer Key:

¹ Rather than receiving a prayer language, the Lord gave Marty a prophetic gift.

² At times, the thing we are praying for is inadvertently leading us away from God.

³ We need to check the motives behind our prayers. See James 4:3. If we are disappointed with God, we need to trust that he is good and wants what is best for us, even when we don’t understand. We must remember that it may be God’s grace to NOT answer our prayers the way we had hoped.

⁴ Desire the Holy Spirit. Welcome him in your life. Invite Holy Spirit to bless you with the gifts needed to build God’s kingdom.

⁵ Trinity ⁶ Holy Spirit ⁷ gift ⁸ truth ⁹ counselor ¹⁰ teacher ¹¹ lives ¹² joy ¹³ heart ¹⁴ sin

¹⁵ sanctifying ¹⁶ renewal ¹⁷ understand ¹⁸ sons ¹⁹ leads ²⁰ pray ²¹ speak ²² power

²³ By their fruit you will recognize them.

²⁴ spiritual gifts

²⁵ wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous power, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues

²⁶ God is the one who determines the distribution of spiritual gifts.

²⁷ serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, mercy

Day 6: Approach Jesus in Faith

The gospel books reveal individuals who approached Jesus with their needs and specific requests. Jesus responded and even commended those who thus approached him in faith. These ordinary persons carried concerns in common with us. The simple factor that led to an extraordinary effect was not so much Jesus' physical presence but that they brought their needs to him with great expectancy. Faith expects Jesus to do something great, because he *is* great. Let us not fail to recognize that when we pray, we are approaching Jesus in the same way as those who served as biblical examples. Jesus remains just as real, willing, and capable to move on our behalf as he proved so in Bible times. The key is to approach him in faith.

In the reading for today, Marty and his youth Bible study participants learned to take Jesus at his word and to bring their practical needs to him. As you read, consider the things that *you* need to present to Jesus by faith.

Read: Chapter 6, “Approaching Jesus in Faith” from *Epic Faith*

“We have missed the point if we think our faith is only to get us into heaven. Jesus died, and rose from the dead, so that we could have a relationship with him right now and live by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is alive in each of us who believes.” (pp. 31-32)

In this chapter Marty explained that we diminish faith through a passive approach. We may simply sit back, waiting for God to do something, while Jesus expects us to press into him with our faith. When you approach Jesus in prayer, identify how it has typically been: with a passive posture or an active one?

How can you move from passive to active in your prayer life? ¹

When Jesus healed people who approached him expectantly, he often replied, “Your faith has healed you.” What is the role of faith when you pray? ²

The woman with the issue of blood was healed by touching Jesus. Have you ever thought about your prayers as touching Jesus? Do you think your prayers have been more like those who crowded around Jesus or the woman who touched him intentionally in faith? Explain. ³

According to Matthew 13:58, how do we “limit” God? ⁴

Word of God: *Study*

Let's take a closer look at the way that individuals approached Jesus, by unpacking Matthew chapters eight and nine. Grab your Bibles in order to answer the following questions.

“Many were amazed at Jesus’ teaching because he taught with _____”⁵ (Matt. 7:28-29). In chapters 8 and 9 we will see that Jesus not only taught with **authority** but also demonstrated his power to those who approached him in faith.

The man with leprosy discovered that Jesus was _____.⁶ (Matt. 8:1-4).

Notice that this man with a desperate need found basis for his faith in the character of God. Jesus is merciful, compassionate and is **willing** to meet us at our point of need. Jesus persists in the business of meeting us right where we are, the moment that we approach him.

Keep in mind that we can both learn and apply these biblical examples of faith. When we pray, we approach the same Jesus, just as willing to help us in our time of need as he was to heal the man with leprosy. Like the man who wanted Jesus to heal his skin disease, we can learn to appeal to Jesus' willing compassion as we engage Jesus in prayer. At times we may illogically regard Jesus as willing to help others but not ourselves. Make faith declarations by listing some needs in which Jesus is willing to intervene:

Jesus, you are willing...

Jesus, you are willing...

Jesus, you are willing...

The Centurion understood Jesus’ _____⁷ (Matt. 8:5-13).

How would you like to be a person that *amazes* Jesus with your great faith? The centurion amazed Jesus by recognizing that Jesus’ **authority** in the spiritual realm brought the capacity to bring instantaneous healing.

Notice that Jesus gave the centurion his word, “I will go and heal him.” Likewise, we can base our faith on God’s word, understanding that Jesus has the authority to back up what he says. The centurion was a military leader who knew how authority works.” Just say the word, Jesus, and it will be done.” We can approach Jesus in faith when we understand his authority.

Jesus told the officer, “Go! It will be done *just as you believed* it would.” God responds to our prayers in the same way. Do we truly believe that he will act?

Peter’s mother-in-law found out that nothing is too great or too _____⁸ for Jesus. (Matt. 8:14-17)

I’ve often heard Christians say, “I wouldn’t even bother Jesus with something **small** such as a headache or fever. I’ll save my prayers for something big.” Unfortunately, this thinking misunderstands God’s character and misses the interactive relationship that he wants to have with us. Not only did Peter’s relative become healed of her fever, she experienced a front row seat, watching Jesus cast out demons and heal diseases. Jesus cares about us in both our great and our small problems.

What are some of the “small things” for which you need to trust Jesus?

The paralytic man received from Jesus both healing and

_____.⁹ (Matt. 9:1-8)

What a beautiful picture of intercession! To intercede is to pray for the need of someone else. The friends of the paralytic man hauled him to Jesus with their obvious request. Jesus observed the faith of the man's *friends* and granted him healing and **forgiveness**. Notice that the healing authenticated his authority to forgive sins!

The bleeding woman and the dead girl both discovered the power in Jesus'

_____.¹⁰ (Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43)

It helps to understand that the woman's “issue of blood” rendered her ceremonially unclean according to Jewish law, and thus touching her was forbidden. She reasoned, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed,” pressed in to **touch** Jesus, and her need was instantly met. Furthermore, Jesus wanted to meet this woman who had touched him in faith. He asked, “who touched me?”, to the bewilderment of his disciples. “How can you ask such a question? *Everyone* is touching you!” they countered. But Jesus discerned the difference between the pressure of a crowd and the touch of one's faith.

Do you think your prayers more resemble those who crowded Jesus or the woman who touched him by faith?

In the same way, a synagogue leader named Jairus recognized the power in Jesus' touch.” My daughter has just died. But come and *put your hand on her*, and she will live.” And that's exactly what happened.

Begin to see prayer as the avenue by which you touch Jesus!

The blind man believed in Jesus' _____.¹¹ (Matt. 9:27-31)

Jesus responded to the blind man's cry for help with a simple question.” Do you believe that I am **able** to do this?”

Jesus is asking us the same question when we approach him in prayer. Let's give him that same response: “Yes, Lord!”

“According to your faith will it be done to you.” Jesus remains in the business of answering our prayers according to our faith.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Take a moment to close your eyes and picture yourself as one of the characters we studied today. Imagine yourself approaching Jesus in faith just like that person. In that place of contemplative prayer, invite Jesus to teach you how to approach him uniquely through prayer.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Gracious

In spite of our many failings, he delights in us and gives us far more that we deserve.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” (Titus 2:11)

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.” (Psa. 145:8)

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Heb. 4:16)

As you approach him in faith, be reminded that God is gracious and he delights in giving good gifts to his children.

Pray

Continue to use your “Epic Prayer Strategy.” For each item on your list continue to invite Jesus to illuminate how to pray through it specifically.

As you pray, remember the lessons you’re learning from those in the Bible who approached Jesus in faith. Recall that Jesus is willing to help you and has the authority to do so. And, as you pray, bear in mind that nothing is too big or too small for Jesus; we need only touch him by faith. He is able and willing to meet our every need!

Faith in Action

Review your Epic Prayer Strategy and ask Jesus to reveal actions to take toward answering your own prayers. Write those down, then do as he has prompted you.

A Note from Coach Marty:

This lesson is really stretching you to flex your spiritual muscles. It may bring on some fatigue, but press into Jesus, from where your true strength is drawn! The more you work out spiritually, the more stamina you will gain in the spiritual realm. Learn to press into God increasingly each day.

Answer Key:

¹ Approach Jesus with expectation. Actively engage your faith when you pray. Realize the reality of Christ and his active role in your life.

² Faith is the vehicle by which we ascertain the things of God.

³ When we pray out of religious duty or obligation, we are like the people in the crowd; when we press into the presence of God, we find ourselves touching and receiving from Jesus by faith.

⁴ We limit God through lack of faith, or unbelief. God prefers to work through us and our faith is a factor by which he has chosen to limit himself. Conversely, we can pray in faith wholeheartedly and leave the results up to God.

⁵ authority ⁶ willing ⁷ authority ⁸ small ⁹ forgiveness ¹⁰ touch ¹¹ ability

Day 7: Dealing with Disappointment

Disappointment sets up a major barrier to faith. When things don't work out as we had hoped, in spite of our prayers, we may be left thinking that faith doesn't work. When we become disappointed over something we may not fully understand, it's natural to begin questioning the validity of faith itself. Some give up all together. Though we may wrestle with God when things don't work out as expected, ultimately, we must learn to trust him. We deal with disappointment by focusing on God's character, believing that he is good and that his ways prove best.

Allow me to share a story about my own disappointment. At nine years old I dreadfully wanted a new bike. Our family didn't have much money and being the second to youngest sibling, I usually accepted hand-me-downs. In this case: my *sister* Julie's bike. You guessed it, a *girl's* bike, without the top tube going straight across as on a *boy's* bike. I was so embarrassed riding that girl's bike around the neighborhood. Kids would see me pedaling their way and enjoy a good laugh at my expense. So, you can imagine my excitement when I learned in Sunday school that Jesus hears and answers all our prayers. As a young boy, I had no problem believing in Jesus and accepted my Sunday school teacher's words at face value. I hurried home and asked Jesus for a brand new *boy's* bike! The following morning before one bite of breakfast I hurried out to the garage, sure to find it waiting there for me. My mom soon noticed my new ritual as each morning I ran out excitedly and returned with obvious disappointment. One morning she asked me about it, but I could not bring myself to divulge the truth. "I was just looking for something but couldn't find it," I said, looking at the floor. My disappointment about the new bike that never came to me had clouded my perception of faith itself.

I know I could not have possibly *believed* any harder than I had believed for that new bike to materialize, absolutely convinced that it would appear for me in the morning. Why had "faith" failed me? Possibly another element escaped my understanding: that true faith is based not on our own desires but on the word of God himself. James 4:3 says, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." I had focused on getting a new bike rather than on growing a relationship with God, holding the false notion that a gender-appropriate bicycle would infuse more lasting fulfillment than God himself. My motives were off.

Many of us can relate to that little boy wanting that new bike, because even as adults, objects that we covet consume us. The question that requires brutal honesty is not "What do *I* want?" but rather "What does *God* want?" Don't get me wrong, God really does care about our desires, but more importantly, *he desires* to see those surrendered to him. He will happily give us our hearts' longings, provided those will be truly good for us. Our Father in heaven, like any loving parent, wants to fulfill our needs and desires, but does *not* want his generosity to transform us into spoiled brats, thinking we are the center of the universe. I am reminded of the wisdom in Proverbs:

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." (Prov. 30:8-9)

When have you recently prayed for the Lord to give you just enough, so that you would enjoy having your needs met, while necessarily continuing to trust him? The Lord is less concerned with your momentary happiness than with developing your gratitude, contentment, perseverance, and character.

We must learn to move past disappointments that would torpedo our faith, by redirecting our focus back toward God. You may invite Jesus to bring insight into your disappointing situation, yet even in seasons when you gain no understanding, you can still trust that God is holding you in his hands. Like the character Job who, when everything went wrong with no understanding as to why, maintained that God is good and

his ways trustworthy. In this lesson, let's confront our own disappointments head-on and come through the encounter with new resolve to place our hope in God.

Read: Chapter 7, "Tested Faith" from *Epic Faith*

"Tragedy had tested me, just as it does for anyone walking out epic faith. The Bible explains that a refining process occurs when we endure pain, grief, or trial. It says, 'These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed' (1 Pet. 1:7)." (p. 44)

In this chapter, when prompted to pray a big prayer of faith, Marty chickened out. Disappointed, he felt as if he didn't have what it took when his faith was on the line. Can you identify a similar experience? What did you or could you learn from this?

In the aftermath of disappointment Marty wrestled with questions such as, "What good is my belief in the Bible if I lack the faith to actually practice it?" What would you say to someone wrestling with similar questions?

God worked his redemptive purpose seemingly in spite of Marty's lack of faith. How have you seen God work during your own periods of disappointment?

In this chapter, "Power Dave" challenged his classmates to pray for those like Saul in their lives—those who seem impossible to reach with the gospel. Can you identify some "Sauls" that you know? Would you muster the faith to pray for them until they come to Jesus?

Word of God: Study

Disappointment can erect a major barrier to functioning in faith. We need to deal with those disappointments to move forward in faith. Let's look at three areas of disappointment:

Disappointment with God

A familiar story in the Bible about Moses speaks to the heart of disappointment. (You can read about it in Exodus chapter 2.) As a Hebrew baby, Moses escaped infanticide by being placed in a basket, floating down the Nile, and becoming rescued by the pharaoh's daughter. Amazing. That Hebrew baby grew up in an Egyptian palace but gained a sense of calling and destiny for his life. When still a young man he regarded himself ready to single-handedly deliver the Hebrew race. The rescued would become the rescuer. In his self-appointed role, he killed an abusive Egyptian and tried to settle disputes among Hebrews. He attempted

to live out his calling in his own timing, by his own strength. The outcome: rejection by his own people and Pharaoh's attempt to take his life. Moses had to flee and live as a fugitive.

Now, can you imagine the disappointment Moses must have shouldered? A former prince of Egypt, his actions relegated him to a lowly shepherd—for the next forty years! He tried to make his life count and ended up a failure.

God showed up on the scene in burning shrubbery to summons Moses to his true destiny. But the problem this time was that Moses stood unwilling to consider the call. Disappointment had crippled him.

Read Exodus chapter 3. How did Moses' excuses reveal inner disillusionment with both God and himself? In what ways can you personally relate to this dialogue?

When we become disappointed with God, we are tempted to question his goodness or faithfulness. We need to look beyond ourselves and our circumstances and instead refocus our faith toward God.

Disappointment with Ourselves

Read Matthew 17:14-20. This passage provides an example of failing to apply faith. A man with a desperate need approached Jesus' disciples, asking them to deliver his son from a tormenting evil spirit. They tried, and they failed.

Now, I must point out that the father did not bring an unfair expectation. A few chapters previous, in Matthew 10, Jesus sent his disciples on a short-term mission trip with the authority to cast out demons and heal the sick. They returned reporting “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Luke 10:17).

Yet in this incident, faced with a simple request from a father and son in need, they failed to deliver. Somehow, now faith didn't seem to work. Have you ever felt this way in your exercise of faith?

When Jesus returned from a mountaintop field trip with his three closest disciples, he made short work of dispatching the demon and healing the boy. His success prompted the nine disciples who failed to ask a stinging question: “Why didn't it work for us? Why couldn't we drive out the demon?”

Jesus' initial response implied that they failed because they had “such little faith,” yet we quickly discover that his response was intended to teach an unforgettable lesson. He proceeded to instruct them that their faith needed to be only the size of a mustard seed—one of the smallest examples of which they would be familiar: something miniscule that produces grand results. The issue is not the size of your faith; it's the focus of your faith that counts. Their focus, most likely, was upon the scary demon. Jesus needed to redirect their focal point back to him. Jesus said:

“I tell you the truth, *anyone who has faith in me* will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”
(John 14:12-14)

Clearly, the target of our faith is Jesus. When Jesus' disciples are disappointed in themselves, he redirects their line of sight. Don't focus on your failure. Don't fixate on your circumstances. Look to Jesus!

Identify several current issues in your life in which your attention needs to get redirected:

We move past our disappointment with ourselves by re-focusing on Jesus. He is able to redeem and restore even the worst of our failures.

Disappointment with Others

In the book of Acts, we find a story about a young disciple named John-Mark. (Acts 2:25) He possessed great potential and the privilege of traveling and ministering with two spiritual giants: Paul and Barnabas. But for some reason John-Mark didn't finish what he started. On his first missionary journey with these noted apostles, John-Mark quit and went home. (Acts 13:13)

We don't have to imagine how disappointed both these leaders became in their young protégé. Paul wanted nothing to do with him, yet Barnabas was willing to give John-Mark another chance. (Acts 15:36-41) This story gives insight as to how we can tackle our disappointment with others.

1. It's okay to honestly _____¹ that others have let you down. That happens. Period. Paul saw John-Mark as a liability whose failure negatively impacted him. Paul took the approach of protecting himself, "He failed us once, I won't take that risk again." Becoming guarded is a natural response to disappointment with others. But Barnabas demonstrated a more productive approach.
2. Disappointment with others can create an _____.² Barnabas saw the potential in John-Mark and decided to personally mentor him. Though Paul and Barnabas ended up parting ways over the ordeal, we later find that Barnabas' second chance paid off.
3. God is able to _____³ and restore others—even those who hurt you. People can change. Later in his life, Paul revealed a change of heart toward John-Mark, calling him "helpful to me in ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). In fact, this young man eventually overcame his own failures and disappointments as God penned the Gospel of Mark through him! I'm thankful that Barnabas willfully took a risk and drew out the potential in this young disciple!
4. Learn to _____⁴ others who let you down. Paul obviously forgave John-Mark and indirectly admitted his own misjudgment by publicly expressing admiration of him. Forgiving others moves us forward in faith. To our earlier discussion, it enables us also to forgive ourselves and move past painful disappointments we have deposited into our own lives. Forgiveness provides a greenhouse in which faith grows.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Let's revisit my recollection about praying for a new boy's bike.

I can still recall when my neighborhood nemesis Trent Buterball came rolling out with that stunning new bike of which every boy dreamed. In particular, it was *my* dream bike, the model for which I had been praying! It boasted metallic blue paint with a five-speed stick shift, a banana seat, and chrome fenders. His cocky parading goaded me to challenge him to a race.

"You think you're so cool, Trent? I bet I could beat you even with my *girl's* bike!"

Juvenile onlookers laughed at me scornfully, but Trent knew he could not back out. I had thrown down the gauntlet, with a sissy bike no less. Motivated participants set up our course as Trent and I prepared anxiously at the starting line. Appointed as the starter, one of Trent's friends called out, "On your mark, get set..." but before "GO" Trent lunged forward. *No way!* I thought to myself as I pedaled with everything in me just to recover his stolen lead. I seized the inside corner on the curve when Trent faltered slightly with the shifter, and I overtook him on the straightaway just ahead of the finish line, edging him out by a spoke's length. Although some contested the result, no one dared to mock my girly bike again. That day I earned a tangible amount of respect in the neighborhood, as the tenacious underdog who triumphed in spite of (and in a way because of) his girly bike.

It is easier now to accept with thanksgiving that God did not answer my prayer in the manner I had expected and dreamed. I remain grateful that my parents did their very best to provide for my brother, sisters, and me, with few resources. I think that God delivered to me character lessons during that season of my life that proved more valuable than any shiny boy's bike would have. Granted, I discern this more readily now, yet such emerging perspective is essential—that we must in the end trust God. God holds the definitive outlook, able to see both past and future, and his plan throughout it, which is ultimately unparalleled!

People of epic faith must learn to trust God even when he does not answer in the way we want.

Now, take a minute to reflect on some of your own disappointments. Invite Jesus to give you his perspective on those past disappointments so that you can move forward in faith.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Good

God always possesses moral excellence, kindness and goodness. He is totally aware of our needs and continually considers what is best for his children.

"Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever." (Psa. 106:1)

"They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." (Psa. 145:7)

When we don't understand—we can yet trust that God remains good.

Pray

The Psalms are filled with expressions of disappointment. David vividly described his emotions and their impact on his life. But he always brought it full-circle, recapturing his focus on God. Read the following Psalm as a prayer and in preparation toward writing your own.

Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"

These things I remember as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God

under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.

By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”

My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

Faith in Action

As a faith building activity, write a David-like psalm of your own. Use the three parts below as a guide for your expression.

Part One: Tell God why you are disappointed with him, yourself or others.

Part Two: Explain how that disappointment has impacted your life.

Part Three: Redirect your focus toward God, proclaiming his faithfulness in spite of your disappointment.

A Note from Coach Marty:

You are crushing it! The fact that you've made it to here shows your intensity toward pressing into God and building your faith. I'm proud of you! Keep your focus on Jesus—he is the ultimate prize.

Answer Key:

¹ acknowledge ² opportunity ³ redeem ⁴ forgive

Day 8: Put God's Word into Practice

We may at times hold the mistaken idea that Christian growth comes automatically from Bible knowledge. Surprisingly, Jesus directed stinging rebukes against religious leaders of great Bible proficiency. They had become blinded by their intelligence, educated beyond their level of obedience. Jesus confronted those Bible scholars with these words:

“You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:39-40)

Although one may benefit from Bible familiarity, at its core Christian growth means becoming more Christ-like. And we emulate Jesus simply by doing what he says to do. In this lesson, we want to come to God with childlike faith, learning to practice his Word.

Read: Chapter 8, “Putting It into Practice” from *Epic Faith*

“Spiritual maturity doesn’t depend on how much of the Bible you know. What matters is how much of the Bible we do. I wonder if we even believe it if we are not willing to put it into practice. Some of us get deceived into thinking that we have a firm foundation because we go to church or a Bible study or memorize a few verses. But when the trials of life hit, we will find out how strong our faith really is. If we have made it a lifestyle, to hear the word of God and then to apply it, we will find that the strength and wisdom of God’s Word has been woven into the very fabric of our lives.” (p. 48)

In this chapter, Marty writes: *“Our faith is based on the Word of God. But it must be the Word of God that is also put into practice. We need to do it!”* (p. 49)

In what ways are you personally putting the Word of God into practice?

What biblical truths do you need to start *doing*?

Based on John 14:15-24, How is “doing the word” an invitation to express your love toward God? ¹

How is this practiced in your own life?

Marty wrote: *“Jesus wants this to become a lifestyle for us. Not just to hear the Word of God, but to put it into practice. I’m certain that we will be challenged if we read the Bible with the idea of doing what it says. Will we just do the parts that we want to obey? Just remember, every step of obedience is a step toward*

knowing God more and discovering greater intimacy with him. Let's ask Jesus now to help us apply his Word." (p. 51)

What steps can you take to make obedience to Jesus a *lifestyle*?

Word of God: *Study*

Let's take a closer look at Jesus' "wise and foolish builders" parable. Read Matthew 7:24-27

According to verse 25 what was the "rock" upon which the wise man built his house? ²

Why was the foolish man's foundation like shifting sand? (vs. 26) ³

If the degree of "putting God's word into practice" is the determination between a wise builder and a foolish one, which more describes you? Explain.

It may sound harsh, but one with much biblical knowledge and little practice, thinking he is building on a rock-solid foundation, is in reality playing the part of the foolish builder. Conversely, someone may be recently "born again," knowing precious little about the Bible, but the little she knows, she practices, so is well on her way to building her house (her life) on sturdy rock! When the inevitable storms of life come rolling in, the one *doing* God's word will persevere!

Now, twice in this section Jesus used the phrase, "everyone who hears these words of mine." What words do you think the Lord is referring to?

In a broad sense we might say "anything Jesus said" or even "the entire Bible." But notice that Jesus had just delivered an extensive teaching. In fact, the preceding three chapters comprise one of the Scripture's treasuries of Jesus' spoken words. Jesus concluded this discourse with the "wise and foolish builder" parable to make a poignant point: now do it—all of it! Let's take a closer look at these specific words of Jesus with an eye toward actually practicing them.

The Beatitudes. (Matt. 5:1-12)

How can these words shape your daily attitudes?

Salt and Light. (Matt. 5:13-16)

How can you practically cast “light” where you work, learn, shop, and recreate?

Keeping God's Commandments. (Matt. 5:17-20)

Jesus referred here to all God's commands, but the ten commandments provide a practical place to start. You can review them in Exodus chapter 20. What commands do you have trouble following? Remember, he is concerned most with the heart's motive beneath that command. What are some practical ways to obey Jesus?

Anger and Hate. (Matt. 5:21-26)

Do you and someone need to reconcile? To whom do you need to extend forgiveness? Can you approach someone and voice, “I'm sorry”?

Pure Minds and Bodies. (Matt. 5:27-30)

Remember, forgiveness is offered for our sin, and God's spirit empowers us to walk in purity. In what ways can you put these words of Jesus into practice?

Divorce. (Matt. 5:31-32)

Has your life been impacted by the calamity of divorce? How can you practice faithfulness in marriage, and honorability in all your relationships?

Carefully Measure Your Words. (Matt. 5:33-37)

We're not big into “oaths” these days, but in what ways have you perhaps tried to bargain with God? Or have you boasted about what you have yet to accomplish?

How can you be more careful with your words?

Go the Extra Mile. (Matt. 5:38-42)

How can you go beyond what's normally expected of you?

Love Your Enemies. (Matt. 5:43-48)

Father God provided the ultimate example in giving his own son Jesus for all who, by nature, are enemies of God. We are beneficiaries of that sacrificial love. How can you show love to someone who hates or opposes you?

Give to the Needy. (Matt. 6:1-4)

How can you practically serve those in need?

Pray! (Matt. 6:5-15)

What steps can you take to raise the intensity of your prayer life?

Fasting. (Matt. 6:16-18)

To "fast" is to choose to deny yourself food, in order to increase spiritual hunger. When practiced, fasting does wonders to build faith. Schedule a fast for one day or even one meal this week.

Make Deposits into Your Heavenly Bank Account. (Matt. 6:19-24)

Consider increasing your giving to missions and your church. How can you practice generosity toward someone you know has a need?

Trust God for Your Daily Needs. (Matt. 6:25-34)

What practical steps can you take toward eliminating worry from your life?

How can you express greater trust in God?

Crush Your Critical Spirit. (Matt. 7:1-6)

Invite Jesus to help you identify some ways that you've been critical towards others. What can you do to overcome judgmental attitudes in your heart?

Ask God for Good Gifts. (Matt. 7:7-12)

Jesus made it clear that the Father loves to give gifts to his children: gifts that are good because they are good for us. Look at some of his good gifts listed in Galatians 5:22-23. For which ones do you need to ask the Father today?

Enter Through the Narrow Gate. (Matt. 7:13-14)

Jesus said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9). Entering the narrow gate is simply surrendering to Jesus and inviting him to be your Savior. (See also Rom. 10:9-10.) If you have not done this—do it NOW!

Produce Good Fruit. (Matt. 7:15-23)

Producing good fruit is a natural result of practicing God's Word. You need not strive for results. Give examples of the fruit you see in your life as a natural outcome of following Jesus.

Build on a Solid Foundation. (Matt. 7:24-29)

This study brings us back to where we started: putting the Word of God into practice. In our "Faith in Action" section today we will be choosing several action items to practice immediately.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Leading into Luke's illustration of the wise and foolish builders, he first recounts Jesus words, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). We've just concluded a brief study through some of Jesus instructions. Now let's allow Jesus some time to speak to us, not only toward our understanding, but to promote our action. Pray the prayer below, then listen.

Jesus, I want to demonstrate that you are the Lord of my life by doing what you say. What do you want most to say to me? What do you want me to now put into practice?

Record below the words and actions that Jesus prompts:

Character of God: *Abide* - Jesus is God

God's Son is the "Word made Flesh"

Jesus, the Son of God, is the tangible manifestation of the uncreated, invisible God. He is the Word of God who came in the flesh.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." (Col. 1:15)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-2,14)

Pray

Jesus, forgive me for hearing your Word but not putting it into practice. I'm sorry for being more interested in knowledge than obedience. It's overwhelming to consider all that you are asking of me, but I trust that your ways are always the best. Thank you for being patient with me.

Jesus, I desperately need the Holy Spirit's empowerment to put your words into practice. I invite his conviction when I disobey, his comfort when I fail, and his courage to take action. Teach me the lifestyle of trusting and obeying you.

Faith in Action

James 1:22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." James goes on to say, "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."

In the "Word of God" section you produced multiple ways that God's Word can be practically applied. Describe at least one of those things that you will do *today*:

A Note from Coach Marty:

This has been one of the most important sessions toward maintaining spiritual fitness. Make it a lifestyle goal to put scripture into action. You may want to dog-ear this lesson to refer back to often. If you put the Word into practice on a consistent basis, you will find yourself living epic faith.

Answer Key:

- ¹ Just as a child can express love by obeying a parent, we show God how much we love him by doing what he says. Jesus says the opposite is also true: We express a lack of love by ignoring his teaching.
- ² The Word of God put into practice.
- ³ He heard the Word of God but did not put it into practice.

Day 9: Listen to God and Obey

Notice that today we are shifting from the first foundational building block of faith, The Word of God, to the second foundational element, The Voice of God. Learning to listen to God's voice cultivates intimacy, which leads to obedience.

God longs to speak to us, his children. The real question is not whether he speaks, but are we listening?

Each day we have been focusing on a unique aspect of God's character. We study his character because we want to know God. Now, grab your Bible and grasp it firmly because I want to tell you something about this book. Do not miss this vital, overarching theme of the Bible: **God communicates!** From cover to cover the Word speaks of a God who interacts with people; He is all about this. Too often, we imagine that God is silent or uninterested in speaking with us. Nothing could be further from the truth! Like a loving parent, he loves to talk with his precious ones. From Adam in Genesis to John in Revelation, God is constantly speaking to his children, and he continues communicating today.

Some have mistakenly suggested that God no longer talks to His children "because we have the Bible." This view misrepresents one of God's characteristics described **in** the Bible—that he communicates! Sometimes it's easier—or perhaps "safer"—to assume that God no longer speaks than to believe that he will speak to you personally.

Take a step of faith today. Dare to trust that he loves you and that from his heart of love, he wants to speak to you. He desires a deeper relationship with you, which requires communication. His gentle whisper will beckon you into the purposes for which you were created.

Read: Chapter 9, "Learning to Listen" from *Epic Faith*.

"Jesus, I know that you hear me when I pray, but lately I've been convicted that I don't really expect to hear from you. I know that you speak to me through the Bible, but I'd like to hear your voice. I want that kind of relationship with you in which you tell me what's on your heart. If there is anything that you'd like to say to me, I pray that you would speak to my heart now." (p. 56)

What aspect of Loren Cunningham's book inspired Marty to try listening to God's voice as a lifestyle?¹

Describe how you can relate to the longing to hear from God in a more personal way.

What were the essentials from Marty's approach that you can apply to your own desire to hear God's voice?²

God's voice demands a response. When Marty shared what he sensed Jesus saying, Kelly responded with faith: "Well, one thing's for certain, if that really *is* the voice of God, then we will need to obey it." How does obedience work hand in hand with hearing God's voice?³

How was it confirmed that God was truly speaking to Marty? ⁴

How can knowing God's Word help us discern God's voice? ⁵

Word of God: *Study*

Believe That God Wants to Speak to You

We need to learn to approach Jesus in faith as we learn to listen to his voice.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Heb. 11:6)

He who belongs to God hears what God says. (John 8:47a)

How does believing that God speaks affect your ability to listen? ⁶

All Christians Can Hear God's Voice

Read each description and scripture to discover and label three categories in which God speaks to all his children.

1. _____⁷: To come to faith, there is an inner prompting from the Holy Spirit that moves us to believe. A form of hearing God's voice is simply responding to God's invitation to receive him.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Rev. 3:20)

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

2. _____⁸: Most people readily acknowledge experiencing inner conviction when they have done something that they know is wrong. This is an aspect of God communicating with us.

When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8)

Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. (1 Th. 1:5a)

So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. (Acts 24:16)

3. _____⁹: We can learn to hear God's voice to receive specific direction for our life. It deepens our relationship with God when we trust and follow Jesus in the way that he leads us:

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isa. 30:21)

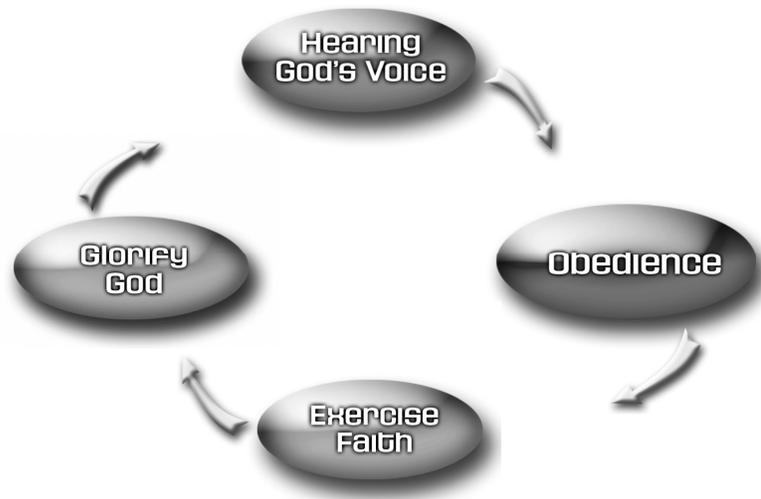
When [Jesus] has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. (John 10:4)

The Faith Cycle of Listening and Obedience

I want to share a pattern of walking by faith that I've noticed consistently throughout the Bible and in my own life. There are four simple steps repeated again and again.

1. **God Speaks:** The cycle is initiated every time that God speaks and we listen. (Notice that we can cut the pattern short at any of these steps. If God speaks but we fail to listen, then this faith cycle never gets rolling.)
2. **We Obey:** We take a step of obedience in response to his voice. We must learn to listen and respond in obedience. The Lord speaks not just to be heard but to be obeyed!
3. **We Exercise Faith:** Our step of obedience requires us to exercise faith.
4. **God Works:** God does something awesome for which we give him glory.

You can visualize the cycle of faith in this diagram:



As you read *Epic Faith*, you will find this pattern played out repeatedly. My stories of faith and God's awesome actions in my life all began with hearing his voice and taking a step of obedience. Let's take some time to study these four steps in our faith-walk pattern.

God Speaks and We Listen

One of the major barriers to hearing God's voice is unbelief. If we don't believe that God speaks, then we don't expect to hear his voice. Consequently, we will not be listening.

I don't think it's really a question of whether God is speaking to his children. Jesus stated, "He who belongs to God hears what God says." (John 8:47) The question is, "Do you believe that God is speaking?"

Once we acknowledge that God is speaking, we need to learn how to listen.

Even Samuel, who became a great man of God, had to learn to recognize the voice of God. He had to be taught how to listen. Read 1 Sam. 3:1-11.

When Samuel first heard God's voice, who did he think was speaking to him? ¹⁰

Samuel had not yet learned to recognize the Lord's voice. What advice did Eli the priest give to help him tune it in? ¹¹

Steps of Obedience

We must take steps of obedience in response to his voice. The writer of Hebrews warns us to not only hear God's voice but to respond in obedience. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." (Heb. 3:15) When we approach God for direction we must do so with a willing heart. Tell Father, "Whatever you ask me to do, the answer is already 'yes'". How could we offer anything less to our loving God, who gave us his own Son?

Exercise Faith

Every step that God leads us to take will stretch our faith. This stretching expands our ability to trust him, and Jesus thus gives us a greater step the next time. We can learn from Abraham:

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Rom. 4:20-21)

God Works and We Give Him Glory

When we listen to God's voice, respond in obedience and walk in faith, then God does something awesome! That response exemplifies who God is, as he always acts in ways consistent with his character. This was the pattern King Jehoshaphat followed, and he was rewarded with the following promise.

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you. (2 Chr. 20:17)

When you follow this pattern in your own life you will find yourself watching God work in extraordinary ways. When God intervenes in our lives, then we are mindful to praise him and give him glory.

Recognize the Cycle of Faith in the Bible and in Your Own Life

Now that you understand this cycle of faith, you will recognize it repeatedly throughout scripture.

God called Noah to build an ark. Noah responded in obedience. The process required faith at every stage and stood against the culture of his time. God brought awesome judgment upon the world, along with mercy and deliverance for Noah and his family. They worshipped God and gave him glory when they reached dry land. (Gen. 6-8)

God tested Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his son. Abraham took a step of obedience and set out early the next morning. In faith he believed that God could raise the dead and was willing to follow through when God provided a ram for the sacrifice. Abraham and Isaac gave glory to God as they offered the ram as a burnt offering. (Gen. 22)

God spoke to Moses and asked him to lead his people to freedom. Moses reluctantly obeyed. The announcement of each plague required him to exercise faith that God would follow through. He exercised

faith on the banks of the Red Sea and the Lord parted the waters. They gave glory to God with a new song for the deliverance that God brought for his people. (Exod. 3-15)

In my story from *Epic Faith*, God told Kelly and I to “Quit our jobs, sell our house and go to a land he would show us.” We took a step of obedience and discovered what it means to walk by faith. I give God all the glory for his faithfulness in every step along the way.

Jesus wants to lead you in the same way. He has plans for you that begin with simple steps of obedience and faith. He will be with you and do awesome works through your life. That’s who God is and that’s what he does when we give him room to work in our lives.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Take time to get *quiet* before the Lord. God usually speaks to us in a “still small voice” or “gentle whisper.” (1 Kings 19:12b) *You need to be **quiet** to hear it.* When Christians find it difficult to hear God’s voice it is often because they fail to take time to be quiet in his presence.

Get your heart quiet before the Lord. I like to go on a prayer walk to get alone with God. At one point, I ask, “Jesus, what do you want to say to me?” Then I remain quiet and I listen. His voice often comes as a clear thought dropped into my mind or impression upon my heart.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is a Communicator

The same God who spoke everything into existence desires to speak to our hearts to create relationship with his children.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. (Psa. 29:3-4)

Read Psalm 29 and list the ways that God’s voice is described:

Remember, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8) God spoke to his children throughout biblical times and he still speaks to his children today.

Pray

Jesus, I believe that you want to communicate with me daily. Help me to hear your voice when I read the Bible and when you whisper through the wind as we walk and talk together. Birth in me the kind of intimacy with my Creator that longs to hear his voice every day. I silence the voice of unbelief and pray for the faith to listen and obey. Amen.

Faith in Action

Document a cycle of faith you can identify from your own life:

1. How did God speak to you?

2. What step of obedience did you take?

3. How did that step require you to exercise faith?

4. How did God work in your life?

Consider how you can practice listening to God. When we listen, God will prompt us to take steps of faith. I encourage you to record those promptings, take those steps in obedience, and watch God do something awesome. Remember to give him all the glory when he does!

Ask him, “Father, what step of faith are you inviting me to take?”

A Note from Coach Marty:

You may find that a shift is starting to take place. Your daily spiritual workout moves from something that feels like a discipline toward a longing fulfilled. We become fascinated with God and desire to know him more deeply. What started as healthy routine becomes a fulfilling relationship. As you learn to tune in God’s voice you will experience your relationship with him becoming even stronger.

Answer Key:

¹ His book was sprinkled with examples of hearing from God and taking steps of obedience.

² He was intent and took time to listen, took authority over the enemy, had faith that God would speak, and confirmed the voice through God’s Word.

³ We need to be prepared to respond in faith with our obedience. If God is giving a directive, we must obey.

⁴ God gave him a scripture reference in answer to his prayer that said essentially the same thing: Genesis 12:1-3.

⁵ God will never contradict his written word. Knowing the Bible will keep you from falling for the lies of the enemy.

⁶ It will be very difficult to discern his voice unless we are listening in faith and expecting him to speak.

⁷ Salvation ⁸ Conviction ⁹ Direction

¹⁰ Eli the priest. Notice that this would have been Samuel’s primary father figure.

¹¹ Say to the Lord, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” We need to cultivate a listening posture.

Day 10: Recognize the Shepherd's Voice

The Bible describes a variety of ways that God relates to us. He is our Father, our Friend, our Savior, and our Lord. All relationships are built on communication. This proves true whether in our relationships with others or in relating to God. Good communication is based on speaking and listening. Most believers are taught to speak to God, but have we been taught to listen? Listening in a relationship cultivates intimacy.

Another way that God relates to us as described in the Bible is that of Shepherd.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” - Jesus Christ

As Shepherd, Jesus serves as our guide, protector, and provider. As in the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, we need to learn to recognize and listen to His voice.

Read: Chapter 10, “The Shepherd’s Voice” from *Epic Faith*

“I had been following an arbitrary, unwritten rule: It was fine to say, ‘I felt the Lord nudging me’ or ‘I sensed His prompting’—that was palatable doctrine. But to claim that Jesus had spoken to me, well, that clearly crossed the line. The voice I had heard in the park actually went beyond a nudge or prompting; it came as a command requiring a response.” (pp. 64-65)

What was the reaction of the church elders when Marty and Kelly explained that God had spoken to them and told them to “go”?

Do you relate more to Marty and Kelly or the elders in that story? Why?

What did these and other Bible characters have in common: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and John? ¹

What did Marty conclude from the following scripture? “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8) ²

Review the list compiled on pages 65 and 66. When you see examples of the variety of ways God spoke to his children in the past, how does it build your faith that God can speak to you in the present?

Word of God: *Study*

We grow in our ability to hear and discern God's voice as we study his Word. Jesus wants to teach us to relate to him as a loving shepherd who daily guides and provides for us.

Read John 10:1-30 and answer the following questions related to this passage.

Who is the good shepherd and who is the thief? ³

Why do we follow the shepherd? ⁴

What is the difference between the shepherd's and the thief's plans and intentions for us? (See v. 10) ⁵

How does Jesus, the Good Shepherd, demonstrate his love and commitment to us, his sheep? ⁶

In verse 27 Jesus promised that we, his sheep, can listen to and follow his voice. How can you cultivate your ability to listen to the shepherd's voice and follow his direction?

Psalms 23 is a beautiful picture of our relationship with God as our shepherd.

First, read through this psalm slowly, reflecting on the goodness of our shepherd.

Next, make a list of every benefit we receive from following the good shepherd: ⁷

Voice of God: *Listen*

The Father longs to communicate to his children. He actually thinks about us all the time. In fact, God's thoughts toward us are more numerous than grains of sand on the seashore. He cannot stop thinking about us because we are his precious children!

“How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.
When I awake, I am still with you.”
(Psa. 139:17-18)

Invite Father to speak to you. It requires faith to acknowledge the truth of God's word that he loves you personally and constantly thinks about you. One of the most spiritually nourishing disciplines in which we can invest is to listen to his voice every day.

Let's take some time right now to listen to his voice.

Tell Father how much you appreciate him. Acknowledge his love for you personally and his capability to speak directly to you.

Ask God to share some of his loving thoughts with you, and record what you hear as a letter from God.

Begin by addressing a letter to yourself. Then, ask the Father, "What are you thinking about me right now?" Simply begin writing down what he says...

Dear _____,

Character of God: *Abide* - God is a Good Shepherd

God is the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for us his sheep. His very nature compels him to protect us and provide for us. God is not surprised when we wander off or lose our way, and he responds diligently to get us back on track.

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)

Your faith will grow as you learn to relate to God as your shepherd and trust that he is good and always wants what is best for you.

Pray

Jesus, thank you for speaking to me. I know that you love me and you want me to hear your voice every day. Teach me the practice of patiently waiting and listening to your still, small voice. Thank you for being my shepherd. Help me to listen and follow you daily. Amen.

Faith in Action

Throughout your day, practice listening to the Shepherd's voice. When you have a decision to make, invite him to speak. It is honoring to God to invite him into your daily decisions. Give him the opportunity to direct your steps in the big and small steps. You may be surprised by his nudge to step out of your comfort zone, but trust him and follow his leading.

A Note from Coach Marty:

You are learning to practice spiritual disciplines that will empower your life. I have learned to cultivate hearing the shepherd's voice every day. My personal journal is filled with "letters from God." The thief will do anything to steal from you this level of intimacy with the Shepherd. Do not allow him to do so.

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." (Heb. 10:35-37)

Answer Key:

¹ They each heard and followed the voice of God.

² If God is unchanging, then He is able to speak to us today in the same ways that He spoke to us in the past.

³ Jesus is the good shepherd and the devil is the thief.

⁴ We follow him because he calls us by name and we recognize his voice.

⁵ The devil intends to harm us—steal, kill and destroy. Jesus intends to give us abundant life.

⁶ He willingly lays down his life for us.

⁷ God provides for our needs. He gives rest and restoration. The shepherd guides us, he is with us and we have no need to fear.

God honors us and blesses us abundantly. We enjoy his love and blessings in this and will enjoy his presence for all eternity.

Day 11: Find True Identity in Being God's Child

One of the greatest discoveries awaiting believers is to find one's true identity as a son or daughter of God. When we know who we are at the core, it changes everything! Jesus said that becoming like a child was a requirement for entering his kingdom. The Father created us to relate to him as his children, and it's that tender relationship for which Jesus went to the cross to reconcile.

When our identity is no longer tied to what we do but rather to whom we are as the children of God, then we are set free to follow Jesus wherever he leads us. This chapter explores what it looks like to walk confidently in Christ, as he reveals our true identity, found in him.

Read: Chapter 11, "Stripped" from *Epic Faith*

"'Father, you have not been impressed by my successes or concerned about my failures; you have simply wanted my heart.' In that moment, everything else was stripped away and I knelt with Jesus again, as I had so long ago on my bedroom floor. It did not matter what everyone else thought. In the Father's eyes, I was not a disappointment. God was pleased with my heart, a place long ago reserved for Him, still given to Him. God-focused, epic faith compels the stripping of everything that clouds our vision so we can follow in His footsteps." (p. 73)

In this chapter, God spoke to Marty through Philippians 3:7-10 (pp. 67-68):

"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death."

Write down how you would personally answer the following questions:

What actions in my life show whether or not Jesus is the most important thing to me?

Do I consider everything else as garbage compared to being close to Christ? If not, what in my life do I consider more precious than my relationship with Jesus?

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, but am I willing to be associated with his suffering? Why or why not?

What does it mean to become like Jesus in his death? ¹

What does becoming like Jesus in His death have to do with knowing the power of his resurrection? ²

In what things might you presently place your identity, thus overshadowing your identity as a child of God?

Word of God: *Study*

Discover Your True Identity

When we have built a false identity based on performance, or anything else for that matter, it may require the stripping away of our pseudo-self to reveal who we are truly created as—children of God! Our story goes back to the original garden to discover why God created us.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26-27 NIV 2011)

God is a loving father. He created us out of his desire to have children. We are the object of his heart’s affection. How might knowing that you were created for relationship with God affect your self-view? ³

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:1-2)

What does this scripture say about my current identity? ⁴

What does this scripture say about my future identity? ⁵

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13)

How do we claim our birthright as children of God? ⁶

As the children of God, we have been adopted into his family. Read the following verses to discover the significance of being an adopted son or daughter of Father God.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Gal. 4:4-5 ASV)

Why did the Father send Jesus to the world? ⁷

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (Gal. 4:6-7)

As adopted children of God, his Spirit lives within us so that we can call God our “*Abba*,” which means “Daddy.” How do you feel about calling God your Daddy?

Since you are God’s child, you are his heir. What does it mean that you have an inheritance from God? ⁸

Read the following passage from Romans and list below how your understanding of being a child of God will affect the way you live. ⁹

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom. 8:12-17)

Did you know that God considers you a “star”?

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. (Php. 2:14-16a)

In the eyes of the world, the rich and famous enjoy “star” status. But we, the children of God, are the true stars that shine in the darkness as we reflect the glory of our creator. Years ago, I put “Child of God” on my business card as my title. It was a way to remind myself of my true identity, and it remains on my business card to this day.

How will knowing that you are God's child (his star) make a difference in your daily life?

Voice of God: Listen

As I've mentioned before, I try to go on a prayer walk every day. During my prayer walk I talk to God in a natural way. Sometimes I'll start by saying, "Good morning Daddy!" Just to set the tone of our conversation. Sometimes I ask Jesus to speak to me, while other times I address the Father and ask, "Daddy, what do you want to tell me about my identity?" He always has an encouraging word that reaches right to my core. I want you to set aside some time today to take a prayer walk with your Abba. Talk to him out loud and ask him to talk to you—and listen for his response. I encourage you to make this a regular practice.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Father

God cares for his family of redeemed sons and daughters who put their trust in him.

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. (1 Cor. 8:6)

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

Knowing God as Father makes us aware of our identity as a child of God. We know who we are and have a sense of belonging in him. Make a faith proclamation now, "I am a child of God because he is my father."

Pray

Father, thank you that you call me your precious child, and that I belong to you. I know that my true identity flows from you, Abba Father. Jesus, thank you for paying the price so that I can be restored to a right relationship with Daddy God. Forgive me for the times I take my eyes off you. You want my heart, so I give it to you freely and without reservation. I love you! Amen.

Faith in Action

The key to living within and living out our true identity as God's children is allowing the process of stripping away everything that we hide behind. It can be a painful process, yet at the same time liberating! We put up a facade to protect the vulnerable child within, yet this barrier keeps us from experiencing the embrace of Father's love.

Reflect upon and list some of the facades that you have allowed to define you.

In prayer, ask Jesus to strip away false identity in order to embrace authenticity as the Father's child.

A Note from Coach Marty:

I want to acknowledge that for some this might have been a difficult, even painful lesson to work through. For those who have never experienced the love of an earthly father it can be difficult to speak of God as Father. Be patient. He will teach you to trust him and embrace his love. As an example: most people don't feel like working out physically, but when we just go and do it, we enjoy the satisfaction afterwards. Likewise, begin telling Father that you love him and that you know that he loves you—even if you don't feel it. In time, you will grow to know and experience Father's deep love for you.

Answer Key:

- ¹ He was stripped naked, humiliated, rejected, and ridiculed as he hung on a cross.
- ² Only when we are stripped of self can God trust us with his resurrection power.
- ³ I am loved and cherished. God sees me as significant and desirable for relationship.
- ⁴ I am a child of God. God is my father and he loves me. The world will not understand, but my identity is in God.
- ⁵ I will be transformed into his likeness and dwell with God in heaven.
- ⁶ We receive Jesus and believe in his name.
- ⁷ To redeem us so that we could become his adopted children.
- ⁸ We have true riches in Christ. He provides for all our needs. God has entrusted us with his authority and resources to expand his kingdom.
- ⁹ We are no longer bound to live according to our sinful nature. We are liberated from sinful lifestyles. We are free from fear. We can live according to our true identity. We have a godly inheritance. We share intimately both in Christ's suffering and honor.

Day 12: Follow Jesus

Now that you have learned to listen to Jesus and become stripped of all promotion of self—as a child of God you're ready to embark on the most exciting adventure in life: following Jesus one step at a time. It's as simple as doing the next thing God says to do. Notice, that this process of following Jesus is instrumental in our personal transformation. As we follow Jesus, we become more like him.

Read: Chapter 12, "Step by Step" from *Epic Faith*

"Our conversation often drifted to the next step that God would have for us. Apparently, God was teaching us to walk by faith, showing us only one footfall at a time." (p. 76)

Think of a time when you took a step of faith and had to depend completely on God. What happened?

How is knowing God's character linked to our ability to take steps of faith that lead us outside of our comfort zone?¹

Why was Marty content to build log furniture?²

Marty and Kelly adopted a simple motto: "When Jesus is all you have, then Jesus is all you need." How could this motto shape your own daily attitudes and decisions?

How could you grow in faith by simply taking the next step God shows you?

Marty discovered that anger and unforgiveness had been holding him back. How did he learn to shed this baggage?³

What thing or things may be holding you back from taking the steps God is calling you to take?

Word of God: *Study*

Following Jesus sets us on a transformational journey. We see this principle dramatically through a follower of Jesus named Simon. His life was so drastically transformed in just three years of following Jesus that he became nearly unrecognizable from the fisherman who started that journey. I believe that the same can be true of each person who would dare to surrender all and follow.

Grab your Bible because we will now take a closer look at the life of Simon, to discover life-transforming principles embedded within following Jesus.

Total Transformation Begins by Responding to Jesus' Call

Read Matthew 4:18-20.

Jesus found Simon by the sea of Galilee throwing out his fishing net. God calls us in place, as we are—even wet, dirty and smelly. Jesus calls out an audacious offer, “drop everything and follow me.” He requires all of a person because he plans a total transformation! Take a lesson from Simon, who met Jesus’ bold request with a bold response—leaving his nets at once and following Jesus.

What steps must you take to fully respond to the call of Jesus in your life?

Jesus Sees Us Not as We Are, But as Who We Can Become

Read John 1:35-42.

I might point out that Simon’s brother Andrew was the “spiritual” one: a disciple of John the Baptist already seeking the ways of God. After meeting Jesus, the first thing Andrew thought to do was to introduce his brother to the Messiah.

Jesus took one look at Simon and gave him a new name—Peter—which means “rock.” Simon was anything but a rock—unstable, brash, and impulsive. Likewise, Jesus speaks prophetically over us not assessing who we have been, but who we can become. Jesus gave Simon a new name because he was about to become a new person—the same faith journey that Jesus invites you to take. Get ready, because God wants to transform you!

What hidden potential might Jesus be calling you to embrace?

Jesus Wants to Get Into Our business!

Read Luke 5:1-7.

Jesus could have stepped into any one of many boats, but he deliberately chose Simon’s. Understand that Simon’s boat was his business. Jesus wants to get into our business. Whether you are a student, a tradesman or a professional—Jesus wants to get into your business! How ironic that the carpenter began coaching a fisherman on the art of the catch. Yet it didn’t take long for Simon to realize that with Jesus in the middle of one’s business, there is a blessing!

Are there areas of your life that you have compartmentalized to the exclusion of Jesus? What would it look like for Jesus to get into your business?

Jesus Takes What We Are Doing and Gives It Purpose

Read Luke 5:8-11.

This was a big win for Peter: the biggest catch of his life! He could have been on cloud nine but instead went face down in a pile of fish, feeling overwhelmed and unworthy. Time spent in the presence of the Master opens our eyes to the great discrepancy between our character and his. Nonetheless, Jesus takes what we do and he gives it purpose. Jesus takes fishermen and turns them into fishers of men.

Take whatever title you may have or want to have and add “for Jesus” to it. One can be a landscaper *for Jesus* or a lawyer *for Jesus*. It’s Jesus who gives our callings purpose and meaning.

What are you doing that could be used for God’s glory?

Jesus Constantly Calls Us Beyond Our Comfort Zone

Read Matthew 14:22-35.

Jesus scared the daylights out of a boatful of disciples as he approached, walking on water. And Peter’s all-in attitude compels him to say, “If it’s really you Jesus, then call me out to join you. I want to do what I see you doing.” Jesus invited him to come and Peter started walking on water! We can learn the following lessons from Peter that apply also to us when Jesus calls us beyond our comfort zone: Step out of your boat at Jesus’ invitation. Maintain faith by keeping your eyes on Jesus. And if you start to sink, reach out to Jesus immediately!

We might wonder about the significance of water-walking. Jesus was preparing Peter, just like he is preparing us. Come Pentecost the world would need someone who would keep his eyes on Jesus, and would step out and speak truth in the face of opposition. Peter became that guy that said, “I’m in!” Will you?

What uncomfortable step is Jesus prompting you to take?

Jesus Uses Us In Spite of Our Failings

Read Matthew 26:47-75.

Previously, Peter acted tough enough in the garden when officials came to arrest Jesus, and needlessly cut off the ear of a servant. But following behind to the courtyard he became increasingly insecure. Palaces are for people of power far beyond the likes of a simple fisherman.

He was questioned by a servant girl and lost it—denying even that he knew Jesus. Peter failed. Haven't we all? But Jesus uses us despite our failings. Peter's outcome shows us how to get back up, not in our own strength but in the power that God provides. Don't allow failure to define you. Get back up and find grace.

Have you been so discouraged that you thought that God was finished with you? Describe that emotional conflict.

When have you felt like you had been disqualified?

Surrender your failings to Jesus and invite his transformational power to renew you.

We Are Transformed by Time in His Presence

Read Acts 4:1-21.

Notice Peter's reply when people of power and influence questioned him. He did not give an inch! "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." (Acts 4:8) How is this the same person who denied Jesus around a campfire? What made the difference? Certainly, he was filled with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. But religious leaders simply noticed one thing—these men had been with Jesus!

And thus we find the one thing that will transform us: being with Jesus. Let that be the distinctive mark of our lives. When people meet us, may they know for certain that we have been with Jesus!

In what ways have you felt transformation through spending these last twelve days more intensely focused on Jesus?

Voice of God: *Listen*

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. (Isa. 30:15)

Too often we avoid the very thing that gives us strength. Following Jesus begins with time in his presence. Jesus is calling you to be transformed simply by being with him. Try taking 2-3 minutes to rest in his presence. Don't effort a prayer—just remain quiet and *be* with him.

Character of God: *Abide* - Jesus is Our Teacher (Rabbi)

God is a skillful and patient teacher. In Jesus' day, when one called another "Rabbi," one followed that person, and in following, became like the Rabbi. Jesus is our Rabbi and he desires to conform us to his likeness.

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.” (Matt. 23:8)

“Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’” (John 1:49)

“As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Mark 10:17)

By understanding God as teacher, we will be eager to learn from and follow him.

Pray

Jesus, when I'm reminded of how much you have forgiven me, I realize that I cannot hold an offense toward someone else—regardless of what they have done or the pain they have caused. Jesus, in forgiving, set me free to follow you one step at a time. Your plans and your ways are extraordinary. I want to follow you with unhindered abandon. Jesus, you truly are ALL that I need! Amen.

Faith in Action

Unforgiveness and bitterness can hold us back from the freedom and destiny in which God wants us to walk.

I invite you this week to identify individuals that you need to forgive. Write a statement of forgiveness, on a separate sheet of paper, beginning with the phrase, “___, I forgive you for....”

After doing this, you can also pray a blessing over each person that you have forgiven!

Finally, in completion, rip up the paper and begin to walk in freedom as if the offenses had never occurred. Jesus has taken them. And in the future, when tempted toward anger and bitterness again about any person or past situation, simply give it back to Jesus.

A Note from Coach Marty:

We are getting into some workouts that demand a whole life effort and you may feel spiritually taxed. That's good news because the work reveals and produces transformational power. Just don't get discouraged if you don't see widespread results at once. You may even need to plan another thirty days when you finish this round to go back and reinforce putting these lessons into practice, but you will be motivated. I'm proud of you for making it this far.

Answer Key:

¹ When we truly know God, we can trust Him. Trusting God enables us to do things we never thought possible.

² He had found true identity in Jesus. He also mistakenly thought that God was finished using him in ministry.

³ Healing comes by taking a humble position, asking for forgiveness, and forgiving those who may have hurt you.

Day 13: Trust God for Everything

Having learned to hear God's voice and walk in obedience, following him step by step, Jesus welcomes you into a life of intimacy and full dependence on him. Yes, you will still work at your job and carry out your responsibilities, but now with trust in Jesus rather than self-sufficiency. Essentially, you will learn to trust God.

Few of us would willingly put ourselves in a situation with no way out save a miracle. Yet that is the adventure to which Jesus invites you. He beckons you to join him on the waters, yet it requires that first step out of our boat—away from false security and self-reliance. It's a liberated life that trusts God for everything!

Read: Chapter 13, "Dependent on God" from *Epic Faith*

"Kelly and I found it curious that the YWAM missionaries we had met told similar stories of how God provided miraculously for them. I never imagined that God would work miracles for us. It had never occurred to me that the reason so many missionaries see the Lord working miracles on their behalf is that their lives completely depend on it." (pp. 85-86)

Think of a past situation in which, humanly speaking, there seemed to be no solution. What did you do? What happened? What did you learn from the experience?

As Marty was reminded of the story of Peter walking on water (Matt. 14:25-32), what were some of the lessons he learned? What do you take away from the story? ¹

Why did Marty and Kelly call their formative years as missionaries "the manna years?" (Exod. 16) ²

Why was trusting God for one hundred stamps so significant to Marty and Kelly? ³

What gave Marty the confidence to pray for God to "heal" his car window? ⁴

How can hearing God's voice increase your faith toward trusting God for specific needs in your own life?

Word of God: *Study*

Learning to Trust God

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matt. 6:28-34)

Jesus instructs us to stop worrying! What are some of the reasons he gives? ⁵

What would it look like in your life to seek God first above all things?

Where God Guides, He Provides

In lesson nine we explored the “Faith Cycle” that is initiated by *God Speaking* and our *Obedience*. We exercise *Faith* and God does something awesome that we give him *Glory* for. We see this cycle repeated again and again in the life of the prophet Elijah. Let’s look at some of Elijah’s cycles of faith and take note of how God provided for his needs as he obediently followed God’s direction.

Read 1 Kings 17:1-6

What did God tell Elijah to do? ⁶

What step of obedience did Elijah take? ⁷

How did this step require faith? ⁸

What awesome thing did God do for Elijah? ⁹

Read 1 Kings 17:7-16.

What did God tell Elijah to do? ¹⁰

What step of obedience did Elijah take? ¹¹

How did this step require faith? ¹²

What awesome thing did God do for Elijah? ¹³

Read 1 Kings 18:16-39.

What did God tell Elijah to do? ¹⁴ (Notice that in verse 36 Elijah declared that he had “done all these things at God’s command.” Each action he took was in response to what God had told him to do.)

What step of obedience did Elijah take? ¹⁵

How did this step require faith? ¹⁶

What awesome thing did God do for Elijah? ¹⁷

God’s provision is connected to hearing God’s voice and obedience to him. Where God guides, he provides. In what specific ways is God calling you to practice these principles of faithfully receiving God’s provision?

Voice of God: *Listen*

Some, just barely making ends meet, may find this lesson encouraging, while others may find it difficult to relate to trusting God for toothpaste. If the Lord has blessed you to the degree that it is difficult to feel dependent on him, then consider giving 10% of your income to your church and 30% directly toward mission work among the unreached. When you begin to set some goals that are impossible to accomplish in your own strength, you will discover the intimacy that comes from being dependent on God.

Regardless of your station in life, invite Jesus to give you a step of faith that will cause you to be more dependent on him.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Jehovah-Jireh (The Lord Will Provide)

God is a provider who knows our needs and has the resources and ability to deliver on his promises. We can trust him to care for us.

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” (Gen.22:13-14)

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:11)

Ask the Father specifically to meet a need of yours right now.

Pray

Lord, I give you my worries, I entrust you with my needs for this day. I recognize that I need you and that I can't just do it on my own anymore. Jesus, you are my source, my supply, my deliverance and my hope. I trust you with everything. You are faithful. Help me to be aware of the little miracles that you are working daily on my behalf. Help me to trust you more. Amen.

Faith in Action

Trusting God for everything is a mindset and attitude that is cultivated by trusting Him for one (little or big) thing at a time, one day at a time. I invite you now to list some of the things for which you need to trust God. One way to identify that list is to ask, “What worries me?” Worry is the opposite of trust. Don’t hesitate to include any issue, whether large or small, on your list.

When your list is complete, read the list to Jesus, and continue each day to present each item to him.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Marathon runners don’t just go out and run 26.2 miles on their first effort. The accomplishment requires training. Each run builds on the one before as the distance is increased. Trust in God is built by trusting God. We see God demonstrate his faithfulness, which in turn gives us the ability to trust him the next time. Before long we are running with God and trusting him for things we previously thought impossible. Keep up your faith training. You are doing great!

Answer Key:

¹ Jesus invites us to take risks—steps of faith. We need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

² God provided only what was needed and only when needed. No surplus remained, but there was always enough.

³ They had begun to question whether God had really called them to be missionaries. If God had not provided, they might have considered giving up.

⁴ He heard the voice of Jesus prompting him to do so.

⁵ If God can take care of flowers, he can certainly provide for you. Father loves you and he knows your needs. Worry will never change anything.

⁶ Go to the Kerith Ravine. ⁷ He did what the Lord told him.

⁸ There was a drought—without God’s intervention Elijah would die in such a desolate place.

⁹ He fed him with ravens and provided water from the brook.

¹⁰ Go to Zarephath where a widowed woman will provide for your needs.

- ¹¹ He did what the Lord told him.
- ¹² Elijah was commanded to go to a place that would naturally be hostile toward him, to be fed by someone without any resources!
- ¹³ He miraculously caused the widow's jar of flour and jug of oil never to be depleted.
- ¹⁴ God directed him to challenge the prophets of Baal to a contest by which the true God would be decided by the one who answered by fire. Elijah was instructed to build his altar and poured water over it because nothing is impossible for God.
- ¹⁵ He did exactly what the Lord told him.
- ¹⁶ Fire falling from heaven is certainly not a common occurrence. Elijah was able to take these steps of faith because he knew God and his character.
- ¹⁷ He caused fire to fall from heaven and consume the altar so that all could see that he was the Lord.

Day 14: Live the Adventure

God created each one of his children as a unique masterpiece, into which he has placed dreams, qualities, abilities, and personalities not replicated in the rest of creation. Each human being is a very special child of God and he is inviting **all** to live the adventure uniquely planned for each.

We may mistakenly think it selfish to pursue things we naturally love. I frequently hear believers say something to the effect, “That can’t be from God; that’s just me talking because it’s in my own interest.” Yet this fails to recognize that God created us this way—he designed us with unique interests and passions. Jesus has weaved God-dreams into the very fiber of our beings.

We needn’t try to be someone else or compare ourselves to others. You can only successfully live the life for which God has designed you. We are learning the lessons of faith required to unlock and explore territory that God has marked out for each of us. You must recognize that your dreams will flow from the very essence of the *you* God created. In embracing your unique design, you will embrace the dreams God crafted for you specifically.

Read: Chapter 14, “Backpacking” from *Epic Faith*

“The Father had responded to my simple prayer about backpacking and created a priceless opportunity of prayer and harvest beyond my imagination. Epic faith has a way of opening doors to unexpected adventures. Those journeys may include breathtaking beauty or heart-striking pain, but they will always have an impact for God’s kingdom when we answer his invitation with faith.” (p. 100)

How did God use Marty’s natural love for backpacking as a blessing to others?

How might Jesus want to use your natural passions for God’s purposes?

What two events in the village of Kagbeni demonstrated the power of prayer? ¹

How can you cultivate faith to understand that prayer makes a difference? ²

Marty and Kelly’s team distributed Nepali gospel booklets and earnestly prayed over each step of their trekking journey. What impact do you think this God-appointed backpacking trip made? ³

In what ways do you think the lives of the two children David and Jasmine were impacted? ⁴

Word of God: *Study*

Live the Adventure for Which You Were Created

Faith Lessons from Philip

Reading the book of Acts, one gets a sense that Christ-followers were getting step-by-step instructions from Jesus. We should expect nothing less. Philip, known as “the evangelist,” was one of those early believers who lived out his created adventure.

We don’t know much about Philip. Not to be confused with the apostle, Philip was one of the seven chosen to help with practical needs of those in the church. (Acts 6:1-7) One thing that came naturally to him was to tell others the good news about Jesus. That’s just how he was wired. Like Philip, some of us have a special gift for evangelism, yet we are *all* called to be witnesses for Christ.

Read Acts 8:26-40.

I picture Philip engaged in his routine of personal devotions when he began to receive step-by-step instructions for the day’s assignment. “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’” Philip received precise directions. At times we also may receive specific steps to follow, while at other times just a nudge or prompting. Regardless, it is of importance that we recognize when Holy Spirit is directing us and respond with obedience, as did Philip. “So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...” We need to simply *start out* and see what then unfolds. Philip met his divine appointment for the day, and so will we when we seek, recognize, and follow the Spirit’s guidance.

After Philip took the first step, God then revealed the grander purpose and continued giving instruction. “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’” Philip took that *next* step and an amazing story unfolded, resulting in a prominent Ethiopian coming to faith in Jesus Christ and receiving baptism in his name! We may never know the full impact of our simple acts of obedience in response to Holy Spirit’s direction. Did you know that many in Ethiopia today trace their spiritual lineage back to this recorded Holy Spirit-directed encounter? Jesus has likewise prepared significant encounters for you and me, and invites us to listen and step out in obedience.

Take a moment now to specifically ask Jesus to provide a divine appointment for you this week.

Make a list of five individuals with which you could begin to intentionally share Jesus:

Ananias’ Adventure Multiplies Ministry

The story of Ananias, a formerly unknown disciple of Jesus, found its place into scripture because he obeyed—albeit reluctantly—the Holy Spirit’s direction. Ananias’ life provides encouragement to unknown followers of Jesus, like us, to follow as God directs.

Read Acts 9:10-18.

Jesus gave Ananias clear instructions in the form of a vision. Jesus directed him to a specific house on a specific street, and to pray for a specific person (Saul of Tarsus), a notorious persecutor of believers—believers like Ananias.

It's noteworthy to point out here that God had orchestrated prior events to arrange for this divine appointment. Saul of Tarsus had planned to come to Damascus, the home city of Ananias, to search for believers to imprison, or worse! Jesus blinded Saul on the way there such that he had to be led like a child into the city, where he waited in darkness at Judas' home on Straight Street. Ananias' reluctance was admittedly understandable.

“‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’” (v.13-14)

Have you ever tried to argue with God, even in the light of a clear directive? I certainly have, yet I'm grateful for every time I haven't argued and instead replied, “Yes.”

“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’” (v.15-16)

Ananias set his fear aside, saying “yes” to Jesus and the rest is history. What was the result of his Spirit-directed obedience? The salvation of the all-time greatest evangelist—redeeming his life and changing his name! You may not recall the name of Ananias, but I would bet that you've heard of the apostle Paul, author of nearly half the New Testament. You may never know, this side of heaven, the outcome of your Spirit-directed steps of obedience. The Bible is replete with examples to teach us that the Shepherd offers step-by-step instruction through his Spirit, placed within us. We should expect nothing less.

How could your “yes” response unlock adventures that God has already prepared for you?

Consider the compounding effect that your “yes” to God can have. Those you impact will in turn impact others. What are some practical ways can you invest in others to help them unlock their God-given potential?

To underscore the impact Ananias had on the life of Paul, note that when the apostle gave his personal testimony, he mentioned Ananias by name! (See Acts 22:10-16) When you live the adventure Jesus has for you, others will name you as a person of influence, or *the* person of influence, that led them to Jesus.

Voice of God: *Listen*

One thing proves certain, when you follow the direction of the Holy Spirit and trust Jesus to provide for your journey, you will find yourself in the right place at the right time for the right reason, to be a purposeful vessel in the hands of the Master.

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you to the next adventure that Jesus has for you. Take time to listen and discern his direction.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Faithful

God is totally trustworthy to keep his promises and to remain true to who he is.

“For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.” (Psa. 33:4)

Our faith grows as we focus more clearly on who God is. Consider some of the ways that God has been faithful to you. He always acts in ways consistent with his character. You can trust God; he will always be faithful to lead you into the adventure for which you were created.

Pray

Jesus, I believe that you have created me and that you have wired dreams and purposes into my very being. I embrace the me that you have created and pray that you would reawaken impassioned dreams that remain hidden within my heart. I want to serve and follow you within the very essence of whom you have called and created me. Amen.

Faith in Action

Can you identify a dream residing in your heart? Give this some thought. Perhaps it has lain dormant so long that it has since been forgotten. Remember that often our God-dreams are connected to the essence of whom he has created us. The dreams parallel what we love to do most. When we do what we love—what we were created for—our hearts come alive; we sense God’s pleasure and purpose.

I challenge you to write out one of your own God-dreams, and then to take small steps in that direction.

A Note from Coach Marty:

When you realize that God has some implanted some sizeable dreams within you, it provides motivation to get into the best spiritual shape of your life. Trust that God has good plans and grand adventures yet waiting for you. It’s time to get ripped and get ready to take the next steps he has for you.

Answer Key:

¹ Praying for the Mustang people on their own turf and confronting the powers of darkness in the Buddhist temple.

² Our consistent and persistent prayer life will produce faith-building testimonies of God’s response to specific requests.

³ In the words of John, the trekking guide, “There is now a fellowship of believers in every village we visited together. Surely the Lord has blessed the seeds you planted.”

⁴ They would be lovingly cared for and instructed to know and follow the love of the Savior.

Day 15: Be Willing to Suffer for Jesus

Few of us would willingly choose to suffer. In a culture that values comfort, pain is to be avoided at all costs! Yet Jesus invites us into the depth of fellowship that blossoms through adversity.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” (Matt. 16:24)

The world is waiting and watching for humble servants who will demonstrate the love of Jesus regardless of the cost. Everything in us may rebel and cry out, “No!” but listen to the voice of Jesus as he summons, “Come, follow me.”

Read: Chapter 15, “Choosing Suffering” from *Epic Faith*

“I struggled through fear, then thoughts of how imprisonment would affect Kelly. My focus then shifted to the suffering of my Savior. I thought of the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made on the cross so that I could be set free from sin and be reconciled to the Father. Though indescribably difficult, I could give no other response.

“Yes, Lord. I will choose this. If you want me to preach the gospel, the answer is yes. If that means that I will have to go to jail for you, the answer is yes. How could I withhold anything from you when you have given everything for me? Yes, Lord, I will choose you.” (p. 103)

Why didn't Marty at first consider going to India with Dan?

How would you respond under similar conditions?

What changed his heart about the decision? ¹

When considering the potential of being put in prison for sharing the gospel, how did Marty respond? What gave him the grace to embrace the possibility of suffering? ²

In recalling his first trip to India, Marty prayed, “Father, I want to know your heart and to feel it beating inside of me.” How did God answer that prayer? ³

Do you truly understand how the Father's heart breaks over his lost children? Consider how God chose suffering by sending his Son to bridge the gap. How might these insights impact your willingness to embrace hardship or shape your priorities?

What tragedy did Marty witness on the bus ride to Siligury, India? ⁴

What did he learn from the experience? ⁵

Epic faith chooses to follow Jesus no matter the cost. In what ways could you choose to align yourself with this principle?

Word of God: *Study*

What's Your View of Suffering?

For many believers, suffering is to be avoided at all cost. We expend a great deal of effort to insure against discomfort of any kind. Yet this is counter to the biblical view of suffering. Pain in a fallen world is unavoidable; the question remains, how will you respond to it?

What is your perspective on pain?

What is your typical reaction when faced with a trial or painful circumstance?

“For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Pet. 2:19-21)

Peter speaks of suffering for a righteous cause as commendable. In your opinion, what would be an example of commendable suffering?

How did Jesus set the example of commendable suffering? ⁶

Surprised by Suffering?

To hold a healthy perspective, we must understand that our persecution was forewarned, even stated as something to be expected.

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” (1 Pet. 4:12-14)

What understanding may need to change for you to adopt a productive view of suffering? ⁷

Many believers have adopted the mistaken theology that God’s primary concern is for our comfort, happiness and prosperity. This errant perspective leaves us surprised by suffering and perplexed at persecution. Yet Jesus himself promised trouble in the work of Christ and for the sake of the gospel.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:11-12)

What reason does Jesus give for “rejoicing” amid suffering? ⁸

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

What are the good and bad news that Jesus reveals in this verse about suffering? ⁹

Perspective on Pain

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:1-8)

Read Romans 5:1-8.

According to this scripture, what should be our attitude toward suffering? ¹⁰

What is our reason for this attitude? ¹¹

According to the passage you just read in Romans, suffering produces positive change in us. The end result is hope, drawn from a new perspective on pain. To put things into perspective, you have peace with God through the sacrifice that Jesus made for you on the cross. That's good news! No matter what goes wrong today, the thing that really matters most has gone right—God loves you and you are reconciled to him by your friend Jesus. Even when pain comes your way, you can still be filled with joy, understanding that God has a bigger plan and he is producing something of value in your life.

Sheep Among Wolves

Advancing the gospel will always produce a certain amount of persecution, because there is a very real enemy who violently opposes the message of the cross. Jesus once uttered a troubling phrase when sending out his followers on a Gospel-proclaiming mission—perhaps a phrase that we would prefer to skip over and ignore. Nevertheless, in these recorded words we can find a profound connection between our mission and his.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.’” (Luke 10:1-3)

What does it mean that Jesus is sending out his faithful followers like lambs among wolves? ¹²

Jesus demonstrated being a lamb among wolves. John the Baptist prophetically proclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Jesus set the example as the Lamb of God, giving his life as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. By his resurrection he proved that death is no victor and he promised that neither could it defeat us. After his glorious resurrection, Jesus proclaimed “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

What insight do you gain from these words of Jesus? ¹³

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?’” (Mark 8:34-36)

What can we learn from this scripture about following Jesus and the role of suffering? ¹⁴

Voice of God: *Listen***The Lamb of God is Worthy of Our Worship**

Read Revelation 5:9-12. In the light of today's lesson, reflect on the worthiness of Jesus. Take time in simple adoration of the Lamb of God.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Love; Christ is the Lamb of God

Jesus is the Lamb of God who was the willing, atoning sacrifice for sin. God demonstrated his love for us by paying the ultimate price to redeem us.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
(Rom. 5:8)

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

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

Pray

Lord Jesus, you were willing to suffer and die on the cross for me. Help me overcome my fear of suffering so that I may have bold courage to follow wherever you lead me, in spite of any hardship I may face. I trust you with my life and I want to glorify you with my actions. Give me the faith to take a bold step for you today.

Faith in Action

We don't need to actively look for ways to “suffer for Jesus.” That's not the point. But our fear of suffering could prevent us from following Jesus, and ironically, lead to unpleasant consequences.

Think about how you may have a natural resistance to following Jesus because of suffering or even simply discomfort. Perhaps you are afraid you will be laughed at or disrespected if you share the gospel with a friend or neighbor. Standing up against a dishonest or corrupt employer could cost you your job. Going on a mission trip involves financial cost as well as the potential of sickness.

Identify some of the positive steps you may have failed to take in an attempt to avoid the possibility of suffering.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Today's lesson was perhaps unpleasant but I want to point out that you have made it to the halfway point of our thirty-day spiritual fitness program. It has required some pain and sacrifice to reach this point. That might seem like an overstatement in light of today's lesson but I trust that you are beginning to realize that pain is gain. You are becoming spiritually stronger and more ready than ever to take on the next assignment that God has for you. Take a deep breath and press on!

Answer Key:

- 1 Marty had recently returned from one overseas mission trip and was not ready for another. He had a change of heart when he recalled telling Jesus that he would follow him even if it meant suffering.
- 2 Marty told Jesus he was willing to go to jail for preaching the gospel. He was empowered by considering the suffering of his Savior.
- 3 God gave him a revelation of how the Father's heart breaks for his lost children.
- 4 He watched a young man commit suicide by throwing himself in front of the bus in which Marty was traveling.
- 5 He sensed the Father's heart mourning over this one lost soul. God doesn't merely love the masses—he loves each person intimately as a parent loves a child.
- 6 His cause was just and righteous. He chose to go that the cross for our sake.
- 7 Understand that suffering for the sake of Christ brings you into a deeper relationship with him. You participate together with Jesus and there are blessings when you are persecuted for his name.
- 8 Jesus promises a reward in heaven for those who are persecuted for the gospel.
- 9 The bad news: we are all going to experience trouble. The good news: we can have peace and victory in the midst of it.
- 10 We can rejoice not only in our salvation, but also in our suffering.
- 11 Because we know that the process of suffering produces something of value in us: perseverance, character, hope, and an awareness of God's presence and love.
- 12 Our mission, like his, will require sacrifice and suffering.
- 13 His followers were terrified, so Jesus gave them peace. His peace enables us to proceed confidently as lambs, even among wolves. Jesus sends us out in the same manner that he was sent by his Father.
- 14 Willingness to suffer is an integral part of being his disciple. Jesus clearly calls us to follow in his footsteps, which undeniably includes sacrifice. Jesus is not only our friend and good Shepherd, but also the fiery King of heaven who deserves our worship, allegiance and surrender.

Day 16: Discover Christ's Power through Weakness

In a culture that glorifies strength, power, and prestige, weakness is the last thing with which we want to identify, let alone to boast about. But that's one of the counterintuitive lessons of Christ—his power is made perfect in our weakness.

It's possible to become so full of ourselves that there remains very little room left for the presence and power of Christ to fill and flow through us.

We can learn to be honest about our weaknesses—to invite Jesus to come and work through us in ways that would be impossible without him. We call this the path of brokenness. God uses broken vessels to bring his wholeness and healing to a broken world. Let's learn to be authentic followers of Jesus, to reach those in need of his healing power.

Read: Chapter 16, "Power in Weakness" from *Epic Faith*

"I felt the Lord's penetrating voice deep within my soul: 'I know that your heart's desire is to know me and my resurrection power, but are you willing to share in my suffering? Are you willing to become like me in my death? It is through the times of entering into my sufferings that you'll find intimacy with me. I was stripped and gave all of myself when I went to the cross. It is not until you become like me in my death that I can trust you with my resurrection power.'" (p. 113)

Recall a time when you felt completely dependent on God due to a crisis or a very difficult situation. What did you do?

Did you feel close to God or distant from Him? Why or why not?

How was this trip to India a "time of testing" for both Marty and Kelly? ¹

Did they pass the test? ²

How have you grown from similar testing experiences? What was the result?

Read Philippians 3:7-11. How can enduring suffering draw you closer to Jesus? ³

What is the connection between suffering and the flow of Christ's resurrection power through us? ⁴

Read 2 Cor. 12:9-10. Although Marty felt completely crushed, in what ways did the power of Jesus flow through him? ⁵

How has Christ demonstrated his power through your weakness?

On the night when Jesus released His healing power and presence in Pudukkottai, what did Marty describe as "the greatest miracle?" ⁶

How does this idea shape our priorities? ⁷

Word of God: *Study*

Broken Vessels

It is amazing to me that God chooses to use broken vessels such as you and me to shine his light to a broken world.

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (2 Cor. 4:5-7)

The God who created light wants to shine through us. We have the all-surpassing power of God inside us! It's good that we are broken vessels because we "leak," and what's inside inevitably gets out! God will keep refilling us so we can leak out his grace to those in desperate need of him.

In what ways do you see yourself as a broken vessel?

Name one or two close people that you could leak some of God's grace onto today:

Wounded Healers

I think Jesus will be the only person in heaven with scars. But his scars (and our own) teach us how to be wounded healers.

During a dark season in her life, my friend Rachael practiced cutting. I suppose the pain she felt inside was so great she thought she could "let it out" by cutting herself on her arm. Rachael carried those painful reminders everywhere she went. After she turned her life completely to Jesus she had a tattoo engraved across those scars which simply declares: "By his stripes I am healed." Now she uses those markings from a dark time as a source of light and healing to others.

Each one of us has scars, though perhaps not as visible as Rachael's. Our markings can remind us of our pain or they can remind us that we are not defeated. Our very scars, like those of Jesus, can serve as a declaration of victory.

Rachael's tattoo declares a verse of scripture found in Isaiah 53:5. That entire chapter is a prophetic declaration of the atonement of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate wounded healer and invites us to follow in his footsteps.

Read the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah and answer the following questions:

What is the picture painted of Jesus in this chapter? ⁸

What is your honest reaction to this portrayal of Jesus? ⁹

What hopeful message and promise is contained in the final three verses of this chapter? ¹⁰

What can you learn and apply to your life about the principle of God's power made perfect through weakness? ¹¹

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus!

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:1-2)

What keys can we learn from this scripture in following Christ's example and letting his power flow through us—even through our weakness? ¹²

Voice of God: *Listen*

Meditate on this scripture from Romans 8:1-4:

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

At times we may mistakenly let our weaknesses condemn us. Take some time to bring your failure and weakness to Father and then just be quiet with him. Allow Jesus to minister to you and equip you to be a wounded healer for him.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Merciful

God doesn't chide or punish us as we deserve but looks on us with great compassion.

“When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.” (Psa. 65:3)

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9)

I'm so glad that God is merciful! When we know God as the one full of mercy, we will stop attempting to hide our failure and weakness and instead exchange those with him for strength and restoration.

Pray

Jesus, if I'm honest with myself, I need to admit that I need you. I'm weak and I can't do it on my own. Rather than weaknesses being my source of shame, I pray that those would become the very areas of my life in which you would flow through me unhindered. Jesus, I want to be real and authentic about my strengths and my weaknesses. Most of all, Jesus, when people see me, I want them to see and experience you. Amen.

Faith in Action

Remember the words from 2 Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

We can hinder Jesus' power flowing through us by always pretending that we are strong. Honestly identify some areas of weakness in your life and consider sharing about those with someone you trust.

When honest about our weaknesses, we can invite Jesus to demonstrate his power through those areas. I encourage you to identify one step of faith you could take today in an area of weakness.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Use a moment to take stock of where you have come from and where you are now going. When embarking on a physical training program, some take a “before” photo for comparison with an “after” photo. What if you could have snapped a spiritual picture of yourself sixteen days ago (or whenever you started this program) and compare it to how you “look” spiritually now. How would you describe the differences?

I bet you are looking great! Keep up the good work.

Answer Key:

- ¹ Acute pain from an ear infection, Kelly’s miscarriage, and Dan’s heart attack all tested their resolve to keep focus on Jesus.
- ² Marty wrote: “I had the impression that Jesus was smiling on me. I had passed His test.”
- ³ In the place of suffering we better understand and appreciate the suffering of Jesus on our behalf. That understanding can bring us into a deeper level of intimacy with Him.
- ⁴ When we suffer, we are emptied of ourselves and Christ can trust us with his resurrection power; we are no longer looking to glorify ourselves but will instead give all the glory to Jesus.
- ⁵ He was empowered to preach the gospel when he had new strength. He prayed in faith for Dan and saw healing power released at the evangelistic gathering in Pudukkottai.
- ⁶ Immediately, a dozen hearts were opened to receive new life. That very evening, Jesus planted a new church that would soon grow and bring about much fruit.
- ⁷ Our priority is to share the gospel and see others brought into relationship with Jesus.
- ⁸ He is gentle and kind, yet not esteemed by others. He is sorrowful and in suffering. Jesus is portrayed as one who is bearing the entire weight and punishment of all our sins.
- ⁹ I feel like it’s not fair—in reality, I’m the one who deserves to be punished for my sin. I’m overwhelmed by the grace and mercy of God. I adore Jesus for the price he paid to redeem me.
- ¹⁰ Because of his suffering, Jesus has become the source of salvation for us. We see the promise of the resurrection and the honor that God will again bestow on the Son.
- ¹¹ Jesus set the example for me. I no longer have to be ashamed of my weakness. I can willingly endure hardship and shame for the sake of Christ so that others can find their way back to God.
- ¹² First, get rid of everything that’s holding you back. Learn the course and run the race marked out for you personally. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He set the example of looking past the pain of the cross to what his sacrifice would accomplish—our redemption! Desire to be more like Jesus.

Day 17: Enjoy Dreaming with God

God imbeds dreams deep into his children's hearts. Sometimes these are like dormant seeds awaiting the season's perfect conditions to grow. Suddenly they may spring up like Easter lilies, seemingly overnight.

Jesus wants us to dream with him and is thrilled to watch our hearts come alive when we embrace the God-dreams scripted for us. He desires to reveal the dreams for which we were designed, and bids us trust that we have been infused with both confidence and power to achieve these longings in our hearts.

Read: Chapter 17, "Fishing with Jesus" from *Epic Faith*

"We sauntered back to the truck, having shared a wonderful day of fly-fishing together—Jesus and me. My heart on fire, I began to dream again." (p. 123)

What has proven to be one of your favorite activities? Now, consider consciously and intentionally doing that same thing that you love *with* Jesus. How do you think it would make a difference, or have a different impact, if you experienced it while being aware of God's presence?

List some of the indicators that God was preparing Marty for a change. ¹

How might you expect that God may have a new adventure in store for you?

Marty's life-altering conversation began with a simple question, "Lord, is there anything you want to say to me?" Do you ever ask Jesus, "What's on your mind?" Why or why not?

How might regularly asking Jesus that question impact your intimacy with God and your ability to follow Him?

How did Marty and Kelly practice hearing God's voice regularly on their blue denim couch, in order to get on the same page and to discern their steps for the future? ²

What are some ways that you could more intentionally invite Jesus into conversations about your life decisions?

Word of God: *Study*

God had a dream—a vision—which he then began speaking into existence. At the very center of his dream is you. You are God’s heart affection. Let’s go back to the beginning to reconnect with God as Creator.

Read Genesis chapters 1-2. After reading it through, list what God accomplished on each of the days of Creation: ³⁻⁹

Day 1 - _____

Day 2 - _____

Day 3 - _____

Day 4 - _____

Day 5 - _____

Day 6 - _____

Day 7 - _____

What does this process of creation speak to you about who God is? (Read Romans 1:19-20 for more about this.) ¹⁰

In what ways are the first man and woman a special reflection of God’s character? (1:27) ¹¹

What special assignment did God give to the man in verse 2:15? ¹²

It has always been God’s intention that we work *with* him. In verses 2:19-20, how does the man get to participate in God’s creative work? ¹³

What do the verses in 2:21-25 tell us about how and why the man and the woman were specially designed for one another? ¹⁴

When you consider God as infinitely creative and that we are created to work and dream with him, how does this influence your ability to dream?

What are some of the dreams that God has placed within your heart that remain unrealized?

Voice of God: *Listen*

Sometimes as adults, we forget how to play. As kids we pretended often, played, and invented all kinds of make-believe scenarios. We knew how to dream and anything was possible. God wants to remind us how to play and how to dream. I invite you to take a minute to simply play with Jesus. Start by picturing a childhood memory of yourself playing. While active in the memory, invite Jesus to join you. He is with you now and he was present then. Ask him to show himself to you amid that memory.

How can “playing with Jesus” unlock the dreams he has for you?

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Creator

God originated all that exists, visible and invisible, out of nothing, for his pleasure.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)

“Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” (Jer. 32:17)

God is not only the physical creator, he is infinitely and diversely creative. He invented art, dance and drama. He invented even emotions, ideas, and concepts—including things such as beauty, excitement, and passion. We share in his creative ability when we dare to dream with God. Trust that he is creative and allow him to create through you. If you could create anything with God’s inspiration, what would it be?

Pray

Jesus, with you, all things are possible. I give you my life and my obedience, and I pray that you would open doors and provide resources to take the steps necessary to progress my dreams into reality. I have faith that this is not only possible, but that you have already planted it in my heart and are causing it to grow. Give me the confidence in you to believe you for great things so I can give you all the glory. Amen.

Faith in Action

Think about the following question: If finances were no barrier and you knew you would not fail, what big dream would you carry out—one that would bring glory to God?

Perhaps after some reflection you still can't think of something. If so, reconsider the question this week while asking Jesus the simple question, "Lord, is there anything you want to say to me?" Seek specific inspiration about this.

I encourage you to include your God-dream in your times of prayer. Begin offering up some big-league faith prayers!

A Note from Coach Marty:

I know that God has placed dreams inside you that are hoping for release. As you have been developing faith-muscles, I expect that you are beginning to trust that God is surely able to accomplish those dreams through you. This is where life really gets exiting. Give yourself the freedom to pursue big dreams with God.

Answer Key:

¹ Marty's general unsettled feeling, lack of tolerance for his present condition, the Isaiah 43 scripture, the Shepherd's voice.

² They set an appointment to meet with God, preparing questions in advance. They entered into the presence of God together, asking questions and patiently waiting for his response.

³ Day 1- God created the heavens and earth. He created light, and separated light from darkness, creating day and night.

⁴ Day 2- God created an atmosphere with water below and sky above.

⁵ Day 3- God separated the water from the land and caused vegetation to emerge from the land.

⁶ Day 4- God created the sun, the moon and the stars.

⁷ Day 5- God created fish and all the creatures that teem in the sea and he created birds and all creatures that fly in the sky.

⁸ Day 6- God created all the land animals and then, finally, the first man.

⁹ Day 7- God rested to show us how to rest.

¹⁰ Everything that God created reflects upon himself: his character, his power, his creativity. All of creation speaks of his goodness and his nature.

¹¹ We are created in his image and likeness.

¹² To work in the garden and take care of it.

¹³ The man received permission to name all the animals.

¹⁴ Gender is a beautiful part of God's design. The man and the woman complement each other and provide for each other companionship. They are endowed, together, with the special ability to procreate eternal beings. Marital union is designed by God as an expression of the man and the woman coming together as one. We are not meant to exist alone.

Day 18: Set God-sized Goals

With God, all things are possible! Yet we humans have a hard time believing for the “impossible.” We are confined in our thinking to natural laws. But God is not subject to restrictions he himself created. When we enter into partnership with God through our faith in him, any restriction may be lifted and all things become possible for him who believes.

Let’s explore what it looks like to practice this type of trust, in which we don’t limit God or his ability to work through us! As we grow in our God-focused faith we begin to trust him for things that are beyond our natural ability to accomplish. We will endeavor to achieve the impossible.

Read: Chapter 18, “The God of The Impossible” from *Epic Faith*

“Over the years I had been growing in my understanding of what a great, awesome, and powerful God we serve, but I had to wonder whether this present audacious goal was even possible.” (p. 132)

Explain how Jesus spoke to Marty through this scripture: “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27) ¹

What impossible things might you attempt to accomplish if you believe the words of Jesus in Mark 10:27?

What did the team do in Kanpur, India, when at a loss for direction? ²

How did that serve as a turning point? ³

What did Jesus speak to Marty during his “tea party” in the garden? ⁴

What then happened to fulfill this word? ⁵

How does this encourage you to walk in daily intimacy with Jesus?

What surprising discovery did Marty make when Pastor George shared his story about planting a church in Kanpur? ⁶

How does this story inspire you to believe God for something greater than you can accomplish in your own strength?

Word of God: *Study*

I want to point out that today's lesson bridged into Part Three of epic faith. The growth process now becomes more exciting because these principles build on each other. The **Word** of God gives us firm principles to build on, while the **Voice** of God gives us specific guidance. Knowing the **Character** of God, then, provides faith to step out in obedience because we know God and his actions in ways consistent with his character.

God-sized Goals

A God-sized goal is any project too big to launch in your own strength. Suppose you are a student: starting a Bible study for fellow classmates may seem out of reach, but with God's help, you can do it. Others with more experience in dependence on God may be ready to trust God to lead a mission trip, start a prayer ministry or plant a new church. The point is, we can go big, because we serve a great God!

Nehemiah was a Bible-times guy who can still inspire us today to set God-sized goals. Let's look at his story to learn how to fulfill big dreams for God.

Big Dream

Read Nehemiah chapter 1.

What is the disturbing news that Nehemiah receives? ⁷

Sometimes a big dream comes in response to a big need. What are some big needs that you are aware of?

What are four actions Nehemiah took as an immediate response to becoming aware of this need? ⁸

In Nehemiah's prayer, to what aspect of God's character did he appeal? ⁹

What was the big dream that had already been growing in Nehemiah's heart? ¹⁰

It is interesting that he does not yet voice his big dream of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in chapter 1. He knew very well what God had put on his heart to do, but he took time to pray and seek the Lord before setting his plan in motion.

Big Ask

Read Nehemiah 2:1-10.

What did the king immediately notice as different about Nehemiah? ¹¹

When we have a big dream on our hearts we often carry a burden to see it accomplished. This constant weight drives us to act. When the king asked Nehemiah, "What do you want?", for what did Nehemiah ask? ¹²

When God gives you a big dream, don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask big, because it's a privilege and a blessing to others to be included in your God-sized goal.

Big Plans

Read Nehemiah 2:11-20.

What was the first thing that Nehemiah did when he arrived in Jerusalem? ¹³

When Nehemiah shared his plan with the officials in Jerusalem, how did they respond? ¹⁴

Big Jobs

Read Nehemiah chapter 3.

Your God-sized job will require hard work. Anything of significance requires effort. Notice how everyone began to work together to accomplish the task because they shared a common vision. You could be that person, like Nehemiah, who shares a vision and unites an effort toward a God-glorifying project.

Big Opposition

Read Nehemiah chapter 4.

What opposition confronted Nehemiah and those working on the wall? ¹⁵

How did Nehemiah and the workers respond? ¹⁶

Don't be surprised if you face opposition to your God-sized goal. That's the cue to press in and trust God as never before. Remember, you are not alone. Enlist others to pray and work with you.

Big Outcome

Read Nehemiah 6:15-16.

What was the ultimate outcome of Nehemiah's big dream? ¹⁷

Noticed that this accomplishment testified to the surrounding nations, who realized that it was completed "with the help of our God." Likewise, God wants you to pursue the big dreams he is placing on your heart and make a statement for him in the effort. Take a step of faith and Jesus will be with you and be glorified!

Voice of God: *Listen*

It's time now to set some God-sized goals! We often limit our goals to those things within our own ability. Yet when God is in the equation, we can be directed to believe God for great things—even "impossible" things.

Perhaps you have a loved one who is antagonistic toward the gospel. God can soften that heart. Perhaps a relationship remains broken, seemingly beyond repair. God can heal wounded hearts. I challenge you to admit whether you have any problems for which you regard no viable, "possible" solution. Remember instead that God can make a way!

List three worthy goals impossible for you to accomplish. Then, invite the God of the impossible to enter into these situations. Finally, remember that you will need to take the steps of faith in which God directs.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Glorious

God is majestic, awesome, and great beyond description.

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exod. 15:11)

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you." (Isa. 60:1)

When we understand how great and glorious is our God, we will not be overwhelmed by the extent of our problems or the magnitude of the dreams he places in our hearts. Keep your focus on him and trust that he is with you.

Pray

Jesus, I'm ready for the next step you have for me. Teach me and stretch me to believe you for greater things. I know that you are great and that nothing is impossible with you. Help me to set goals that are consistent with who you are. I pray that the steps I take in faith will bring glory and honor to you. Amen.

Faith in Action

Turn to the last page in *Epic Faith* and find the page entitled "Epic Next Steps." Choose several of these that you will begin to work on in the next seven days.

A Note from Coach Marty:

It can be exciting, but also intimidating, as you begin to dream with God. You are in a transformational process and he is developing in you the strength, character and faith to do things you would have previously thought impossible. I believe that you are now about to hit your stride. All your efforts are really paying off.

Answer Key:

- ¹ It gave him the focus to look to God to accomplish something otherwise impossible.
- ² Pray!
- ³ God miraculously connected them with missionaries who had been praying that they would come, and God established partnerships that would pave the way to accomplish his mission in Kanpur.
- ⁴ He indicated that Marty would be giving the message at the church they were visiting.
- ⁵ Marty was invited by Pastor George to give the message.
- ⁶ Marty was in awe that a group of Indian believers had been crying out to the Lord for their city at the exact same time that the Lord had spelled out "KANPUR" for him and had compelled him to pray for and eventually go to that city.
- ⁷ The walls of Jerusalem had been broken down.
- ⁸ Wept. Mourned. Fasted. Prayed.
- ⁹ Nehemiah called upon the God of heaven: a God great and awesome. A God loving and who hears our prayers. A God who keeps his promises.
- ¹⁰ To rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹¹ The king noticed that Nehemiah had sadness of heart.
- ¹² He asked to be released from his duties in order to rebuild the wall. He asked for letters of authorization and building materials.
- ¹³ He surveyed the situation and made plans.
- ¹⁴ The officials were supportive and started to work immediately.
- ¹⁵ The workers encountered mockery, threats, discouragement, and attacks.
- ¹⁶ They responded by praying, encouraging one another, creating battle strategy, appealing to the greatness of God, encouraging one another, and working together.
- ¹⁷ They finished restoration of the entire wall in only 52 days!

Day 19: Start Something New

To “pioneer” is to initiate something new with purpose. It may involve starting a new ministry, job, or a healthy habit. As followers of Jesus, I believe that before we take the first step into something new, we must be certain that the Lord has invited us to do so. Whatever we start, we should want to launch it with God.

As the Lord’s servant Moses famously told God, “Unless you’re going with me, I’m not going!” Likewise, we need to invite Jesus into all our endeavors and make sure we follow his lead.

Yet even with specific direction from the Lord, a vital question remains: whose strength will you rely on? I know the feeling of getting excited about something new and then darting off before God to do it on my own. I’ve spent enough years and wasted effort thinking I could do everything in my own strength. My plan, my strength, my way. After a while, it gets exhausting. Jesus is watching and waiting till we run out of steam (preferably sooner rather than later) and invite him to take the lead. Jesus wants to show us a better way—a way that includes him. His plan, his strength, his way. This requires some patience and a persistent faith, but in the end there’s no doubt it’s the best scenario.

When we know the power of our God, alongside the limitations of our own resources, we quickly recognize the foolishness of self-reliance. We need to redirect our focus from the size of our circumstances to the size of our God!

Let’s pioneer with Jesus. He is inviting us into our next adventure with Him. We simply need to trust him and take that fresh step.

Read: Chapter 19, “Pioneering” from *Epic Faith*

“We found ourselves in uncharted waters. I had never had to trust God like this before to navigate such financial seas. Rather than focusing on the size of the challenge, we would have to focus on the size of our God.” (p.142)

What is something new into which you are stepping?

Describe some of the emotions Marty felt when he heard the words, “Congratulations, young man. Your first day on the job and you’ve bought yourself a camp.” Why did he feel this way?

Have you faced similar experiences of being “way over your head,” yet at the same time holding a strange sense of peace?

In what ways did trusting God for toothpaste and postage stamps uniquely prepare Marty and Kelly to trust him for thousands of dollars to start a new ministry? ¹

Marty recalls a pivotal moment in his faith walk when Jesus asked him a simple question: “Marty, do you trust me or not?” In what area or circumstance in your own life do you most need God to intervene?

You may be tempted to tackle challenges on your own. Let Jesus ask you the same question, “...do you trust me or not?” How will you respond?

What action did Marty take to demonstrate his trust in God? ²

What action will you take to demonstrate your trust and dependence on God?

What did little Isaac do to help buy the camp? ³

Why do you think sacrificial giving unlocks the storehouses of heaven? ⁴

How will focusing on God’s character strengthen your faith for the “new thing” you are starting?

Word of God: *Study*

Starting something new requires a great level of faith—and faith always flows from intimacy. Our degree of intimacy with God will determine our degree of faith. The section of *Epic Faith* we are currently exploring has a special emphasis: Character of God. To say that we know God’s character is to say that we know *him*. When an employer asks for a “character reference,” the reason is because the person giving the reference knows the person in question. He or she can speak accurately about the applicant’s character.

When we know God intimately, our faith grows because we know that he will act in ways consistent with his character. Moses was a man used mightily by God. Moses took time to cultivate deep intimacy with God that led to his unshakable faith. We can do the same.

Let’s look at Exodus 33:7-23 to discover keys to promoting faith-building intimacy with God.

“Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the ‘tent of meeting.’” (v.7a)

The first key we see straightaway is that Moses developed a consistent time and place to be alone with God. How will you plan to intentionally spend time with Jesus?

“Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.” (v. 7b)

I want to point out that this was a place where *anyone* could go and meet with God. Jesus is not more accessible to the “important,” but rather wholeheartedly ready to meet with anyone who will prioritize friendship with God. How can you make this a priority in your life?

“And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to his tent.” (v.8-10)

Did you know that you have the ability to influence and inspire intimacy with God in the hearts of others, simply through your personal passion for Jesus? Others are watching. The level of intimacy they see in you will be what they can aspire to. Are you currently nurturing a level of intimacy that would make others desire to likewise go deeper with God?

“The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.” (v.11a)

Jesus is just as real and present now as he was for Moses, or for the disciples who walked and talked with him. In fact, we today have the benefit of having the Spirit of God residing within us. We will be as spiritually intimate with God as we want to be. He desires to meet with you on account of his exceeding love for you. Make the time to find your way into his presence.

“Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” (v.11b)

I love the passion of young Joshua, “If this is where God is, I’m not leaving!” When twelve men were sent on a reconnaissance mission to the promised land, only two believed, trusting in the help of God, that they could take the land. Joshua was one of those two! No wonder this very young man would later be chosen by God to lead his people. Why? He developed faith through time in the presence of God.

“Moses said to the LORD, ‘You have been telling me, “Lead these people,” but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, “I know you by name and you have found favor with me.” If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.’” (v.12-13)

Moses recognized discontent with his current level of intimacy with God. If you are not growing, you are losing ground. He told the Lord that he wanted to know him even more. Let’s make this our prayer too! “Teach me your ways so I may know you!”

“The LORD replied, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ Then Moses said to him, ‘If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your

people from all the other people on the face of the earth?’ And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’” (vv. 14-17)

As believers, God’s presence is our distinguishing mark. God is with us. His favor abides with us. We must press into the presence of God and abide firmly in that phenomenal place.

“Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’”

I want more of you, God! After all Moses had experienced, he wanted more. The closer we get to God the more we realize how much of him we don’t know. Our hunger for God will leave us longing, in a good way, for more.

“And the LORD said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’

“Then the LORD said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.’” (vs. 19-23)

Moses’ deep desire for intimacy with God was rewarded by a greater revelation of God himself. We may think of faith as something we desire—but God is really what we need. When we have greater intimacy with him, faith is a natural byproduct. When we know him we will naturally trust him, regardless of what he calls us to do. God wants to move mightily through you, but first and foremost he wants to enjoy deeper relationship with you.

Voice of God: *Listen*

What is the “more” of God you are looking for? Ask God to reveal to you a greater revelation of his character and attributes. Spend some time in your own “tent of meeting” and invite him to speak to you there.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Sovereign

The nations—and all of history—reside under God’s complete control and authority.

“God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.” (1Tim. 6:15-16)

When our character is pressed through trial, we find what we are really made of. When God’s character is tested, it is simply an opportunity to demonstrate his glorious attributes. When you discover that he is sovereign over all, and ultimately in control of *your* life, it promotes a sense of peace when in his presence.

Pray

Pray about past and future faith opportunities: Proclaim the name of the God who has shown himself faithful, and pray into new opportunities where he can again provide!

Faith in Action

“It’s always good when you have the Red Sea in front of you, mountains on both sides of you, and an opposing army quickly approaching from behind, because in that moment, faith has the opportunity to express itself.” - Watchman Nee

List some circumstances in which your faith has had the opportunity to express itself.

A Note from Coach Marty:

As a spiritual coach I am compelled to remind you that any amount of effort to strengthen your relationship with God is worth it. I cannot produce intimacy with God for you—you must nourish that for yourself. I will, however, encourage, inspire and point you in the right direction. Now, go for it!

Answer Key:

- ¹ Marty and Kelly learned to trust the character of God. God proved that he was a faithful provider in the small things and that his character does not change when it comes to the big things.
- ² Marty mailed invitations to a list of pastors to attend a retreat at a camp he did not yet own!
- ³ Isaac gave all that he had—his snowboard money.
- ⁴ There is power in generosity. His children, when willing to give all for the sake of his kingdom, move the heart of Father God!

Day 20: Pray God's Character

Jesus wants to teach us the power of praying according to the character of God! It's simple, yet profound: the character of God is who he is and how he responds. When we know God, we know how capable he is and his innate desire to respond to the prayers of his children. For whatever we are trusting God, there exists an aspect of his character to which we can appeal. For example, if we are facing an injustice, by understanding the right and just character of God, we will believe that he is willing and able to move on our behalf. Through any and all of our pressing needs, our faith will grow alongside our knowledge of our loving Heavenly Father, who generously provides for his children.

Our prayers can appeal to who God is. The greater our intimacy with the Almighty, the more potent our faith to see him come through for us. By rooting our faith in the character of God, our prayers will take on a deeper dimension.

Read: Chapter 20, "Victory" from *Epic Faith*

"Marty, I want you not only to know me. I want to teach you to apply my character to whatever you are facing. If you truly believe that I am faithful, then call upon my faithfulness. If you believe that I am just, then appeal to my justice when you face injustice. My character is not just something you should know about me, it must be the foundation of your faith." (p. 149)

"And the end of a time of communication with God, the Father put a phrase into Marty's heart: 'Son, victory never comes without a battle.'" (p. 150)

That which we determine worth fighting for reveals our values. For what things in your life do you consider worth fighting?

How did God use the unjust and overwhelming issue of the home liens to teach Marty and Kelly to pray using God's character as their basis? ¹

How can you see the hand of God in the way the liens and the lawsuit were resolved? ²

Put in your own words the principle of praying according to God's character. How will this understanding increase your faith?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:55-58. Jesus won the victory for us. In what ways do you need to “walk in that victory” in your own life?

How did Marty and Kelly use the character of God to turn their prayer journal into a praise journal? ³

Word of God: *Study*

Right Reactions When Faced with Big Problems

How do you react when faced with a BIG problem? Do you run and hide? Do you stick your head in the sand and hope it goes away? Or likewise try the denial game and pretend it isn't there? Perhaps you freeze in fear and hope that someone will come to your rescue. Maybe you lash out in anger hoping to scare your problem away. Exactly what is the right reaction to our problems?

In today's reading you noticed that Marty and Kelly were confronted with some looming problems and learned to be victorious by appealing to the character of God. I want to share additional problem-facing principles by employing a story from the life of King Jehoshaphat.

Joe and His Very Big Hairy Problem

We can read about Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20 and encounter the really big hairy problem he faced. Since his name may be a big hairy problem for some of us to even pronounce, let's just call him “Joe.” Now, Joe was one of the “good kings” of God's people. The Bible says that he followed God and walked in the ways of David. He sent out teachers to go from town to town instructing the people from the Word of God. Joe also instructed the judges to rule with justice in order to reflect the fair character of God.

Things went pretty well for Joe and the people until one day they received message that “a vast army is coming against you” to wipe them out! In fact, three armies had joined together for the purpose of destroying God's people. Joe and his followers didn't stand a chance against such a great enemy. They were face-to-face with a big hairy problem that seemed impossible to deal with. What Joe did next was amazing. He demonstrated ten right reactions in the face of an overwhelming crisis.

Ten Righteous Reactions to Big, Ugly, Hairy Problems

1. Ask God

“Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to enquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.” (2 Chr. 20:3)

The most natural reaction to this kind of problem is to totally freak out! Joe, however, gets it right by not focusing on the problem but by looking up. When we put our focus onto God, we can begin to see our crisis from God's perspective.

I want you to take a moment to identify a big problem you are facing right now in your own life. By doing so, you can immediately begin to apply these ten righteous reactions.

My big ugly problem is: _____

Now, begin by asking God to give you his insight on how to deal with it.

2. Seek God's Help

“The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.” (2 Chr. 20:4)

How often do we try to work out our problems on our own? The simple reaction of seeking God's help could save us from a mountain of grief. He is our Father God who lovingly *wants* to help us. We need to take this step to invite him into our ugly, hairy situations.

In the midst of your problem, seek his face!

3. Pray to God

“O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no-one can withstand you.” (2 Chr. 20:6)

Joe's the kind of guy who knows how to pray in faith. I'm not talking about some wimpy wishful-thinking kind of prayer. This is a prayer of faith because it's focused on God, *not* on himself. Joe begins by basing his faith on the good character of God. He's saying, “I know the God that I'm praying to. You're a God of power that rules the universe. This big problem is nothing compared to you!” Joe continues to pray by reminding God of His promise, “that when we cry out for help, you will hear us and save us.” By basing his faith on God's character and God's word, Joe is strengthened with an unshakeable confidence that God will act on his behalf.

What specific aspect of God's character can you appeal to for your problem?

4. Rely on God (He is God...we are not!)

“O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” (2 Chr. 20:12)

When faced with a big hairy problem we have a choice to make. Are we going to rely on our own strength or on the power of God? Joe makes it clear that his eyes are fixed on God. His focus is no longer on the problem and he's not looking to his own strength for the solution. Joe is going to wait for God to miraculously work and the rest of the people follow his leadership. “All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.” (v.13) The proof that they were relying on God is the fact that *they didn't do anything*. Not a thing. Nothing. They just stood there! The mommas and the papas and the babies just waited, expecting God to show up and do something!

How can waiting on God demonstrate faith in your situation?

5. Trust God

Now, Joe and the people were standing there waiting for God to do something when a prophet named Jahaziel stood up with a word from the Lord. (Remember, faith is also based on the voice of God.)

“He said: ‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.’” (2 Chr. 20:15)

Do you really believe that God is going to come through for you? You see, the people prayed, and God spoke to them and returned a promise that he was in control. But they still had a choice to make. Would they really *trust* God? The Bible is full of God’s promises to us; the question is, “Do we trust him to *really* keep them?”

How can you practice your trust in God in the face of *your* big problem?

6. Praise God

“Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. Then some Levites... stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.” (2 Chr. 20:18-19)

Think about this for a moment: what had now changed in the circumstances that Joe and the people were facing? Ready for the answer? Absolutely nothing! The vast army was still on its way to wipe them out. But now, rather than being afraid, they were rejoicing! This is the righteous reaction of praising God *in advance* for what he is *going* to do!

Take a moment to praise God in advance for the solution he will bring for *your* problem.

7. Obey God

The Lord gave Joe very specific instructions:

“Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.” (2 Chr. 20:16-17)

It’s interesting that God said that they would not have to fight, but would still have to show up! You, too, must face your big hairy problems, but the Lord will be with you. Not only that, but he is pretty specific and helpful in his bailout plan. God often requires us to take a step of faith in obedience to his word. What did Joe do? He obeyed God:

“Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.’” (2 Chr. 20:20)

What step of obedience is God calling you to take to face your problem?

8. Worship God

“After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.’” (2 Chr. 20:21)

One of the most powerful things you can do when faced with trouble is to worship God. This gets our focus off ourselves and connects our hearts with his. Joe knew that he had to go out before the raging armies but also that he wouldn't have to fight, so he put the choir in the lead. What happened next was totally of God!

Turn on some praise music and worship God despite your circumstances.

9. Watch God Work

“As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.” (2 Chr. 20:22-24)

Somehow, the Lord caused the enemy to turn on itself. God was true to his word. They had no knowledge of *how* God would solve their big ugly hairy problem; they only had faith to believe that he would—somehow! Joe didn't have to fight yet the enemy was defeated. God took care of the problem. When we have righteous reactions to problems we face, God will provide solutions (however crazy!) that we would never have imagined!

10. Thank God

“On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, where they praised the LORD. Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the LORD had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies. They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the LORD with harps and lutes and trumpets.” (2 Chr. 20:26-28)

When God does a work in our lives it is vitally important to thank him. This should become a natural reaction in our lives to give glory to God. The more we thank him, the more our eyes are open to what he is doing all around us, all the time. A grateful heart can see God's hand in any circumstance...and in every ugly problem we face!

Prepared to React

God had been working in Joe's heart long before he was faced with his big hairy problem. When the problematic time came, he was able to have the right reactions because his heart was already focused on God. You may be in the middle of a big hairy problem right now, or it may be just over the next hill. One thing I can promise you, though...it *is* coming. Jesus once said, “In this world you *will* have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Get prepared now to have these ten right reactions when faced with big hairy trouble by keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus!

Voice of God: *Listen*

Reflect on the aspect of God's character that most closely applies to the problem you've identified. Speak aloud to God your appreciation of that aspect of his character. Now ask him for the specific game-plan for dealing with your problem. Write down what he says and do it:

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Righteous and Just

God always deals with us based on his righteous standard and perfect justice.

“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” (Deut. 32:4)

When we know that God is righteous, we can trust that he has the right solution to our situation. He can effectively work his justice even in the most unjust scenarios. Apply these aspects of God within your prayer life.

Pray

Father, thank you for consistently demonstrating your character through your involvement in my life. As I walk with you, teach me daily awareness of who you are and how you are working out all things for my good, because you love me. Each time I see your hand at work in my life I want to be mindful to give you praise. Forgive me for the times I have taken your divine intervention for granted. I look to you in all the glorious aspects of your character, to meet me at my point of need. I am your child and believe that you are always involved in my life. Thank you, Father. Amen.

Faith in Action

Begin to journal your spiritual journey. Use a notebook or purchase a bound one. Consider developing your own praise journal with the idea of praying the character of God. Here is a suggested outline:

1. Start by listing the needs and challenges you face.
2. Alongside each issue, record an aspect of God’s character that specifically relates to that need.
3. Pray daily, appealing to the Lord’s specific character trait for each issue.
4. As the Lord responds, record your praise reports in the journal.

Alternatively, use your Epic Strategy to assign aspects of God’s character to each of your prayer requests.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Keep in mind that through every struggle you reach new depths in your relationship with God. This enables you to face every new challenge by specifically appealing to his character. Each battle becomes an opportunity to trust in God’s strength, not your own. You are learning to walk in victory!

Answer Key:

¹ Marty and Kelly discovered the power of God that is unleashed when we link our prayers with God’s character. With each problem they faced, they looked to an aspect of God’s character and connected it to their prayers.

² They discovered the insurance rider that they didn’t realize they possessed, and the Lord changed Kyle’s heart to pay the final debt that was rightfully his.

³ Each time they were faced with a new challenge, they wrote it down in their prayer journal and asked, “What aspect of the character of God can we appeal to?” They recorded the character trait of God next to the problem, and then took it to prayer. It’s amazing how overwhelming obstacles appear small when placed next to aspects of God’s awesome character!

Day 21: Withstand the Fire

We can acquire something more precious than pure gold: the treasure of our God-focused faith. Faith is so valuable that our Father desires to refine it, rendering it even more appreciated and useful. The apostle Peter wrote:

“These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Pet. 1:7)

Faith is costly and often requires much of us within that refining process. Father knows that the pain of fire is worthwhile because of what it produces in us. When we endure the flames, we learn to focus on Jesus. Through withstanding the fire we give praise and glory to God. May we willingly submit to the Father’s faith-refining fire.

Read: Chapter 21, “Fire” from *Epic Faith*

“Those flames were no match for the sovereign protection of God. Epic faith often requires us to be still, watch, and pray as God does all the work.” (p. 163)

Jesus told Marty that raising the money for the camp was “going to be eeeeasy,” and that he should do nothing. Why is doing “nothing” sometimes the most difficult approach? ¹

Upon which aspects of God’s character was Jesus teaching Marty and his team to rely? ²

When Marty was tempted to panic, he received a prompt to pray. How did the email he received help to shape his prayers amid the fiery trial? ³

Marty forwarded the email from his prayer-warrior friend to his entire mailing list to invite others to pray with him. What miracle resulted from this widespread, focused prayer effort? ⁴

How did that annual payment for the camp indeed prove “eeeeasy”? ⁵

In what way was it *not* so easy? ⁶

When nothing can be accomplished in the natural, prayer becomes our lifeline and expression of faith. How can you prepare for future fires now by fostering a lifestyle of prayer?

Word of God: *Study*

The Fire of God

How do we embrace the refining fire of God in our own lives? Interestingly, the fire's temperature in one's life is raised in proportion to the calling and spiritual ambition in that's person's life. When we have a passion for the glory of God and the expansion of his kingdom, we can expect some scorching fire.

Consider biblical examples of the faithful who endured fire of God in their own lives: Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, Daniel, Esther, Jeremiah and Paul. God's monumental plans for them required that they first pass through the inferno.

Are you more likely to embrace the fire of God or run from it?

How to Survive Fire Without Being Burned

We may think of fire primarily as destructive, but it is equally useful and necessary. This lesson will teach us to survive and even embrace the fires of God to become more like Jesus!

Read Daniel chapter 3.

Three young men intentionally chose the fire over compromise. They would rather die than to yield to the wave of an ungodly culture.

What ultimately happened at the end of this story? ⁷

How could your embracing of the fire be purposeful for God?

Your reaction may determine your level of preparation for what's ahead.

Seven Reasons Why God's Fire is Inevitable

Read the following scriptures to discern and complete each statement that follows:

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’” (Heb. 12:28-29)

1. Fire is a part of _____ being.⁸

“Their stronghold will fall because of terror; at sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic,’ declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem.” (Isa. 31:9)

2. God’s Fire resides among God’s _____.⁹

“Everyone will be salted with fire.” (Mark 9:49)

3. God’s fire is for _____.¹⁰

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matt. 3:11)

4. God’s fire is part of the infilling of the _____.¹¹

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” (Php. 3:10)

5. We need to embrace the fire of sharing in the _____ of Jesus.¹² (The fire of God is a normal part of a Christian’s experience.)

“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

“As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!

“For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.” (Isa. 64:1-3)

6. God’s fire is a demonstration of his _____ character.¹³

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Eph. 5:25-27)

7. God’s fire is preparing his holy _____, his church.¹⁴

Seven Purposes of God’s Fire

(Note the similarities to the purposes of natural fire.)

1. To melt the hard substances in our will, in order to produce brokenness and dependency on God.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” (John 15:5-6)

How can hardship create a greater degree of brokenness and dependency of God in your life?

2. To melt our harden hearts in order to make us more like Jesus.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ezek. 36:26-27)

Identify areas in your own heart that need to be softened:

3. To destroy something that is useless.

“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.” (Mal. 3:2-4)

What are some of the useless things in your life that you should allow fire to consume?

4. To rekindle a first-love fire in our hearts for Jesus.

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.” (Rev. 2:4)

“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.” (Rev. 3:16-18)

What will it take to rekindle your first-love fire in your heart for Jesus?

5. To promote a life of holiness.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.” (2 Pet. 3:10-12)

God’s inevitable judgment will come with fire. Therefore, What kind of person do you want to be?

6. A fitting price to pay for obeying the Great Commission.

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.” (Phil. 1:29)

“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” (2 Tim. 2:8-10)

In what ways could your reluctance to fully obey the Great Commission be an avoidance of its inevitable but worthwhile cost?

7. A means to mentoring others.

As those you lead observe your response to the fire of God they can learn to also survive his fire without being burned.

“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” (Jam. 5:10-11)

Name those individuals who look to you as an example of living for Jesus:

How is your response to God’s fires a help or hindrance to their faith?

Voice of God: *Listen*

Read Revelation 1:12-18.

We seek God not for his blessings alone but to encounter him. He is the Consuming Fire. Embrace the entirety of this. Meditate on the fiery nature of God and invite him to test you.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is a Warrior

God is at war against and will be victorious over all that is evil.

“The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.” (Isa. 42:13)

How can knowing God as a warrior, fighting on your behalf, help you stand in times of fiery testing?

Pray

Jesus, I know that you are faithful, even in the fiery trials I face. Help me to keep my eyes focused on you when I encounter painful or frustrating experiences. I want my faith to be strong and know that you will use trials to strengthen my focus on you. Lord, to be honest, I don't like the trials. I prefer to be comfortable, but I want to embrace whatever it takes to develop my faith and bring me and you into closer relationship. Jesus, you are the real, pure gold that I desire above all things. Teach me to face the fires in faith and endure through them with a more abiding hope in you. Amen.

Faith in Action

Think about the inevitability of trials. At any given time, we are going through a trial, coming out of a trial, or approaching a trial. Life itself brings this. Yet though you may have little choice about what trials you shall face, you *can* choose how you will respond to them.

Think about a fire you've endured or are presently engulfed in. Consider, and determine specifically how you will resolve to praise God amid such trials.

A Note from Coach Marty:

No doubt, this workout tested your mettle. Difficult things make us stronger. I bet you are emerging more spiritually athletic already even if not fully aware of it. Do you think that you responded differently to this lesson today than you may have twenty days ago? This just might indicate that you have already become more spiritual fit. Congratulations, you have made it two-thirds through this program!

Answer Key:

- ¹ Doing “nothing” requires absolute trust in God. We often prefer to work things out on our own.
- ² One aspect was God's sovereignty—that all things are under his control. Another, that Father is a protector. He can keep us from harm. Lastly, that God is a provider—he will supply our needs.
- ³ His prayer-warrior friend said, “The enemy wants to steal what the Lord has given. We need to take a stand against the enemy and cover the very borders with prayer.”
- ⁴ The fire encroached upon the camp but was not allowed to cross any part of its circular six-acre boundary. Jesus protected the camp from the fire.
- ⁵ They received an insurance settlement for loss of revenue and the remainder came from unsolicited donations as others heard about the fire and were prompted to give.
- ⁶ It's never easy to go through a fiery trial, in this case, a literal one. In the fire they needed to rely upon God completely.
- ⁷ Rather than being consumed by the flames they participated in a display of God's glory that shifted the tide of a godless culture.
- ⁸ God's ⁹ people ¹⁰ everyone ¹¹ Holy Spirit ¹² suffering ¹³ awesome ¹⁴ Bride

Acknowledgement: Content for the “Study” sections of this lesson is adapted from personal notes from a message, (given on 8-22-1999), by author and international speaker Joy Dawson who has had a profound impact on my life through her books, teachings and friendship. She helped me prepare for the fire.

Day 22: Receive a Good Heart

I want you to take the next few minutes to wrestle with a question that pries into the core of your being. Are you essentially good or essentially bad? Put in a couple other ways: Is the heart of your person pure or evil? Are you a good apple or rotten to the core? Think about it for a minute...what do you believe about yourself? What have you been taught about your innermost nature? It's an important question because what you believe about yourself will affect the way you live. We will always act in ways that are consistent with our core beliefs.

Perhaps like me, you've grown up since Sunday School being taught that you are a "poor miserable sinner." But is that really you? Is the heart of the redeemed desperately wicked?

To be clear, I'm not questioning the doctrine of original sin, but rather I intend to honestly explore the completed work of Jesus in the hearts of those who have embraced his redemption.

Let's keep an open mind as we explore what God's Word says about the condition of the hearts of those who are in Christ.

Read: Chapter 22, "Faith in Dark Days" from *Epic Faith*

"As I continued to pray I felt God calling me to rise up and fight, to take back what the enemy was trying to steal—my joy, my vision, my heart. I recognized at once that this had been a strategy of the devil—he wanted me to lose heart.

"If my adversary was so concerned about the condition of my heart, then something very powerful and precious must reside there." (p. 167)

What crisis had Kelly faced? ¹

Have you experienced a similar condition? What does it feel like when "the bottom drops out?"

What happened to Marty as Kelly was clawing her way out of the "pit"? ²

In your own words, describe the battle for your heart:

What did Marty sense that the Lord was revealing to him about his heart? ³

Why did that create conflict within him? ⁴

How can you relate to this dilemma?

Consider the implications of Marty's statement in his prayer by the lake:

“Father, you have been teaching me about your character. I know that YOU are good. You have also instructed me to represent your character to a lost world in need of hope. How can I possibly demonstrate to the world that you are good if I am desperately wicked? Perhaps that is how I once was, but now, as a new creation, I am no longer defined by my sin, but by the life of Jesus that dwells within me.” (p. 168)

List ways that your outlook and behavior might change if you lived in the awareness that, as a redeemed Child of God, you have been given a new, good heart and are no longer defined by your capacity to sin.

In this chapter, we read how Marty began to see familiar passages in a new light as Father brought revelation about the condition of his redeemed heart. As you read the scriptures contained this chapter, what conclusions are you coming to?

How can we practically embrace our good heart as a new creation while at the same time recognizing that we sin and for now remain in a fallen world?

Word of God: *Study*

Heart Check

I once climbed the volcano Pico De Orizaba, the highest point in Mexico, rising to 18,491 feet above the sea. Unfortunately, our schedule did not allow time for acclimation so my friends and I just showed up and climbed it. Well-conditioned, the three of us summited, but that kind of altitude can burn the lungs and make one's head and heart feel like bursting. Any mountaineer knows that the time to check and condition one's heart is not while upon the mountain, but *before* beginning the effort. In our spiritual climb, we want to be sure that our heart is okay *before* arriving at a place of temptation, *before* tackling a crisis, and certainly *before* we die and stand at the judgment seat of God.

The heart is the most vital organ of the human body. If our heart fails, we can't live—end of story. When the Bible describes our heart, it is referring to the center of our being, including our mind, our will and our emotions. In biblical language, the heart is the center of the human spirit and the very essence of who we are. When Jesus blessed the “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8), he was saying that those who are pure in the center of their being will receive the reward of seeing God! Proverbs 4:23 thus warns: “. . . guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.”

What do you believe about your own heart?

Desperately Wicked?

I don't need to convince anyone of man's capacity for evil behavior. Just open any newspaper or watch the nightly news and you'll find plenty of evidence for the depravity (wickedness) of humanity. This problem of depravity simply means that since the fall of man all are in desperate need of a Savior and can do NOTHING to save ourselves. This is true of the best “good person” and the worst “bad person.” Not one can acquire heaven by his or her good works.

So, does this real capacity for evil define us? Is this God's intended design for us? When God created the first man and the first woman, he took a step back and said that his “good” creation was now “very good.” (Gen. 1:31) After all, God did create them in his image. God created us to be his sons and daughters and to enjoy our company. Ever since the first man and woman introduced sin into the world, God had a plan to redeem us. He created each of us with a “good heart” and through Jesus he made a way to restore that “good heart.”

Many persist in calling the heart of the redeemed “desperately wicked,” quoting from Jeremiah 17:9 “the heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and *desperately wicked*: who can know it?” It will be helpful to look at this scripture in context to see what the prophet is really saying.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-19.

This section of scripture contrasts two types of men. One turns his heart away from God to trust in his own strength—that man is cursed. The other man puts his trust in the Lord and is blessed. In fact, he is like a tree planted by the river and is sustained by God in times of trouble. Only a deceitful heart would choose to turn from God and trust in oneself in the light of such obvious consequences. The Bible goes on to say, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.” (Jer. 17:10) If ALL hearts were “desperately wicked” there would be no need for God to search and examine our hearts.

Problematically, many of us have embraced the idea that our hearts remain evil and have never understood how completely Jesus has restored us as new creations.

New Hearts

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (Col. 1:21-22)

That's what I call a complete transformation. We switched from being enemies of God to shining holy and blameless in his sight!

Our hearts had been diseased and spoiled by sin. As hard as we may have tried, we cannot fix the problem of our heart. This might sound shocking, but God never intended to fix your heart...rather, to *replace* it! Through the prophet Ezekiel, God made this promise: *I will give you a new heart* and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (36:26) That's what I call a true *heart transplant*!

How does this happen? How do we get a new heart? We don't have to register on a "recipient list" and there's no long wait! It's free and immediate for all who believe!

Read John chapter 3.

How do we receive a new heart? ⁵

It's very simple, really...just trade your old sinful heart in for a new one that Jesus will give you. Then, like the apostle Paul, you can say, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

If you have never done this before, do it now! Confess your sin to Jesus and admit that you can't repair your own wicked heart. Tell Jesus that you believe that his death on the cross has purchased a new, clean heart for you. Ask Jesus to take your old sinful heart and give you a new one that beats with his life within you. Then thank Jesus for this new life!

The Heart of the Redeemed

Read Romans 5:12-19.

This section compares the work of Adam (which made us sinners), to the work of Christ (which makes us righteous). We may not want to admit it, but we may regard the work of Adam as effective but disregard the work of Christ. No one can argue with the results of Adam's work, bringing sin into the world, but we have a difficult time believing the results of Christ's redemptive work. Friends, we are not only forgiven, but transformed!

With any self-examination, it's easy to be aware of our sin. Yet how can we cultivate a greater awareness of our righteousness in Christ?

Grace is Like Original Sin Working in Reverse

Adam introduced a cancer called "sin," and the epidemic spread completely. But Jesus introduced the grace agent. God's grace is fully effective in its treatment of sin. This cure is even more contagious than the cancer. It can easily be passed from one to another and brings complete healing wherever it goes, to whomever it touches.

God provided an ingenious delivery system for his grace agent. Anyone who has the Jesus-grace antidote for the cancer of sin can pass it on to others without depleting their own supply. And anyone to whom it is given is instantly equipped to pass it on, like the lighting of candles at a Christmas eve worship service. The only limitation is that the delivery system depends upon the free will of those who have been cured, to share this grace with others.

How might embracing the full effect of our redemption better equip and motivate us to share sin's cure?

Don't Lose Heart

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

Satan has a plan for your life, and it's not a good one! He is after your heart—your wellspring of life. Jesus wants to fill your heart with *his* life; the devil wants to rob your heart *of* life. The devil's temptations, attacks, and schemes are part of a larger plot toward your losing heart. This often happens through disappointments and feelings of rejection.

When we lose heart, we abandon our dreams and settle for mediocrity. When we lose heart, we forfeit our destiny and doubt Jesus' promise of abundant life.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

How can this scripture keep you from losing heart?

In what ways have you been feeling under attack lately?

Don't lose heart. In attacking you specifically, the enemy is unknowingly confirming an area of your destiny. Take a minute to write out a statement of your destiny. Keep it in your Bible as a reminder that the devil has no right to steal your heart!

Living from Your Good Heart

Jesus put it this way, “A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a *good heart*, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.” (Matt. 12:33-35 NLT)

So, what makes a good tree good and a bad tree bad? In context, Jesus is discussing participation in the kingdom of God or of the kingdom of Satan. In verse 30, Jesus said that one is either with him or against him. Therefore, the person who is on Jesus' side is a “good tree” that produces good fruit, and the person who sides with the devil is a “bad tree” that produces bad fruit. So, the person operating within God's kingdom will bear fruit consistent with the good heart that God has given to him.

When you are living from the good heart bestowed in you, good fruit is produced naturally. You don't have to strive, only let God flow through you. What you believe about yourself will affect the way you live. If you believe that you remain “desperately wicked” or a “poor miserable sinner,” then that is what you'll have

to offer. But, if you embrace the truth that you are a new creation, with a good heart, then you will have something good to offer to the world. If you are on Jesus' side, then you are essentially good.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17 NLT)

Knowing that you are a new creation with a new, good heart will invite a world of difference.

Voice of God: *Listen*

“My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.* Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.” (Prov. 4:20-27)

In the midst of this fatherly advice comes the strong warning to “guard your heart.” Why? Because it's your “wellspring of life!” You wouldn't put poison in your only source of fresh drinking water, would you? But that's what we do with our hearts when we pollute them by what we see, say and do. God has given you a good heart. Guard it with your life because it *is* your life!

Is there an area in your life where you have let your guard down?

Have you exposed your heart to some things that are harmful?

What things attempt to take up residence in your heart where only Jesus should be given room?

Talk to God about those things right now.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Our Sanctifier and Our Righteousness

God is Jehovah-Medaddishkem (The Lord our Sanctifier)

“Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.’” (Exod. 31:13)

“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11b)

God is Jehovah-Tsidkenu (The Lord our Righteousness)

“This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.” (Jer. 23:6b)

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and

be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” (Php. 3:8-9)

When we know that God is our righteousness and the one that sanctifies us, we can yield to the specific work he wants to accomplish in our life. It’s not just a matter of “trying harder”—rather, it’s a matter of allowing the Holy Spirit to perform deep and transformational work in our lives.

Pray

Jesus, I believe that you died and then rose, including me in the blessing of your resurrection. I believe that I am a new creation. Thank you for taking my heart of stone and giving me a heart that beats for you. Jesus, I want to learn to live from the good heart you have given me and I want to represent your goodness to a world in desperate need of it. As I embrace the truth of your new, good heart, beating in me, empower me to live in a way that is consistent with that belief. Amen.

Faith in Action

What we believe about ourselves will affect the way we think and ultimately live. If we believe that we are wretched sinners, then we will act in ways consistent with that belief. If we embrace the truth that we are new creations, with good hearts, then we will have much good to offer the world, in reflecting the character of our Father.

Thoughtfully, list and think about ways that your faith in action will reflect the good heart that Jesus has won for you.

A Note from Coach Marty:

We’ve been talking much about becoming spiritually fit, but this lesson cuts right to the core of why we are working out at all. It may take some time for your behavior to catch up to your beliefs. Be patient with yourself because God is patient with you. Just don’t lose heat!

Answer Key:

¹ Kelly was going through a clinical depression.

² While Kelly had been crawling her way up from the bottom, Marty had begun to slide downward. He had lost heart.

³ “Marty, you have a good heart.”

⁴ He had always been taught that his heart was desperately evil, or “wicked.”

⁵ Jesus said that we must be “born again” and that happens by believing in him!

Day 23: Understand the Fear of The Lord

To reach to new depths of intimate friendship with God, we must understand a foundational concept in the Scripture known as “the fear of the Lord.” This phrase, primarily used in the Old Testament, is like biblical shorthand to describe a life fully surrendered and walking in complete obedience to God.

“The fear of the Lord has two attitudes: one toward sin—to hate it, and another toward God—to stand in awe of His glory. It is only natural that we should have a reverent fear of God, because He is God! In His glory He is unapproachable, in His power He is incomparable, and in His wisdom He is unfathomable.” (p. 168)

By understanding the fear of the Lord and its inseparable connection to faith, we will experience the blessing of deeper friendship with God.

Read: Chapter 23, “The Fear of The Lord” from *Epic Faith*

“I determined that I wanted to become a person with a life marked by the fear of the Lord, living in beautiful submission to the Savior.” (p. 179)

One aspect of walking in the fear of the Lord is inviting him into our decision-making process. It is possible to develop a pattern of refusing to move without the Lord’s clear direction. How did Marty and his team honor God through their process of purchasing a house for their ministry?

How did Brad’s ministry house purchase stand in contrast to the approach of Marty’s team? ¹

When you think about your own approach to making major decisions, do you have more in common with the direction of Marty’s team or Brad’s team? Explain.

What could you learn from these two scenarios?

Below each of the following four scriptures, list the benefits of walking in the fear of the Lord as described:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Prov. 9:10) ²

“Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing.” (Psa. 34:9) ³

“He will bless those who fear the Lord—small and great alike.” (Psa. 115:13) ⁴

“He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.” (Isa. 33:6) ⁵

Consider the connection between “the fear of the Lord” and “faith.” “The fear of the Lord” has its New Testament counterpart in “faith.” In the New Testament, when we read of God’s call to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, it is called a test of faith (Heb. 11:17). When we read the same story back in the Old Testament, the test refers to the fear of the Lord. (Gen. 22:12)

How can understanding of the fear of the Lord strengthen your faith?

Both faith and the fear of the Lord are rooted in the character of God. We can walk in obedience because of who he is. We can believe him for great things because our God is great. When God said “go,” Abraham said “yes,” focused on the One who called him. When God promised a child to Abraham and Sarah well past their child-bearing years, trust prevailed because they knew that God was capable of making this happen.

What could you do to strengthen your own understanding of the character of God? ⁶

The fear of the Lord leads to deeper friendship with God. Some hold a misconception that the fear of the Lord alienates us from God, in the sense that we feel afraid of God, but the contrary is true. The fear of the Lord is on the path that leads to friendship with God. The fear of the Lord puts our relationship with God in proper perspective—he is God; we are not. We can be led to deeper levels of intimacy by understanding that distinction. When God directs us, and we obey in the fear of the Lord, it will ultimately lead us to walk in intimate friendship with him.

What steps will you take personally to deepen your friendship with God by walking in the fear of the Lord?

Word of God: *Study*

In our study of God’s Word we will go deeper into the two aspects of the fear of the Lord: Hating sin and loving God. We will discover that walking in the fear of the Lord is the opposite of sinful bondage to a tyrant—it is instead a beautiful invitation to walk in intimacy with the Almighty.

Set Free from Sin

Read Romans chapter 6.

What phrase is repeated three times in this chapter? (vv. 7,18, and 22) ⁷

We must embrace the liberating truth that we are not only forgiven but also set free! When we see a phrase repeated three times in scripture it's like shouting or typing in all caps: YOU HAVE BEEN SET FREE FROM SIN, REFUSE TO LIVE IN BONDAGE AS A SLAVE TO SIN!

Romans 6 employs the metaphor of sin as a slave master. What is the key to being released from this slavery? (vv. 1-7) ⁸

Sin shall no longer be our master (v. 14) because slavery to sin leads to death (v. 16), and we have a new master, Jesus, who has set us free from sin to instead walk in life-giving obedience (vv. 17-18). Living in the fear of the Lord leads to righteous freedom and victory over sin.

The Clear Choice

What is the "benefit" of sin? (v. 21) ⁹

What is the benefit of obedience? (v. 23) ¹⁰

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23)

What is the choice given to us in Romans chapter 6? ¹¹

In view of this crystal-clear choice, it's pure insanity to continue to return to our sin when the blessing of obedience to Jesus is so much better than what sin "offers."

Moses gave a similar choice to God's people while they were still in the desert. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-21.

What choice is given to the people in this passage? (v. 15) ¹²

How do we choose life and prosperity? (v. 16) ¹³

How do we choose death and destruction? ¹⁴

What choice does Moses counsel us to make? (v. 19) ¹⁵

What is the result of that choice? (v. 20) ¹⁶

When we choose life and obedience to God over bondage to sin it leads us to intimacy with God.

Hate Sin

Clearly, any soft view of sin needs to change! We can now take on a new attitude toward sin—to despise it—because we recognize it as the villain that keeps us from intimacy with our creator and from fulfilling our destiny and calling. Our new view of sin keeps us walking in freedom.

It's time to confront sin head-on: to take back areas in our life in which we have willingly given over territory to the enemy.

In what ways have you believed the devil's lie that sin is the fun stuff you don't get to do because you are a Christian? (Be honest.)

When you give in to sin, what reasons do you give? Why *do* you sin?

If you give external reasons or excuses such as temptation, peer pressure, family history, the devil, or “it's just my sinful nature,” then you have little hope of freedom. We need to see sin as an internal choice so that we will change our mind about it!

“But each one is tempted when, *by his own evil desire*, he is dragged away and enticed.” (Jam. 1:14)

We sin because we love it! If you are in bondage to sin, chances are you have a love/hate relationship with it. If we didn't love it to some degree, we wouldn't do it! Why should it sound unrealistic to have a zero-tolerance policy with sin? The problem persists because we have made friends with our sins and don't want to see them go.

Are there some sins with which you have made “friends” and thus allowed to remain in your life?

What keeps you from evicting them?

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Cor. 10:13)

I have some very good news. We sin *because we choose to!* This understanding takes responsibility for our sin. It's not someone else's fault. According to this verse, God will always "provide a way out" so that you do not need to give in to temptation.

Why is it "good news" that when we sin, we do so by choice? ¹⁷

As long as we believe that we sin unwillingly due to external circumstances, we remain victims! In contrast, when we realize sin is a choice, we can actively resist temptation and walk in freedom and holiness. In order to not choose sin, we need to change our view of it.

"What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in *death!* But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:21-23)

See sin for what it really is: *Death!* Sin is a cancer willingly invited into one's own body. Sin always brings death. It destroys relationships as well as the intimacy with God for which we were created.

"But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (Jam. 1:14-15)

We need to stop this death-spiral before it gets started. Instead of loving sin, we must hate it!

"To fear the LORD is to *hate evil*; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech." (Prov. 8:13)

"An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or *hate his sin*." (Psa. 36:1-2)

When we lack the fear of God, we become blinded to our own sin. Walking in the fear of the Lord will reveal our sin to us from God's perspective. When this occurs, we begin to *hate* sin! We see sin as death, and hate it accordingly, choosing no longer to give in to its slavery.

Repentance Breaks the Sin Cycle

Perhaps you are all too familiar with this repetitive sin cycle:

Sin ⇒ Shame ⇒ Confession ⇒ Forgiveness ⇒ Sin

This cycle continues in force when we substitute repentance with mere confession. Confession is an acknowledgment of sin, and a good start. But we can confess without actually turning away from our sin. We can confess and receive forgiveness only to fall again the next time. The key to breaking the sin cycle is the stronger action of repentance.

"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 3:19)

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 2:38)

Sin ⇨ Repentance ⇨ Obedience ⇨ Intimacy

Repentance leads to obedience and intimacy. The word “repentance” means to change both one’s mind and direction. When we repent, we turn away from sin and turn to God. You need not go back to your sin—ever. If you fail, to be sure, Jesus is gracious and will forgive you yet again—but with your eyes fixed on him, you can walk in freedom.

“Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.’” (Exod. 20:20)

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” (1 John 2:1)

With the sin cycle broken by repentance, we can pursue a life of intimacy with God, walking in the fear of the Lord.

Love God: An Invitation to Intimacy

When we live in obedience to God and his Word, it leads us into intimacy with the Almighty. Remember that there are two aspects of the fear of the Lord: hating sin and loving God. With repentance, we turn away from sin—no longer focused upon it. Our hearts are captured by a new focus—our love and awe of God!

Obedience is God’s invitation to _____.¹⁸

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.’ Jesus replied, ‘If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’” (John 14:15, 21, 23)

According to this scripture, how do we express our love for God?¹⁹

What are the rewards of this obedience lifestyle?²⁰

Obedience is God’s invitation to _____.²¹

“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:14-15)

When we turn away from our sin to walk in obedience, we are not just trading one tyrant for another, we are finding relationship with a wonderful friend!

Abraham is an example of one who walked in the fear of the Lord through immediate and wholehearted obedience. And repeatedly in scripture, Abraham is called a friend of God.

“And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and *he was called God’s friend.*” (Jam. 2:23)

Likewise, there is a friendship with God awaiting us who cultivate a lifestyle of obedience, walking in the fear of the Lord. You too can bear the name “Friend of God”.

Voice of God: *Listen*

“LORD, I have heard of your fame; I *stand in awe* of your deeds, O LORD.” (Hab. 3:2)

Let’s step into the presence of God and invite him to reveal our sin from his perspective. (This practice drives us to repentance.)

Take some time to practice the second attitude of the fear of the Lord—to focus on loving God and being in awe of his majesty. We become like that which we behold, and thus get our eyes off sin altogether when focusing on God.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Holy

He is separate and above all. He is pure and spotless.

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” (1John 1:5)

“And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’” (Isa. 6:3)

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16)

When we behold God’s holiness, this leads us to become more like him.

Pray

Jesus, I’ve known you as my friend, my companion, and my shepherd, but I’ve often neglected to see you as my King and the righteous, sovereign Lord of my life. By knowing each aspect of who you are, I grow in my intimacy with you. Now, I want to know the fear of the Lord. I desire to walk in beautiful submission to you, my Savior. I pray for a greater revelation of what it cost you to pay for my sin, and for a new appreciation for you, enthroned as King in holy glory. May my devotion to you be permanently marked by the fear of the Lord. Amen.

Faith in Action

Marty developed a list of key “fear of the Lord” principles. Write one action item for each principle to be demonstrated in your life. The fear of the Lord is:

...a life that is fully surrendered and walking in obedience to the Lord.

...being afraid of God when our walk is sinful.

...complete reverence of God.

...filled with promises of the Lord's blessing.

...hating sin.

...demonstrated by submitting our decisions to God.

...key to walking in righteousness.

A Note from Coach Marty:

I'm not expecting you to master this lesson in one sitting. I have spent years practicing the fear of the Lord and intimate friendship with God. Like any workout or new discipline, the hardest part is simply getting started. Great job! You have started walking in the fear of the Lord and I believe that you will continue to grow and enjoy its benefits for the rest of your life!

Answer Key:

¹ Brad's team thought it was a good business decision to buy the house, so they moved forward without consulting God in prayer.

² wisdom and understanding ³ lacking in nothing, having abundant supply

⁴ Anyone who fears the Lord will be blessed.

⁵ A solid foundation, salvation, wisdom and knowledge.

⁶ Make a careful study of the character of God from scripture. Read books on the subject.

⁷ You have been set free from sin.

⁸ When we are baptized into Christ, we are joined to him in his death so that the sinful self is crucified, and we are raised with him and are set free from bondage to sin.

⁹ Shame and death. ¹⁰ Holiness and eternal life.

¹¹ Slavery to sin or life in Christ. ¹² Life and prosperity or death and destruction

¹³ Love the Lord your God, walk in his ways, and keep his commands.

¹⁴ We choose death and destruction by turning our hearts away from God, by not obeying him, and worshipping other gods.

¹⁵ He counsels us to choose life.

¹⁶ The result is life for you and your children, a loving relationship with God, the ability to listen to his voice.

¹⁷ If sin is a choice, then we can also choose *not to* sin.

¹⁸ intimacy

¹⁹ We demonstrate our love for God through obedience.

²⁰ The rewards are to experience the Father's love and a deeper revelation of God.

²¹ friendship

Day 24: Appropriate God's Authority

Have you come to the place where you want to make a mighty impact for the kingdom of God but doubt that you have what it takes to make it happen? Do you feel like your prayers go unanswered? Do you read of in the lives of the epic followers of biblical times and sense that there is a missing element in your personal prayer life?

We need to understand that God possesses all authority and that he entrusts that authority to his children, to bless all who need the Father's touch. We must learn to appropriate the authority that God has already bestowed on us.

Read: Chapter 24, "Appropriating His Authority" from *Epic Faith*

"I have often been bothered to see the discrepancy between the way I prayed and the way Jesus and His disciples prayed in the Bible. Where I may plead or beg, or make a mild suggestion to the Father, the epic followers of days long ago commanded demons to flee and proclaimed healing in Jesus' name—and that's exactly what happened." (p. 185)

When have you felt prompted to pray a bold, fervent prayer? What did you do? Describe the outcome.

If we believe in the power of prayer, why might we yet be reluctant to exercise our faith?

Do you believe that God still entrusts his children with authority today? Why or why not?

How much authority does Jesus hold? (Matt. 28:18–19)

What does Jesus do with his authority in this scripture? ¹

With the awareness that Jesus has entrusted us with his authority, Marty wrote:

"By faith we appropriate the truths of God's Word. It's one thing to believe that God loves me, yet it requires faith to allow that truth to change me and affect my attitudes and behaviors. I can believe that God heals, but it requires faith to receive it. Belief says, 'God can.' Faith says, 'God will.'" (p. 187)

What does it mean to appropriate God's authority by faith? ²

As you read Marty's stories of healing and the casting out of demons, how are you inspired to exercise the authority that God has given you?

How can you practice appropriating God's authority through your own prayer life?

What aspects of God's character are we appealing to when we appropriate his authority as we pray in faith? ³

Word of God: *Study*

Just Ask

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:7-11)

As God's children, what are we encouraged to do? ⁴

What promises are we given? ⁵

What basis does Jesus give for the certainty of this promise? ⁶

How can this scripture give you confidence as you approach Father in childlike faith?

The Basis of our Authority as the Children of God

Relatively few believers learn to exercise the authority that they have already been endowed with as sons and daughters of the Most High God. In this lesson we will explore the basis of our authority and some practical steps for its use.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and *let them rule* over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” (Gen. 1:26)

We were created to be God's children. How much authority did God entrust to the first man and woman? ⁷

Obviously, something was lost when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, siding with the serpent. Nonetheless we see that Jesus has been given all authority and has since entrusted it to us to accomplish his purposes.

“[Jesus] called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” (Matt. 10:1)

Jesus gives his disciples his authority. For what should it be used, according to this scripture? ⁸

In the book of Revelation, a promise was made concerning authority given to the followers of Christ.

“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations...just as I have received authority from my Father.” (Rev. 2:26-27)

To whom is this authority given? What is the condition of the promise? ⁹

What similarity do you see here at the end of God's book to the promise given at its beginning, to the first man and woman? ¹⁰

“I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.’” (Psa. 2:7-8)

As children of God, for what are we invited to ask? ¹¹

As children of God created in his image, we have been given authority to advance the kingdom and ask for nations as our inheritance. In order to accomplish these, we must learn to appropriate his authority.

Appropriating God's Authority

We must first believe, in faith, that God has truly given us authority. Then we must learn how to use it. The word appropriate means “to set aside for a specific use.” God has given us his authority and calls upon us to *use* it for his purposes. I like to think of appropriating God's authority as writing checks that draw from our spiritual bank account.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And *God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms* in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:4-7)

What is our current spiritual position in Christ? ¹²

Read Ephesians 1:15-23.

We require spiritual revelation in order to see the extent of the authority we have been given. According to this section, what is included in this trust? ¹³

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3)

What have we been given, according to Ephesians 1:3? ¹⁴

Our spiritual bank account is loaded and in Christ, we are able to appropriate those blessings toward others. At times, when I go to work in intercession, I picture myself seated alongside Jesus and in praying I “write checks” from our joint spiritual bank account. I *know* that those for whom I pray will be blessed because I am drawing from real, ample authority and means to bless them. You too can learn to base your faith on the Word of God and appropriate his authority when you pray!

Using the Keys of the Kingdom

Jesus has given his followers “Keys of the Kingdom.” Read the following verses to discover what this means.

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 16:19)

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt. 18:18-20)

For what are the keys of the kingdom used? ¹⁵

And to whom are these keys given? ¹⁶

What do you think the word “bind” means, and how can you apply this toward kingdom purposes?

Jesus has given his authority, his keys of the kingdom, to the Father's children on earth. It is therefore on us to practice his kingdom authority. The word “bind” means to tie up or secure. We have the legal spiritual authority to bind things on earth with the promise that such matters will be secured in the heavenly realm as well. Whether related to demonic activity or anything that opposes God's kingdom, his children can “tie it up” here and now!

In contrast, what do you think the word “loose” means, and how can you apply this concept toward kingdom purposes?

The word “loose” means to release and set free from restraints. If the devil or an entity is holding on to something that belongs to God, we possess the power to “loose” it, and the matter will be released in both heaven and on earth.

Recently, Jesus was teaching me about the keys of the kingdom during my personal Bible study time. I began the time frustrated, as a needed resource for our ministry had been held up without progress for several weeks. I decided to venture out on my prayer walk, and as I did, soon felt the prompting of Jesus to practice these keys—both by binding that which opposed this ministry resource and loosening the resource to be used for God's purposes. When I returned from my prayer walk, an email awaited me declaring the issue completely resolved, that we would receive the resource shortly. I realize that matters may not always resolve that immediately, but this was a reminder to me that Jesus gives us real authority to bind and loose.

Authority to Accomplish the Great Commission

Our primary purpose as followers of Christ is to make disciples among every people on earth. (A task we have not yet accomplished.) Whenever the Great Commission is mentioned within the four gospels, we see Jesus' impartation of authority to accomplish the task! The gospel of Matthew shows us clearly that Jesus holds *all* authority.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...’” (Matt. 18:18-19a)

What do we learn from this scripture about the authority given to accomplish this task? ¹⁷

“[Jesus] said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” (Mark 16:15-20)

In this passage, what clear connection did Mark make between our calling and our authority? ¹⁸

Doctor Luke used similar language in both his gospel and his historical account of the Acts of the Apostles. He recounted first what Jesus told his disciples to say, and then how Jesus gave them power to say it!

“[Jesus] told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’” (Luke 24:46-49)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...” (Acts 1:8)

What two-fold promise is given in Luke’s Great Commission verses? ¹⁹

Don’t miss the *clear gospel message* Jesus provided: the simple historical facts of his death and resurrection, and what those mean for us. Notice the “power from on high” that Jesus promised to provide for communicating that message!

John recorded Jesus’ words in sending us out as missionaries, in which Jesus drew a parallel with the mission assignment that the Father had given him. And he likewise emphasized the Holy Spirit’s impartation to accomplish the task.

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (John 20:21-22)

What does it mean to you that Jesus sends us in the same way that the Father sent him?

Did Father empower Jesus for the task? Can we be assured that Jesus has equipped us in like manner? Certainly so! That is what his Word has made clear. So, go in his name, with his power and authority!

Voice of God: *Listen*

I want you to go back to a scripture that we looked at earlier, Ephesians 1:15-23. This time, meditate on the meaning of these words. Then pray this scripture over yourself, intentionally claiming the promises included in within in.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Omnipotent

He is infinite in His power and abilities.

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”
(Matt. 19:26)

Not only is God's power limitless, he is able to work in us despite our natural limitations and beyond our limited understanding. Trust his power to meet your current needs.

Pray

Lord, I do believe that you have entrusted your power to me. I want to be a child of God who appropriates your authority. I don't want to limit you through unbelief, but I desire to exercise your authority by faith. I receive it now in Jesus' name. Amen.

Faith in Action

Appropriating God's authority is like learning to write checks from a spiritual bank account. God is inherently all-powerful. He created all that exists, and all authority belongs to him. In Scripture it is clear that the God of the universe has entrusted authority to his children in order to bring hope and healing to a hurting world. He appoints us as representatives to reflect his character. We are commanded and compelled to demonstrate his love, mercy, and compassion; we are also entrusted with the authority to wield his power.

When praying today and in the week ahead, think intentionally about appropriating God's authority. Revisit and reconsider key impacts from today's lesson and confront any of your own hang-ups or resistances to praying in this way.

A Note from Coach Marty:

We are in the homeward stretch of our thirty-day fitness program, but the content for today makes it clear that we are yet scratching the surface. I pray that this time together will provide inspiration for the perspiration required to attain practical appropriation of God's authority in your own life.

Answer Key:

- ¹ He entrusts it to us when he commissions us to make disciples of all nations.
- ² We need to exercise faith to access the authority that God has already imparted to us.
- ³ We appeal to the reality that God is all-powerful. That this is inherently part of who he is. That he created all that exists, and all authority belongs to him.
- ⁴ To ask, seek, and knock.
- ⁵ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.
- ⁶ The Father in heaven is good and will give good gifts to his children.
- ⁷ He gave them authority to rule the earth and steward it on the Father's behalf.
- ⁸ To drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.
- ⁹ The authority is given to those who will steward it well—those who overcome and who do the will of God.
- ¹⁰ God gives his children authority to rule and reign with him. The Father promises his authority to rule nations.

- ¹¹ We are invited to ask for the nations as an inheritance. When we play a part in reaching unreached people groups (nations) they become part of our inheritance and legacy.
- ¹² We are seated with him in heavenly places.
- ¹³ The trust includes hope, riches, inheritance, and the same power that rose Christ from the dead. We are seated with Christ in that place of authority—even over demonic powers.
- ¹⁴ We are given every spiritual blessing in Christ.
- ¹⁵ To bind and loose things in heaven and on earth.
- ¹⁶ They are given to the disciples of Jesus on earth, either as an individual or as those gathered together agreeing on anything in his name.
- ¹⁷ Jesus has the authority, therefore he can grant it to us, his disciples, for the effective accomplishment of his purpose.
- ¹⁸ There will be signs by which Jesus will confirm the gospel message that we preach. Jesus promised that he would be working alongside us!
- ¹⁹ In both of Luke's verses quoted, he articulated our call to be witnesses as well as our empowerment to be witnesses!

Day 25: Transformed by God's Presence

One attribute of God's character is that he is "omnipresent." God has the unique ability to be everywhere at the same time—simply because he is God! We can accept this as theological truth because it is repeatedly affirmed throughout the Scripture. But how does this understanding apply to us?

We need a revelation beyond the fact that God's omnipresence is a theological truth—that it is also a *practical* reality. One of the names of Jesus is "Immanuel," which translates, "God with us." "Immanuel" reminds us that Jesus, who is God, is constantly with us. Becoming aware of this practical reality empowers our faith perspective.

Read: Chapter 25, "Standing in God's Presence" from *Epic Faith*

"I realized I needed a shift to Gabriel's perspective. I was often overwhelmed by circumstances: I focused on the size of my problems rather than on God's immense capability. I sensed Gabriel's response inviting me to practice the presence of God." (p. 197)

"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God." (Luke 1:5–19) What can Gabriel's statement teach us about our own faith perspective? ¹

Think about your average day. Of your waking hours, how much are you consciously aware of God's presence? How would increasing that time change your faith perspective?

"Jesus said, 'I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever *abides* in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.'" (John 15:5 ESV)

The word "abide" means to remain and be present within a state of expectancy. According to Jesus, how does this attitude affect our fruitfulness?

Marty discovered a connection between practicing the presence of God and "dream seeds." He sensed Jesus saying, "*I've planted dream seeds in the hearts of all of my children. To grow, they require faith and the soil of my presence.*" (p. 198) Describe the dream seeds that the Lord has sown in your heart.

How have you practiced faith in such a way as to nourish the growth of those dream seeds?

How can remaining in God's presence promote the maturing of those dreams?

There is transformational power in God's presence. For each of the following Bible characters, note how that person was impacted by the presence of Jesus and how you might relate to each one's experience:

Moses -

Peter -

Mary Magdalene -

Saul, who became the apostle Paul -

These individuals were never the same after meeting the God who transforms. They were forever changed by the presence of God in their lives. How does this truth inspire you to intentionally remain aware of God's presence?

"Gabriel had taught me that the key to epic faith was to find my way into the presence of God and to live my whole life there." (p. 200)

How might your life be transformed by the presence of God?

Word of God: *Study*

The Secret to a Life of Faith

"Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons." (Mark 3:13-15)

Why did Jesus appoint the twelve disciples? What three purposes are recorded here? ²

I want to make sure that you did not miss the first and most foundational reason. Jesus appointed disciples to be *with him!* The presence of God in our lives effectively transforms us into the likeness of Jesus. It doesn't do much good to send out preachers who are not like Jesus. We are to reflect his love, his character, his truth, and his compassion. The only way to become *like* him is to be *with* him.

After the ascension of Jesus and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, these same disciples went out and preached the good news of Jesus, exercising the authority of Jesus. Read the following scripture to note a distinguishing characteristic of these disciples.

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

What stood out here as the distinguishing mark of the disciples? ³

Like Gabriel from our reading today, how can your life be marked by the presence of God?

I would like to offer you a gift. It's the secret to a life of faith, and the key to becoming a man or woman of God. Furthermore, my gift provides the sole path to experiencing the kind of relationship with God that your heart is longing for. Here you go:

Spend time in the presence of God!

Yes, that's it.

Will you be a person who invests in spending time in the presence of God?

Breakfast with Jesus

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

During my season in Los Angeles, I used to practice what I called “breakfast with Jesus.” Ironically, this coincided with my day of fasting, not eating a thing. I would get up early, while still dark, and in the cool of the morning I would hike to the top of a particular hill near our home. Then I would sit there with Jesus and watch the sunrise, intentionally aware of his presence. I did not designate this as a time to study the Bible or even to pray, but simply to exist, bathed in his presence. Times like these have established an ease of accessibility to consistently find my way into his presence.

Using this as an example, what could you begin to do to intentionally improve your time in the presence of God?

I'm reminded of a time that the disciples had breakfast with Jesus: Read John 21:1-14.

After a full night of fishing, how many fish had the disciples caught? ⁴

After encountering the presence of Jesus, how many fish did the disciples haul in? ⁵

Notice the practical fruitfulness that came from the presence of God.

What did Peter do as soon as he realized that the stranger on the shore was actually Jesus? ⁶

I interpret this as a passion for the presence of God. Peter could not wait for the boat to reach the shore—he wanted to be with Jesus immediately. How can you nurture the same passion for his presence?

Practicing the Presence of God

Read Psalms 139:1-18.

What can this Psalm teach us about the presence of God? ⁷

How can this understanding increase intimacy with God? ⁸

Years ago, I encountered a short book entitled *Practicing the Presence of God*, a collection of letters from a 17th-Century Carmelite monk named Brother Lawrence. It left a lasting impression upon me as he shared his principle of practicing the presence of God whether participating in formal worship or carrying out duties such as cleaning kitchen vessels. In fact, he claimed, these activities were equal as worship experiences. I wondered *what would it be like to continually practice the presence of God?* I have since made it my ambition to be more consistently aware that Jesus is with me, and I with him.

Do you feel like you require a worship gathering or a special place to be aware of God's presence?

What could you do to practice the presence of God within your regular schedule?

Mountain Biking with Jesus

One of my passions is mountain biking. I love the challenge of grinding up a steep ascent and the thrill of bombing down the other side. Once, while mountain biking, I began to think about practicing the presence of God and the thought occurred to me, "Why don't I go mountain biking with Jesus?" Right then and there I decided to invite him along. (I know that he is always with me, but I had been unaware of his presence.) Immediately, I was mountain biking *with* my willingly invited and sporty companion, Jesus. Now, hardly a ride goes by that I do not acknowledge his presence, even making comments out loud, as I enjoy my friend Jesus right there with me.

What is something that you love doing in which you could intentionally invite Jesus to join you?

God is Always with Us

After each of the following scriptures, indicate what you can learn about the ever-present nature of God in our lives:

“No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:5-9) ⁹

“‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5) ¹⁰

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:18-20) ¹¹

Praying with Jesus

On a recent prayer walk I became conscious that I was praying *with* Jesus—not just *to* Jesus. Hebrews 7:25 indicates that Jesus always lives to intercede for us. He is praying for us continually. So, we not only pray *to* Jesus, we are praying *with* him.

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” (Heb. 5:7)

Let Jesus inspire your own prayer life by remaining conscious that you are praying with him. And remember, as we spend time in his presence we are transformed into his likeness.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Considering my story about breakfast with Jesus, use your Faith Focus time to just be with him. Be at peace and simply be aware of the presence of God. While in his presence ask, “Jesus, what do you want to say to me today?”

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Omnipresent

God is everywhere. His name is Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, ‘God with us.’” (Matt. 1:23)

“‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the LORD.” (Jer. 23:23)

Thank you, Jesus for being our Immanuel!

Pray

Jesus, I know that you are always with me. You are Immanuel, “God with us.” You are God with me! Like Gabriel, I want to be marked by your presence. I pray that knowing you are with me, and being constantly aware of your presence, will create a shift in my faith perspective. I don’t need to fear, worry, or be insecure because you will never leave me or forsake me. Thank you for your constant presence in my life. Teach me to walk in the awareness that you are with me. Amen.

Faith in Action

The very presence of God was Gabriel’s distinguishing characteristic. He defined himself as one “who stands in the presence of God.” What if each of us could say the same thing?

Our desire is to be people of faith marked by the presence of God. I invite you to make a faith declaration by inserting your name in the blank. “I am

_____, I stand in the presence of God.” Now, repeat it several times.

Today, you can launch a new and growing faith perspective...a point of view that comes to one constantly aware of the Lord’s presence in his or her life. So, be intentional about it, such as to invite Jesus into something specific you are doing. I encourage you not simply hike, but to walk the trail with Jesus. We can increasingly invite Jesus to participate in our day with the awareness that he is present. This will initiate a seismic shift in your faith perspective!

A Note from Coach Marty:

It takes practice to cultivate an awareness of the Lord’s constant presence in your life. Even though we are nearing the end of our thirty-day training program, we are just beginning to explore the depths of intimacy with God.

Answer Key:

¹ If you were to stand in God’s presence, you would have no need to ask, “How can I be sure of God?” Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and that faith is focused on God.

² He appointed them to be with him, to send them out to preach, and to entrust them with his authority.

³ They had been with Jesus.

⁴ Zero. ⁵ 153

⁶ Peter put on his outer garment and jumped into the water, swimming to Jesus.

⁷ There is nowhere we can go to escape his presence, nor would we want to. From the moment I wake up to the moment I go to bed, God is with me.

⁸ No one knows us the way that God does. He created us and has been with us even since formation in our mother’s womb. He loves us and is always thinking about us.

⁹ God’s presence gives us strength and courage.

¹⁰ God will never leave me. I will not be afraid.

¹¹ I am not alone. Even though I don’t see God, he is with me.

Day 26: Write God's Story for Your Life

An "epic" is an expansive story centered on a hero. When we try to play the hero, our lives, revolving around self, remain insignificant. But when Jesus takes the role of hero as we invest ourselves into others, we find a much more compelling tale. Our life stories take on significance much greater than ourselves because our focus is on Jesus and participating in the magnificent plot of God's sweeping epic.

Epic faith is God-focused. We become like that which we behold (see Psa. 115:7-8). As we daily look to Jesus and walk with him, our focus dictates our direction and he shapes the kind of person we become. Let's continue to run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Let's embrace the story that he is writing through us.

Read: Chapter 26, "Living by Faith" from *Epic Faith*

When we read Hebrews chapter 11, what do we find as the defining characteristic of the heroes listed therein? ¹

How can our lives reflect a similar quality?

What did the men and women of Hebrews 11 accomplish by faith?

How did they demonstrate faith based on the Word of God? ²

In what way does David stand out as one who demonstrates faith based on the voice of God? ³

In what ways were the heroes of Hebrews 11 distinguished by faith rooted in the character of God? ⁴

How has reading the book *Epic Faith* inspired you toward faith-filled living?

How will Jesus increasingly become the hero of your life?

How will you spend yourself for the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) and bring glory to Jesus?

Word of God: *Study*

We are going to dive deeper into the famous “faith chapter”—Hebrews 11—but first I want to provide some context. The whole book of Hebrews is itself about faith because it’s focused on our hero Jesus, described there as “the author and perfecter of our faith.” In fact, I can sum up the entire book in one sentence: *Look how great Jesus is!*

Let’s highlight each chapter leading up to Hebrews 11 to get our eyes on Jesus and establish his exceeding greatness.

Look How Great Jesus Is!

Look how great Jesus is—he is the _____⁵ of God! (Heb. 1:3) And he has also provided a way for us to become redeemed children of God!

Look how great Jesus is—he is the best _____⁶ ever! (Heb. 2:11) He blends us into one family with God.

Look how great Jesus is—he is greater than _____.⁷ (Heb. 3:3) He is the faithful son over the house of God—and we are that house.

Look how great Jesus is—he is the great _____.⁸ (Heb. 4:15) Now we can approach the throne of grace with confidence.

Look how great Jesus is—he is greater than _____.⁹ (Heb. 5:6-10) He has become for us the source of eternal salvation.

Look how great Jesus is—he is our hope and the _____¹⁰ for our souls (Heb. 6:19-20) Jesus is immovable, firm and secure.

Look how great Jesus is—he is the perfect _____.¹¹ (Heb. 7:27-28) Jesus paid the price for our sins—once for all.

Look how great Jesus is—he the high priest of a new _____.¹² (Heb. 8:6-10) He is our God and we are his people.

Look how great Jesus is—he is the _____.¹³ (Heb. 9:15) Through Jesus we receive the promised inheritance.

Look how great Jesus is—he is the only one who can make us _____.¹⁴ (Heb. 10:10-14) By his one sacrifice he “has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Which brings us to chapter 11. After this great build-up focused on Jesus, we might mistakenly assume that the next chapter is all about us. It is, after all, the hero of faith “hall of fame”! But that’s not exactly what’s going on here. It continues all about Jesus.

Look how great Jesus is—he chooses to use us, frail and broken human beings, to accomplish his purpose on earth. (Heb. 11) Now that’s something great!

Aspire—by Faith—to Do Something Great for God

In your *Epic Faith* reading today we already established that the heroes of chapter 11 built their God-focused faith on the Word, Voice and Character of God. These are not heroes to be idolized, but followers to be emulated.

A careful study of each person listed reveals a collection of imperfect people with some significant character flaws. We are in good company, and this should encourage us. God is in the business of calling imperfect individuals to accomplish extraordinary things!

Read through the entire chapter to discover how each person can inspire you to do something extraordinary for the kingdom of God. (Please note that each statement I’ve included is based on further study of each person mentioned. You may want to do your own follow-up study on the heroes of faith, since you are called to be one of them.)

Like _____,¹⁵ we offer an acceptable sacrifice to God—ourselves. (v. 4. See also Rom.12:1)

Like _____,¹⁶ our faith grows as we walk with God. (v. 5)

Like _____,¹⁷ our faith enables us to stand against the tide of our culture. (v. 7)

Like _____,¹⁸ our faith is tested by obedience—our willingness to give God that which is most precious to us. (v. 8)

Like _____,¹⁹ we believe that we are children of the promise. (v. 20)

Like _____,²⁰ we speak prophetic blessings over others in our lives. (v. 21)

Like _____,²¹ faith enables us to follow the dreams that God has placed in our hearts. (v. 22)

Like _____,²² we will do things by faith we never imagined possible or that we dreamed ourselves capable. (v. 24)

Like _____,²³ we will align ourselves with the people and purpose of God. (v. 31)

Like _____,²⁴ we will triumph against insurmountable odds because our God is with us. (v. 32)

Like _____,²⁵ God will give us victory over cruel oppressors as we champion capable and courageous women like Deborah and Jael. (v. 32)

Like _____,²⁶ we recognize that our strength comes from the Lord. (v. 32)

Like _____,²⁷ an outcast, the Spirit of the Lord will be with us because we acknowledge the sovereign hand of God. (v. 32)

Like _____,²⁸ we will be people of worship known as people after God’s own heart. (v. 32)

Like _____,²⁹ we will listen to God and, by faith, do everything he says! (v. 32)

Your God-focused faith will enable you to make a significant impact and advance the kingdom of God. Jesus is issuing an invitation to enlist as an epic hero of faith. But it will cost you something.

Notice the transition that takes place in verse 35 that continues through 36-38. These verses move from people doing great things by faith to people suffering great persecution by faith. Faith enables the endurance to share in the sufferings of Christ.

What might it cost you to live as an epic hero of faith?

Notice the promise given in these concluding verses:

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (Heb. 11:39-40)

God is still compiling his faith hall of fame and wants to induct you! In fact, he says that those who have gone before will only be made complete when we have done our part!

With every person mentioned in this chapter we see a pattern emerge. By faith (a person) did (something great for God). Jesus wants to do something great through you. You have been called to a life of significance. You serve a great God and he expects nothing less. We are called to reflect his character and lead the way for the rest of the world to find purpose and calling in Jesus Christ.

Today’s “Voice of God” activity is very important. Please take the time now to complete it.

Voice of God: *Listen*

Make your own Hebrews 11:41 declaration. This Bible chapter finishes with verse 40, yet God continues to write his story through you. Write your own personal faith proclamation, from a future perspective. What did that hero—you—do by faith? In faith, “look back” on your life of faith and record the great things that God has accomplished through your life.

My Hebrews 11:41 Faith Declaration

By faith, _____,

Reading your faith declarations aloud to someone you love and trust will provide great encouragement and spiritual accountability. This is a significant and powerful exercise.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is Omniscient

He perfectly knows all.

“Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.” (John 16:30)

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jer. 29:11)

When you realize that God is all-knowing you can trust him with every aspect of your future!

Pray

Jesus, I realize that my life is not my own. It has been purchased with your precious blood. I want my life to be a reflection of your sacrificial gift. I want to live for your glory. Jesus, I desire to live for that which has eternal value. Use me, Jesus, to make an impact on this world, to lead others to you, and to spend myself on behalf of the Great Commission. I want my heart's desire to be aligned with your heart's desire: to see people from every tribe and tongue knowing the Father's love that is available simply by believing in you. I pray that my life will be one of epic faith. Amen.

Faith in Action

I have two simple yet very important action items for you today.

First: Notice that the reading for tomorrow is the “Epilogue” to *Epic Faith* found at: <https://epicfaith.net/epilogue/> (It is not printed in your *Epic Faith* book.) The epilogue, entitled “Go: Searching for Jesus’ Lost Sheep,” can be read online or downloaded as a PDF. I encourage you to download it now in preparation for tomorrow’s workout.

Second: Order or download my second book, *Mission Accomplished*, also available at my website: <https://epicfaith.net/resources/> Lessons 29 and 30 will use material from *Mission Accomplished* which I have included in this “Thirty Days of Epic Faith Spiritual Fitness Manual.” I want to provide continuity to keep you growing in your faith, purpose and destiny. Order the printed book now so it will arrive in time to continue your spiritual growth program or download the electronic version and get cracking right away.

A Note from Coach Marty:

Don’t stop at thirty days! Plan now to join me with *Mission Accomplished* by ordering or downloading your copy today. *Epic Faith* has taught you to put basic faith principles into practice. *Mission Accomplished* will lead you to discover the destiny for which you were created. Trust me: We’ve made it this far together. Let’s continue the journey. *Mission Accomplished* has eighteen purpose-packed chapters, each with discussion questions and action items.

Answer Key:

¹ Faith emerges as the qualifying characteristic of their epic heroism.

² Moses was used by God to write the first five books of the Bible. David wrote most of the Psalms. They have encouraged us to know God through the Word and live accordingly.

³ David consistently “inquired of the Lord.” He stopped and asked for God’s direction at most every turn.

⁴ Basing our faith on the character of God is simply about knowing God. When we have taken the time to know God relationally, we can trust him absolutely, and he will be able to trust us.

⁵ son ⁶ big brother ⁷ Moses ⁸ High Priest ⁹ Melchizedek

¹⁰ anchor ¹¹ sacrifice ¹² covenant ¹³ mediator ¹⁴ holy

¹⁵ Abel ¹⁶ Enoch ¹⁷ Noah ¹⁸ Abraham ¹⁹ Isaac ²⁰ Jacob ²¹ Joseph ²² Moses

²³ Rahab ²⁴ Gideon ²⁵ Barak ²⁶ Sampson ²⁷ Jephthah ²⁸ David ²⁹ Samuel

Day 27: The Power of the Gospel

Jesus has given us his darkness-shattering, liberating message of truth, and the authority to speak it boldly. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil. His victory over sin empowers us to preach. His victory over death empowers us to heal. His victory over the devil empowers us to conquer.

Because Jesus defeated sin, we can preach forgiveness in his name and bring restored relationships with the Father to all who will receive him.

On the day of Pentecost, a fire fell from heaven that remains on Christ's followers to this day. That holy flame enabled a simple fisherman to proclaim one of the most eloquent gospel messages recorded in Scripture. That same Spirit of God will enable *you* to share his Word with power beyond your natural capability, because it will not be you alone sharing it, but Christ living in you!

Let's proceed in this lesson with faith, believing that God will so entirely transform us that we will in turn become agents of transformation in the lives of others, through the power of the gospel.

Read: Epic Faith Epilogue, "Go: Searching for Jesus' Lost Sheep"

This reading is available online or as a free download: <https://epicfaith.net/epilogue/>

"When going becomes a way of life, one's story fills with epic adventures. With the gospel living in our hearts we will be Father's ambassadors wherever we go."

According to Loren Cunningham, "go" means a change of location. How can "going" in your life become a significant factor in sharing the gospel? ¹

Why do you suppose the rescue of David and Jasmine was a highlight for Marty and Kelly, and what happened to them in the intervening years? ²

What experience demonstrated that the gospel is indeed "Great News"? ³

In what ways have you been influenced by the enemy's lie that "Nobody wants to hear about Jesus"? ⁴

What was some fruit of the gospel seeds that had been planted twenty years previous? ⁴

What examples were given that illustrate how going is inevitably accompanied by spiritual warfare? ⁵

How can media be used as a powerful gospel-sharing tool? ⁶

What was the parallel between Marty's story about finding Grandmother and Jesus parable of the lost sheep? What was the ultimate result? ⁷

Word of God: *Study*

I recently studied the effects of the gospel's expansion in Nepal. I was astounded to discover that a country completely unreached thirty years ago now holds over one million believers. There's still work to be done in this Hindu kingdom, but this progress is astounding. This nation has experienced a consistent 30% annual growth rate over the past thirty years.

We can learn a profound lesson from Nepali believers: For the powerful effects of the gospel to be realized, the gospel must be shared! By *every* believer. In this lesson we want to explore the power of the gospel, and keys to releasing its effectiveness.

The Power of Preaching the Gospel

The gospel is the simple historical facts about the life, _____, ⁸ and _____ ⁹ of Jesus Christ.

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ **died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was **raised on the third** day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:1-6)

We may not be able to answer every question that people have about faith, but we can be prepared to share the simple facts of who Jesus is, and of what he has done in our lives.

Be _____ ¹⁰ to respond to people who ask you about your hope in Christ.

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be **prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Pet. 3:15)

What could you do to become better prepared to share the simple gospel truth?

The gospel is so simple, even a _____¹¹ can receive it.

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little **children** come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” (Matt. 19:14)

Remember the simple song, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Sometimes we try to make things too complicated. Just be willing to share what you *do* know from God’s Word and how it has impacted your life.

The gospel has the power to rescue people from the dominion of _____¹² and bondage to the devil.

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of **darkness** and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:13-14)

How would it affect your witness if you recognized that people without Jesus are in bondage to the devil?

“Jesus” is the only _____¹³ that brings salvation!

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other **name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Consider how merciful God was to provide a means for salvation. He didn’t have to do it, but he did. His son remains the only sacrifice and the only provision given for us to be saved.

The _____¹⁴ is in the gospel itself.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the **power** of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Rom. 1:16-17)

The power of God is embedded within the gospel message and we have been authorized to *preach it*. Our responsibility is to simply share—it is God’s responsibility to make an impact.

Are you ever reluctant to share the gospel because you doubt that it will have an effect?

How could this truth of the gospel’s inherent power bring freedom in the area of witnessing?

People must _____¹⁵ the gospel before they can believe it.

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they **hear** without someone preaching to them?” (Rom. 10:14)

We are not the source of the message’s power. God has infused *his* message with saving power and employs us as his delivery agents!

List some ways you could be a delivery agent of the gospel this week:

People must _____¹⁶ the good news message to be saved.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever **believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” (John 3:17-18)

For people to believe, we must speak. The God who spoke the whole world into existence has likewise given us the authority to speak life into the soul of another.

People *really* need Jesus to be saved. How can embracing this truth move you to share the good news?

When a person receives Jesus, he or she is transformed and becomes a new _____!¹⁷

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new **creation**; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17)

The gospel message has transformational power and we have the privilege of sharing it. Some of my greatest experiences in life have been watching transformation take place after a person turns to Jesus.

Identify some ways you have been transformed by the gospel.

The gospel may seem like foolishness to some, but for us it is the

_____¹⁸ and _____¹⁹ of God.

“We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the **power** of God and the **wisdom** of God.” (1 Cor. 1:23-24)

We may get psyched out because we recognize that people might think the gospel is foolish, or worse yet, think that *we* are foolish! So what? The Bible says to expect this to happen with some. Even so, others will find wisdom and transformation through our powerful message.

Identify at least one person that you have been reluctant to share Jesus with because you fear their response.

One of the ways we soften hardened hearts is through prayer. Commit to praying for that person you just identified.

We are containers of the gospel message because Jesus _____²⁰ in us.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ **lives** in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20)

We live as examples of the gospel message, carrying the life of Jesus inside us. How can others see the gospel through Jesus residing in you?

We are called to _____²¹ the good news.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to **preach** the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:17-18)

I realize that the word “preach” may carry some negative connotations, but we bear a great message that cannot be kept to ourselves. Our message must be authenticated by a life that reflects Jesus, but the power is inherent in the gospel and that gospel *must be announced* to unleash its saving power.

Friends, this is what we are called to do, from the streets of Calcutta to our favorite coffee shop among friends. Wherever we might preach the good news, let us appropriate the power given to us to bring salvation.

Voice of God: *Listen*

I have found that my desire to share the gospel is often proportionate to my gratitude for what Jesus did for me on the cross.

Read of and contemplate the sacrifice that Jesus made for you.

Then invite Jesus to increase your heartfelt appreciation for the salvation he won for you. Ask Jesus to increase your passion for the lost. Next, invite Jesus to put lost souls on your heart and pray for each one that comes to mind. Finally, request that Jesus will give you opportunities to share this great news with others in the next 48 hours.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is the Mighty Savior

“Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” (Isa. 60:16b)

“The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zeph. 3:17)

When we know God as the mighty Savior, we will grow in our confidence to share his saving message.

Pray

Jesus, if you can use me, I am willing to go. Whether you send me across the street or across the ocean, I want to know the joy of being used by you to reach your lost sheep. Here I am God, send me. Amen.

Faith in Action

You are already “going.” Whether you go across the ocean or across the street, how can you combine your going with kingdom-minded purposes?

Begin preparing now to go on a short-term mission trip. You could even be the catalyst to mobilize a team from your church.

Prayerfully consider dedicating your life to going as a long-term field worker among the unreached.

Don’t forget to order or download Marty’s second book, *Mission Accomplished*. It is available at: <https://epicfaith.net/resources/>.

Marty has also written a Gospel tract entitled, “Are You Forgiven”. Consider purchasing a pack to have on hand for the divine appointments God will bring into your life. Available at: <https://epicfaith.net/resources/>.

A Note from Coach Marty:

I want you to regularly experience the joy of partnering with God through the power of the gospel, seeing others come to faith in Christ. This is a beautiful benefit of being spiritually fit. Maturity in the faith means that we can reproduce such faith. I want to encourage you in your faith journey by challenging you to live the destiny for which you were created.

Answer Key:

¹ Every time we travel there are unique opportunities to meet people one would otherwise have no contact with. It’s a great time to pray for God to provide divine appointments, regardless of where you are going.

² Marty and Kelly invested in their lives. David grew to become a gifted evangelist and Jasmine is fulfilling her dream to care for children in need.

³ The first person that the team met wanted to receive the good news of the gospel.

⁴ Only two decades later they were amazed to be greeted by believers and identified at least one small fellowship in each of the same villages.

⁵ Praying over the Buddhist monastery, putting a Bible in the foundation of an idol, sharing with Lemcha in the authority of the gospel. Any time we share the gospel we are threatening the enemy’s territory.

⁶ The team used *Jesus Film* media resources in that people’s own language, via smartphones and public showings using projection equipment, with powerful results.

⁷ Just like a good shepherd goes looking for one lost sheep, Marty and his team went in search of the grandmother. When they found her, they brought the gospel and she responded in faith, resulting in great rejoicing.

⁸ death ⁹ resurrection ¹⁰ prepared ¹¹ child ¹² darkness ¹³ name ¹⁴ power ¹⁵ hear

¹⁶ believe ¹⁷ creation ¹⁸ power ¹⁹ wisdom ²⁰ lives ²¹ preach

Day 28: The Power of Your Testimony

In *Mission Accomplished*, I shared a story about encountering a guy named Kevin on a flight from Los Angeles. After that initial contact, it took years of prayer for and witnessing to Kevin before he finally became a follower of Christ. Interestingly, Kevin's primary memory from our original conversation aboard that plane is the story I told him about my motorcycle accident--the same account I give in chapter 3 of *Epic Faith*. Basically, Kevin connected with my story (my testimony) of how Jesus spared my life, and how I thus surrendered it to him. That story became an avenue to share the gospel. Power resides in real life events and transformations, and God has given you these stories to tell.

Your testimony is a powerful tool for sharing the transformational power of the gospel. This is the essence of being a "witness," as we testify to what we have seen God do in our own lives!

In the book of Acts, when the disciples faced opposition, they simply responded: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20) Likewise our opportune calling is to tell others what we have seen Jesus do in our lives, and what he has spoken to us in his Word.

Every Christian has a story to tell. Your testimony is a real-life story in which Jesus touched *your* life. In this lesson you will learn how to develop your own personal testimony, to share with authority what Jesus has done in your life.

Read: Paul's personal testimony found in Acts 22:1-21

In this portion of scripture the apostle Paul described his personal testimony of encountering Jesus, and the transformation in his life that followed. Note the personal details that Paul used as he related his testimony to his listeners.

How did Paul describe his life before his encounter with Christ? (v.3-5) ¹

List personal details Paul included regarding his conversion experience. (vv. 6-13) ²

How did Paul respond to the gospel? (v. 16) ³

How was Paul changed by this experience? (vv. 14-21) ⁴

I want you to notice in Paul's testimony a powerful pattern for sharing what Jesus has done in your own life.

Describe your life before you encountered Jesus:

What specific details surrounded your conversion experience?

How is your life different now that you follow Jesus?

Word of God: *Study*

One of the reasons that your testimony is so powerful is that it tells of an undeniable experience that you shared with Jesus. Someone may contend with you about something found in Scripture, but when you say, “I know that Jesus is real because he saved my life,” that person will likely take that at face value. My wife has shared a testimony about a time when God spoke to her in an audible voice and healed her mom of cancer. When she tells the story, no one says, “I don’t believe that happened to you,” as they can see in her eyes that she’s telling the truth! Likewise, when you share your experience of an encounter with God, it speaks powerfully to the heart of your listener.

Your testimony answers the question “How do I know that Jesus is real?” Often it will be marked by the story of your conversion experience, but any encounter you have had with Jesus, speaking to his reality in your life, can be a powerful testimony.

“Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (1 John 5:10-12)

What does this scripture say about the testimony that all believers have? ⁵

“They overcame [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” (Rev. 12:11)

What does this scripture say about the power of our testimony? ⁶

Remember the testimony pattern I gave based on Paul’s testimony in Acts 22? I want to give you another personal example of this pattern before you begin using it to write your own. Review chapter 2 of *Epic Faith* in which I relate the story of Jesus becoming my best friend.

Describe Marty’s life before he encountered Jesus: ⁷

What specific details surrounded his experience? ⁸

How is Marty's life different now that he follows Jesus? ⁹

Question to Focus Your Testimony

I want to clarify that your testimony is not the entire story of your life, but a story from your life that conveys the reality of Jesus. Ideally, you should be able to share this story in five minutes or less so that you can interject it into any witnessing conversation that arises.

Answer these questions now, and we will use this to outline your testimony later.

Describe your life before you encountered Jesus:

Explain the need that you felt for Jesus:

What was the void in your life that only God could fill?

Share about your personal needs that led you to seek Jesus:

What specific details surrounded your conversion experience?

Describe what Jesus did in your life:

Specifically tell how the Lord met your need:

How is your life different now that you follow Jesus?

Tell about the reality of Jesus in your life today:

Share how your life looks different because of Jesus.

Voice of God: *Listen*

We have focused each day on a different aspect of God's character. Take a moment to review the "Character of God" from past lessons and list one or two aspects with which you want to become better acquainted. Take some time to invite God to produce fruit, of those aspects of his character, from your own life.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is the Source of Life

All life proceeds from God. Jesus is the true source from which our hearts come alive.

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6)

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.'" (John 11:25)

"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Col. 3:4)

When we know the true source of life, we can testify to others of the new life he has effected in us.

Pray

Jesus, thank you for becoming real in my life. I recognize that apart from you, I would be lost. I want to be able to share you with others in a way that is vibrant and life-giving. Help me to be a bold witness and to testify to the reality of your life inside me. Make me a contagious Christian. I trust that you will use me for your glory. Amen.

Faith in Action

Now that you have prepared your testimony, I expect you to use it!

First, I want you to simply "practice" giving your testimony to a friend. Ideally, if someone is going through this course with you, you can practice on each other. If not, just practice on any willing friend or family member. Ask for feedback as to how you could be clearer in your testimony.

Second, create an opportunity to share this testimony with a friend or associate in the next 48 hours. Bring it up in conversation by asking a question. Or try the direct approach, "Can I share with you an encounter that made Jesus tangible in my life?"

A Note from Coach Marty:

When we set out on this program, I challenged you to train for the best spiritual shape of your life. On a scale from one to ten, how did you rate when you started? What number would you score your progress now? At what number would you yet like to be? How will you get there? We only have two days left, but I again want to encourage you to keep up the training by delving into my book *Mission Accomplished* and working through the questions and action items at the end of each chapter. It's available at www.epicfaith.net.

Answer Key:

- ¹ Paul had a good education. He was religiously zealous. He was a brutal persecutor of anyone who would follow Jesus.
- ² Paul saw a bright light and heard the voice of Jesus. He was blinded by the experience. A believer named Ananias prayed for him and he was healed.
- ³ Paul called on the name of the Lord and was baptized.
- ⁴ Paul was transformed from a persecutor of Christians to a follower of Jesus with a deep desire to share the gospel message with others.
- ⁵ Anyone who believes in Jesus has in his heart the testimony of new life in Christ.
- ⁶ Our testimony strikes a crushing blow to the enemy.
- ⁷ Marty had been running from God—rebellious and partying. He was in a new town and lonely because he didn't have any friends. He had a longing to be understood and experience real friendship.
- ⁸ Marty prayed and asked that if Jesus was real, would he reveal himself through the Bible. He began reading the Bible's gospel books on a nightly basis. While reading the crucifixion account in Luke, Marty realized that Jesus had become his best friend: it was his friend Jesus that was mocked, beaten and suffered the cross on Marty's behalf.
- ⁹ Marty discovered true friendship with Jesus. Jesus revealed himself and that has become a life-giving relationship. Marty now reads the Bible to better know his friend Jesus.

Day 29: Discover Your Destiny in the Mission of Jesus

I want to help you connect with the purpose for which you were created, because this will bring you the greatest fulfillment in life.

In a recent Barna Study, nearly half of churchgoers did not know the meaning of “The Great Commission.” No wonder so many believers suffer from an acute lack of purpose. The Great Commission is a term assigned to the final mandate that Jesus gave his followers, just prior to his ascension. Although the Great Commission’s message is found in all four Gospels, it is best encapsulated by Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 28:18-20.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

A problem exists when many disciples mistakenly think that these verses only apply to a select few believers—those called by God as full-time missionaries. If thinking this way, we fail to grasp that this mandate is actually the key for unlocking fulfillment and destiny in *every* believer who chooses to follow Jesus.

Read: “Introduction,” from *Mission Accomplished* (printed below)

This is a call for every believer to discover the destiny for which they were created. This is a charge to find your purpose fulfilled by taking your rightful place in the completion of the Great Commission. This is an opportunity to discover that living out Jesus’ final mandate is *the key* to living your life with purpose and joy.

If you regard this as an overstatement, let me ask you some questions: Do you ever feel as if your life lacks purpose? Do you wonder if you were created to play a role in a plot more extensive than your individual story? Do you ever read the Bible and sense a nagging suspicion that you might be missing something? Do you see a discrepancy between your life and the faith and purpose of the early Christ-followers found in Scripture?

If you find yourself answering yes to any of the questions above, let me ask you one more. On a scale from one to ten, to what degree has the purpose of your life been linked to the fulfillment of the Great Commission? Jesus gave a final mandate to all who would call themselves Christ followers; to share his Good News and make disciples, who then themselves make disciples, until all the peoples of earth have heard how to be reconciled to the Father. This is the most meaningful and fulfilling purpose with which any church or individual follower of Jesus could align. If you gave yourself a low score on the question above, I have some good news for you. You are about to experience a “purpose revival” that will dramatically impact your life!

We all long for that day when the Master says, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:21a) Those words are based on what we have done with what we have been given. In context, Jesus tells a story to make a very specific point. (The story is found in Matt. 25:14-46.) The master, representing God, gives each of his servants something to steward. A talent. An entrustment. The master departs but expects his servants to be faithful with what they’ve been given. When the master returns, those servants who were faithful with the entrusted gift were awarded with these words:

His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matt. 25:21)

Jesus also had a stern rebuke for the one who was not a good steward.

So, the question is, have we been obedient and faithful with what Jesus has entrusted to us? We want to be certain of the answer to that question because Jesus’ reward at the end of our life is based on our faithfulness to his commands. I am not inferring works righteousness, but Jesus clearly promises heavenly rewards for those who obey. The Bible does not specify what those rewards will be, but knowing Jesus, they will be fantastic! Obedience to Jesus

not only provides a future benefit, but the joy and fulfillment that we experience in this life is directly related to our faithful stewardship of what he has entrusted to us. In Jesus' summation to this story he said:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him...” (Matt. 25:31-32) Discovering that your faithfulness to his commands will have a direct connection to this ingathering of the nations is significant!

It may sound like an oversimplification, but we can summarize all of God's commands in just two directives: The Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:37-40)

The word that Jesus used for “love” in this passage is *agapao*, which means a commitment of devotion that is directed by the will. We get to choose to love God! It's not a flighty falling in love, but a willful life-decision we make. Jesus is very clear about how we express our love to God. “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15)

Please understand that we are not talking about earning salvation through obedience. Salvation comes only as a gift from the Father through the sacrifice of his Son. We are talking rather about our response to that love, that grace, causing us to live our lives in devotion to him. The root of our problem, leading to purposeless lives, is that we have made faith all about the end goal of future salvation, when the Father desires a vibrant daily relationship with his sons and daughters.

Our narrow focus on how we can get into heaven has kept us from seeing that getting saved is just the beginning of the journey—the Father has so much more in store for us. Salvation is the starting place, and it's high time we discover our purpose! Eternal life starts now, and is filled with purpose and adventure as we walk in obedience to his commands.

So what are those commands? According to Jesus, the summation of all the law and the prophets is to love God and to love others. Jesus refers to a scripture that would have been very familiar to his listeners:

Love GOD, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got!

Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of your homes and on your city gates. (Deut. 6:5-9 MSG)

I want you to see that Jesus advocates a radical love relationship with God; one so vital that you cannot stop thinking or talking about him. He should occupy our hearts and every waking hour of our days. You can't get enough of God and your purpose is fueled by your radical love for Him! I'm here to tell you that this is the only kind of Christianity that makes any sense at all. Many try to practice a lukewarm Christianity in which they have just enough of God for a ticket to heaven, and then wonder why their lives lack vibrancy. When you follow Jesus wholeheartedly, it leads to a radical love relationship with the Father. Hold on, because he will stretch you to the max and you will be the better for it.

Jesus continues his summation in declaring that it is not enough to love God, we also must love others. The apostle John echoes this truth:

...I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. (2 John 1:5b-6)

As faithful stewards of the Father's trust, we want to be obedient not only to the Great Commandment, but also to his Great Commission. Jesus gave one final mandate right before he ascended to heaven. This final command (commission) brings the two mandates together into a beautiful harmony.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

We demonstrate our love for God by obedience to his command to share his love to the whole world. We love others by inviting them into a love relationship with the Father.

This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him. (John 3:16-18 MSG)

In the Great Commission, God calls us to "go and tell." He gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for him through our obedience to share the Good News and make disciples. That includes every person in the whole world.

So, one may ask, in the light of the Great Commandment *and* the Great Commission, *what have I done with what I have been given?* Have I been a faithful steward of all the Father has entrusted to me?

When we engage in practicing the greatest commandment of all, and likewise the greatest commission, our lives are infused with destiny beyond our imagination. You are about to embark on an adventure that will drastically change your life.

Begin by asking some important "what if" questions:

What if the Great Commission is the most important mandate because Father knows better than anyone that His commission is integrally tied to my destiny?

What if it's not about God trying to get me to do something that I really don't want to do, but rather that he is opening a door to my most fulfilling life?

What if my life *can* have purpose?

What if I can impact another human being and see that person's life changed for eternity?

What if I was created for something much bigger than myself?

Mission Accomplished will lead you on a journey of discovering the destiny for which you were created. We are going to explore the meaning of the Great Commission and how it is accomplished. Remember, your purpose is connected to its fulfillment. We will seek ways to engage Christ's call in meaningful ways and discover an incredible power with which we can tap into when we are living presently and purposefully with Jesus. Our God-empowered purpose leads to maximum impact, making our actions count both for the moment and for eternity. *Mission Accomplished* will set your course on a life-fulfilling trajectory.

At the end of each chapter you will find the heading "Accomplish It!" This section is designed to cultivate a lifestyle of obedience focused on completing the task. Completing the Great Commission requires all of us taking small steps towards that goal. Here you will find guidance to accomplish it!

I challenge you to read the chapters that follow with an open heart and allow a flame to begin to flicker within you. It is his desire that your heart come alive and your days be filled with meaning and purpose. I pray that your heart will burn with a passion for the name of Jesus to be known and worshipped among every people and language until you hear the words of the Master saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Mission accomplished!"

Questions: Drawing from the reading above, respond to the following questions.

In what times or circumstances have you felt as if your life lacks purpose?

What role might you be created to play in a plot more extensive than your individual story?

When you read the Bible, what specific passages or scenarios have given you a nagging suspicion that you might be missing something?

In what ways do you see a discrepancy between your life and the faith and purpose of the early Christ-followers found in Scripture?

On a scale from one to ten, to what degree has the purpose of your life been linked to the fulfillment of the Great Commission? What number would you like it to be? How can you become more engaged?

Word of God: *Study*

Seven Keys to Living with Purpose and Destiny

1. Say “Yes” to God

“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’”

“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.” (Gen. 22:2-3)

God tested Abraham by asking him to say “yes” to something unbelievably difficult. God did not intend for Abraham to carry it out, but he did want to prove whether he would be willing to say “yes.” What if God asked you to do something difficult, like take on a foster child, or learn a foreign language so you could witness to your Iraqi neighbor? Would you say “yes”? Or more simply, what if God asked you to invite your co-worker to church? Would you?

My friend Kevin recently confessed that he has missed key opportunities to add purpose and value to his life by failing to say “yes” to doors God had opened. In this moment of self-disclosure Kevin admitted, “I need to say ‘yes’ to God more often.” His honesty can challenge us to consider opportunities to add joy and purpose to our lives by simply by saying, “yes” to God.

I’m not advocating that we say “yes” every time anyone asks us to do anything. But do we say “yes” to the rich opportunities that God provides us?

Identify one opportunity that saying “yes” to could connect you with your God-given purpose:

2. Connect with Others in Meaningful Ways

“When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matt. 9:36)

When we connect with others, including those who are hurting, we connect with the heart of Jesus in a meaningful way.

When my wife and I led a team of high school students on a mission trip to Alaska, Kelly made a meaningful connection with one of the chaperones named Rachel. Rachel had struggled to come to grips

with circumstances in her past and had resisted the invitation to let Jesus enter her heart and heal her wounds. God used the connection that Kelly initiated to unlock Rachel's heart and bring healing to her life.

How could your connection with someone who is hurting join them to the source of healing and life?

3. Align Your Life with the Great Commission

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28:19)

I was preparing a group of high school students to go on a mission trip to India. During that training week, Paul, one of the students, invited Jesus to be the Savior of his life. Yes, you read that correctly: Paul got saved on his own mission trip. (I'm compelled to state here that the most fundamental key to living in purpose and destiny is the foundation of receiving salvation through the forgiveness available in Jesus Christ.)

The next week we were in Northern India among an unreached people group—one that had never heard the gospel in their tribe's history. When Jesus provided an opportunity to openly share the gospel with a large gathering, I requested a volunteer. Paul immediately responded. If you think that aligning your life with the Great Commission is only for an elite few, take a lesson from Paul, who shared the gospel with an unreached people group in the very first week after he was saved!

What incremental steps could you take to align your life with the Great Commission?

4. Be Available

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isa. 6:8)

Isaiah certainly did not feel worthy to answer the call, but he stood available. A foundational factor of success is just showing up! It's not necessarily the one with the most talent who makes the greatest contribution; more often, it's the one who is simply willing and available.

I was in Delhi, India when after an early morning run, I approached a small shop to buy a bottle of water. Babu, the young shopkeeper, was curious and eager to engage. I saw an opportunity, so I made myself available to talk and to answer his questions. The next day I returned and Babu and his uncles gathered around my iPhone to take in a short gospel video from the Jesus Film Media App.

He invited me to return the next evening, at which time I discovered that Babu was the Hindu priest in charge of leading their evening ritual. Before they began, Babu invited me to share the gospel message inside the Hindu temple. This story is still unfolding, but it began with buying a bottle of water and being available to be used by God.

How can you become more available to the call of Jesus in your own life?

5. Serve Those in Need

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

My friend Wilson serves HIV-positive persons in a major city in South India. I once spent an entire day observing him as he carried out his unique ministry to these outcasts and the destitute. We visited his home where he and his small team care for those dying of AIDS. I did not see an overt witness, so I asked Wilson the question, “What percentage of these people come into a saving relationship with Jesus through your ministry?” Without hesitation, Wilson responded, “About 95%.” He perceived that I thought I had misunderstood his response so he continued, “All of these people are dying. We, who have the hope and life of Jesus Christ, are the only ones who care for them. Through our compassionate witness, nearly every one turns to Jesus.”

It was then that a feeble woman resident grasped my hand and interjected into our conversation, “I would rather have AIDS and know Jesus, than to not have AIDS and not know Jesus.”

Wilson is one of my heroes.

How can your simple acts of service provide kingdom-building opportunities?

6. Invest in God’s Kingdom

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt. 6:33)

My friend Tom is a businessman with a goal of investing over a million dollars in the Great Commission. (I share his story in chapter 10 of *Mission Accomplished*.) His business has often struggled, even to the point of collapse. When I provided Tom with the opportunity to invest in a Bible project for a people group who had no Scripture in their language, Tom and his wife gave without hesitation. His gift continues to pay eternal dividends.

How can you invest in God’s kingdom work in more significant ways?

7. Share Jesus with Others

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

When my wife and I were camping with our family in southern Utah, my wife met a photographer staying at the same campground. She invited him for breakfast in our tiny vintage camper and we engaged in delightful conversation. We both shared with genuine authenticity the hope of our faith in Christ. Kelly presented him with her very own travel Bible, and we continue to stay in contact and pray regularly for this photographer.

How can you make sharing Jesus with others a more natural and normal part of your lifestyle?

Voice of God: *Listen*

I asked several “What if” questions above in the Introduction, which I will repeat below. For each question, invite the Holy Spirit to stir your heart to re-write the “what if” into a faith proclamation:

What if the Great Commission is the most important mandate because Father knows better than anyone that his Commission is integrally tied to my destiny? ¹

What if it’s not about God trying to get me to do something that I really don’t want to do, but rather that he is opening a door to my most fulfilling life? ²

What if my life *can* have purpose? ³

What if I can impact another human being and see that person’s life changed for eternity? ⁴

What if I was created for something much bigger than myself? ⁵

Character of God: *Abide* - God is the King of Heaven and the Lord of Hosts

God is the mighty King of heaven and the Lord over all the host of angelic beings. He reigns over the heavens and the earth.

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” (Dan. 4:37)

“‘Neither,’ he replied, ‘but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, ‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’” (Josh. 5:14)

“Micaiah continued, ‘Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.’” (1Kings 22:19)

As I see God as the King of heaven, I trust that he is in control and I gladly submit my life to him.

Pray

Jesus, I believe that you created my life with meaning and purpose. Forgive me for the times I become self-absorbed and fail to see the larger plans you have for me. Teach me to walk in faith-filled obedience. I'm ready to say "yes" to the next faith-stretching opportunity you have for me. I know that I need you to fulfill the destiny you have for me. Teach me to daily keep my eyes on you. Amen.

Faith in Action

Find the YouTube channel "Marty Meyer" and watch the short videos entitled "Keys to Living with Purpose and Destiny." Subscribe to the channel. Then share the link with your friends to encourage them to live with God-given purpose.

Review the Word of God: *Abide* section and make plans to implement each of the seven keys within your own life.

A Note from Coach Marty:

We have spent nearly a month together building up faith muscle. Now we will learn how to really put them to use. Whether you are called by Jesus to go across the ocean or across the street, he wants you to discover the joy and fulfillment found in joining Jesus on *his* mission. He is still in the business of seeking and saving the lost, and we get to be an important part of his work. The best is yet to come!

Answer Key:

¹ I will discover my destiny with new clarity through the lens of the Great Commission!

² I am ready to walk through the door that God is opening, to enter the most fulfilling chapter of my life.

³ I will wake up each morning excited for the purpose God has for me.

⁴ I will put into practice all the faith lessons that I've been learning, to impact the lives of others.

⁵ Jesus, I'm ready to make a big impact by living for others rather than for myself.

Day 30: Find Passion for Life

When we discover our true purpose, aligning our life with the mission of Jesus, this generates passion for life. Jesus lived his days on earth with purposeful passion as an example to us. He arose early in the dark of morning, not because he had to, but eager to start the new day which the Father had planned for him. The same can be true for us: we can wake up and proclaim, “Good morning Father! What have you planned for me today?” After Jesus invested time in intimate prayer, he went out prepared to bless others.

I have discovered that I can brighten someone’s whole day by offering the simple question, “How can I pray for you?” I’ve seen heartfelt reactions from waitresses and postal workers, overwhelmed that someone would care. My wife and I both carry a box of *Epic Faith* books in our cars, in preparation to be a blessing to others. One day after a brief conversation with a Staples employee, I felt a nudge to go to my car and return with a copy. I presented her with the small gift and she stood stunned, then said, “It was God who sent you to encourage me today.”

Jesus demonstrated that a key to finding passion for life is to live for others! “...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:26-28) Let’s discover real passion for life by living to bless others.

Read: Chapter 1, “Passion for Life,” from *Mission Accomplished* (printed below)

Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation. – Jesus Christ

I found myself weeping on the floor, enclosed in a small room of a rundown Salvation Army youth hostel in Mumbai, India. The source of my travail was not mere sadness but something much deeper—as if an unfulfilled longing shattered my heart. I didn’t understand it, and I couldn’t control what was happening to me.

Just hours before, I had experienced one of my life’s greatest joys. I had been exploring the streets of Mumbai when I discovered a narrow and seemingly secret passageway that zigzagged through ramshackle buildings and dingy homes until it opened into an expansive fishing village nestled on the shore of the Arabian Sea. Though I could not speak their language, the people welcomed this blond hair blue-eyed 25-year-old American into their community. I watched the old fishermen mend nets, much like I had imagined Peter and Andrew doing prior to being sent out by Jesus for a miraculous catch. When some teenagers started a soccer game on their makeshift field, which incidentally doubled as the community bathroom, I joined in and quickly found myself in the goal-keeper position. The goal I guarded was comprised of two sticks shoved into the dry, rocky soil.

I had been an acclaimed goalie at the university level, and after making a remarkable save, the game quickly changed to “let’s take turns trying to score on the American.” Something like thirty penalty kicks followed. I dove at shot after shot, soon covered in filth, but I didn’t care. To see the laughter and celebration on those teen faces when someone scored against me made the dirt-crusting all worth it. Ultimately I had to say goodbye to my new friends as it was getting late, and I felt certain that my outreach team would be wondering as to where I had disappeared.

Later that evening when I decided to take some time in prayer and reflection, I was overwhelmed with uncontrollable weeping and dropped face-first to the floor. Uncertain what was happening, I began to cry out to God for answers. Am I losing my mind? Why does my heart feel like it’s breaking? Does this have something to do with my desire to be a missionary?

Until recently, I hadn’t ever considered becoming a missionary. So what had brought me to this place, in a city a world away from my Idaho home?

Missionary Seeds

I grew up unaware of the significance of the Great Commission. I knew that Jesus had instructed his disciples to share the Good News of salvation through his death and resurrection with the whole world, but I certainly did not

sense that it had anything to do with *my* life purpose. Perhaps seeds of missions had been planted deep in me that were waiting patiently to grow.

My mom served in the ladies' group at church that intentionally supported foreign missionaries. The women would at times sell baked goods to raise money for missions' projects or would put together a used clothing drive and send a care package to people serving God in some faraway place. Mom must have played a special role in this, because when missionaries visited our church they would present her with "artifacts" such as hand-carved bowls, plates and wooden forks. These gifts were proudly displayed on our family's dining room wall.

From time to time, during family devotions, mom would tell my siblings and me stories she had heard from missionaries from the field. I still vividly recall one story that was especially scary to a seven-year-old boy. It tells of a man who served as a missionary to a remote tribe of headhunters in the jungles of New Guinea. This westerner discovered an in-road to this unique people by adopting their way of life and eventually becoming one of them—with the exception that he would never join in the raiding and killing of people from other villages. In time he patiently shared the Gospel with this secluded people group, and many in the village became Christians. Even so, some were drawn back to their killing, headhunting ways. Anytime a seeming omen occurred, superstition demanded that the villagers needed another head from the neighboring tribe as a sacrifice. The beloved missionary tried to convince them otherwise, but when he realized that the men would not be dissuaded and more innocent blood would be shed, he offered a solution:

"I happen to know that if you go to this certain place tomorrow night and hide in the bushes along the trail, there will be a man riding on a donkey wearing a red hood. You can take this man as your sacrifice." They did as the missionary had instructed, and as the sun was setting they saw the man approaching on a donkey. The warriors quickly attacked him and cut off his head. As they removed the hood they were shocked to discover that they had just taken the life of their friend—their own beloved missionary.

They realized then that the missionary had willingly given his own life in the place of another, to rescue them from their sinful ways—and that in doing so he was an example of what Jesus had done for them. They were struck to the heart and repented for all the blood they had shed. They honored the fallen missionary with a proper burial and committed to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

I remember being very disturbed by the story, thinking that this missionary must have made a terrible mistake. Yet I couldn't deny that Jesus had made the same sacrificial, horrifically wonderful choice for us. Before he died on the cross he told his followers, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (John 10:17-18a)

While I was in grade school our church sponsored a refugee family from Vietnam. We learned that this family was well educated yet had nothing since fleeing for their lives from their war-torn country. My mom had volunteered my family to serve as hosts for these new arrivals.

I remember great frustration in not being able to communicate with our Vietnamese guests. I wondered about how lost they certainly felt in a new environment with a completely different culture, food, language and way of life. In time they learned English, the parents secured jobs, the children went to school, and our families became dear friends.

Dad helped to find a small house for them; a tall two-story home, though very narrow and in terrible need of paint. Yan, the mother, wanted to paint it in two tones, but in a way that looked unusual to us. We did as she desired and painted the top half of their house bright green and the bottom half bright yellow. My brother called it "tutti frutti" because it looked like a lemon and a lime smashed together.

Our new Vietnamese family members would often invite us over in appreciation for the things our family did for them. Some of their food was amazing—like nothing I had ever tasted before, in a good way—while other dishes horrified our senses. We secretly called one dessert "green pea under the sea" because it looked like a chartreuse swampy pudding with unknown bits swimming about. I didn't want to offend them, but I could not bring myself to partake of it.

Looking back, I'm grateful for these experiences that exposed me to people of cultures different from my own. It's easy to become so comfortable with our way of life that we ignore the greater world we live in and the implications of the Gospel to reach it. Our comfort becomes a prison that keeps us from the destiny for which we were created. While entire peoples created in God's image still wait to hear the Gospel, our isolation keeps us from bringing it, as well as from receiving the joy of discovering the uniqueness God has deposited in them.

What is the Great Commission?

Why do so many of us find church boring and lack a sense of destiny in our own lives? It's because we have neglected the central purpose to which Jesus has called us.

Just prior to taking his last breath on the cross Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "It is finished." He did what he came to do. He gave his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Mission accomplished! But the mission of his disciples, including you and me, was only beginning.

Jesus rose from the dead and gives us this same resurrection power to accomplish his purpose. What purpose? He didn't want us to miss it, so he delineated it through his very last words on earth before ascending to heaven. I quoted this in the Introduction, but let's have a look this important passage again:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

Embedded in these epic words spoken over 2,000 years ago is a key to the life-purpose of each one of us. We commonly refer to this scripture and Jesus' mandate to make disciples of all nations as the "Great Commission." Although Jesus made his assignment painfully clear, many believers fail to recognize that this is *their primary purpose*. More alarming is the fact that most believers are completely unaware of the Great Commission.

A recent Barna study asked regular church-goers if they had ever heard the term, "The Great Commission." While a meager half of those polled had previously heard the phrase, only seventeen percent could explain what it meant. Keep in mind, this is not a survey of people off the street, but of those who identify themselves as Christians who regularly attend church.

Barna also presented churchgoers with five different passages from scripture and asked them to identify which one is known as the Great Commission. A little more than one-third of churchgoers (37%) correctly identified the Bible passage Matthew 28:18-20.ⁱ

Equally troubling is the fact that the younger the generation, the less likely they are to identify the Great Commission as found in scripture. Not only have we failed to embrace the destiny-fulfilling effects of the Great Commission, we have failed to inspire the next generation toward their primary purpose in life! How will we discover passion for life if we are disconnected from our primary purpose? Our disconnect from the Great Commission leaves us wandering aimlessly like the unemployed workers in Jesus' parable of the vineyard.ⁱⁱ We remain idle and aimless when the master wants to give us meaningful engagement in his vineyard.

Finding Purpose in God's Mission

As a teenager I remained rudderless while searching for direction. The only thing that gave me a sense of purpose was working at a Christian summer camp in the mountains of Idaho. Initially it was all about the fishing, backpacking and mountain climbing. But something began to shift in my heart. Jesus had become more important in my life and I thrived on seeing the "lights come on" among the young campers. Throughout my high school years and into college I would anticipate my summer retreat into Idaho's crags to spend those days impacting young persons with God's Word. I loved working at camp with my brother and my closest friends—it's what I lived for.

My older brother, Rob, was the camp's director and from time to time he would invite his friends with missionary experiences to share with the campers. I remember listening to his friend Jerry with wide-eyed amazement as he told stories of smuggling Bibles into Russia. He was risking his life to take the Bible, a book I took for granted, to people who had never encountered the Word of God.

Other friends, Dan and Cathleen, visited the camp and shared stories of working with Laotian people. Dan gave a testimony of how he had previously hated the Asian culture and had allowed past wounds to build walls of prejudice in him. When Dan and his wife signed up to go on a short-term mission to Australia, God sent them to work with Laotian refugees living there! God changed his heart and they fell in love with these displaced people from the country of Laos.

Toward the end of one of my summers I received a strange prompting. It was as if I knew that I would not be returning to camp the following year. I felt a strong impression that instead of working at camp, I was to go on a mission trip. I did not recognize it at that time as "the voice of God," but looking back it is clear that he was orchestrating a divine encounter that would leave a life-changing impact.

The following season, Dan and Cathleen helped me find a summer-long “Around-the-World Outreach” facilitated through a group called Youth With A Mission out of Los Angeles.

The outreach started with two weeks of missions and evangelism training and the more I learned, the more I became convinced that I wanted to be a missionary. What touched me even more deeply than the teaching was the passion for Jesus evident in the hearts of young missionaries around me. One young man leading worship would pound on the keys and make up lyrics as he went along. I will never forget his passionate prayer, “Lord, I want my heart to break with the things that break yours. I want to be so close to you, Jesus, that I can feel your heart beating inside of me.”

By the time I left for outreach, I had two prayers ringing in my *own* heart: “God, where do you want me to go as a missionary?” and “Father, I want to know your heart and feel it beating inside of *me*.”

My outreach team traveled to Switzerland, Germany, and France, but it was not until we reached India that the Lord answered both of my prayers. By the time our small team arrived in Mumbai, many of our members fell sick, and some were afraid to go outside our Salvation Army youth hostel to experience Indian culture. So I went out alone, unprepared for the human suffering I witnessed. I observed the sick, the crippled, and the hungry begging for food. I encountered a woman mourning over her husband’s dead body in the street. I also discovered that little fishing village by the bay where I began to fall in love with Indian people sewing nets and playing soccer.

As I mentioned before, I had never experienced anything like what suddenly overcame me that evening when I returned to my meager room in the hostel. The next day I convinced two of the guys from my team to go back out into the streets with me. We carried children on our shoulders and played carefree soccer with teenagers, but when I found myself alone later that day, I again fell into inconsolable sobbing. On the third day, when heart-rending tears began to flow, I questioned my sanity and called out to God through my relentless weeping.

“God, what is happening to me? Am I losing my mind? My heart is breaking inside of me and I don’t understand why!”

The Lord then spoke to my heart with alarming clarity: “Marty, you have been praying that you might know my heart. I have revealed to you how my heart breaks for my lost children.” Even as those words resonated, the Lord began to question me: “Do you think that I do not see those who die in the streets? Do you think that I do not long for those who are separated from me? Who will be my hands and who will be my feet? Who will be my mouthpiece that brings the only message that gives life?”

The tears stopped flowing but my heart pounded, sobered by the seriousness of his questioning. I felt like giving a logical response, but could I muster the courage to pray it? Finally, softly, I spoke, “Here am I, send me. I’ll spend the rest of my life as a missionary in India. Just say the word.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Knowing the Father’s Heart

This experience of feeling God’s heart and my simple prayer of response has shaped the destiny of my life. I have found my true life’s purpose, as all believers must, by connecting to God’s purpose. One might try to deflect that idea by saying, “Marty, that’s just because *you* are *called* to be a missionary.” To this, I will simply point out that the Great Commission is not given to some special category of Christian, rather it was mandated to all who would consider himself or herself a follower of Jesus.

Others might retort, “If I had a special experience like Marty had, then certainly I would invest my life in the Great Commission.” If this sentiment is sincere, I would invite you to earnestly seek the Father and ask him to give you a revelation of his longing heart for his lost children. This is a prayer Abba loves to answer! I have often prayed with earnest believers to receive an impartation of Father’s heart and have observed the overwhelming love of God for the lost fill their heart as he did for me years ago on a dirty youth hostel floor. These earnest God-seekers always emerge from the experience with fresh resolve to impact the nations.

The question is not, “Does Jesus want me to go?” The question is, “Will I ask God to give me His heart for the lost, and persist until I receive it?” When you feel his heart beating inside your chest you will know the answer to that question.

But even if one never receives a special revelation, it does not change the simple truth that the Word of God calls us to go. Anyone who wants to discover real purpose will find it *in connection* to this final command of Jesus: “Go, and make disciples!”

Jesus completed his mission on the cross and gave access to every tribe and people group to come into a reconciled relationship with Father. Our mission is to go and share this Good News with the world, even to the “ends of the earth.” The Great Commission is the Father’s invitation to join him in a life-transforming adventure. When we

say “yes” to him, we discover a course set before us that brings a new level of intimacy with God and a sense of purpose that our heart has been longing for.

This task is far from complete, but it is within reach. It will be accomplished by faithful Christ followers like you and me who hear his call and respond in faith.

Questions: Drawing from the reading above, respond to the following questions.

Why did Marty’s experience in Mumbai, India produce both joy and sadness? ¹

What were some of the “mission seeds” that had been planted in Marty’s heart? ²

“Our comfort becomes a prison that keeps us from the destiny for which we were created. While entire peoples created in God’s image still wait to hear the Gospel, our isolation keeps us from bringing it, as well as from receiving the joy of discovering the uniqueness God has deposited in them.”

What is your reaction to this quote from the reading?

In your own words, what is the Great Commission?

To what degree does the Great Commission define the primary purpose of your life? Explain.

What were Marty’s two prayers during his first mission trip? ³

How might making these prayers shape your own purpose and passion?

Word of God: *Study*

Passion is Kindled by a Revelation of the Fiery king.

Read Revelation 1:1-17.

Make a list of all that is revealed about Jesus in these verses.

How do these attributes kindle your love for and admiration of the King?

Rekindle Your First Love Fire!

Read Revelation 2:1-7.

For what are the followers of Jesus commended? (v.1-3) ⁴

How can you relate to this list?

What rebuke is given? (v. 4) ⁵

In what ways can you relate to this word of correction?

In what ways have you left Jesus out of your life?

Three Ways to Return to Your First Love

Remember: (v. 5)

Think about the times or seasons in which you were most in love with Jesus. What did that look like?

Repent: (v. 5)

From what do you need to turn away?

Honestly, what needs to change in your life for that to happen?

Do: (v. 5)

What were the beneficial things “you did at first” in your young faith walk?

What can you do to demonstrate your passion for Jesus and rekindle your “first-love” fire?

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psa. 42:1-2)

How can we, like the psalmist, stoke our passion for God?

Our Passion for Jesus Stokes our Purpose

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Php. 1:20-21)

The apostle Paul was so passionate for Jesus that Christ became his life. He frequently faced beatings and imprisonment for pursuing his purpose of spreading the gospel. How can our lives likewise reflect Paul’s statement: “For to me, to live is Christ”?

“If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For *Christ’s love compels* us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Cor. 5:13-15)

How does your passion for Jesus drive your purpose?

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus to do good works*, which God *prepared in advance* for us to do.” (Eph. 2:8-10)

How does God’s gift of grace motivate your service of others?

What does it mean to you that God has pre-planned purposes for you?

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I *press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: *Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead*, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:12-14)

Notice, Jesus “took hold” of you for a purpose. How can you “press on” to grab hold of God’s purposes for you?

What do you think is the “prize”?

Why do you think it may be important to “forget what is behind” in order to “strain toward what is ahead?”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb. 12:1-2)

What hindrances will you need to lose in order to run with perseverance?

Jesus has marked out a course for you. Do you know what it is? According to your reading today, how will you discover it? ⁶

Notice how Jesus approached his painful purpose with joy. How did his passion for us drive his purpose? ⁷

Likewise, how can our passion for Jesus move us to live for others?

Voice of God: *Listen*

Take a moment to settle into the presence of God. Invite Holy Spirit to germinate the mission seeds he has already planted in your heart. Make some notes here of what he prompts or reminds you. Then, earnestly ask Father to give you a revelation of his heart for his lost children.

Character of God: *Abide* - God is the King of Glory

“Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.” (Psa. 24:7-8)

Jesus, the fiery King, is our King of Glory. He leads us into battle to accomplish his purpose, to rescue the nations so that they will know his benevolent reign. Our focus on the King of Glory will give us confidence for every mission he sets before us.

Pray

Jesus, I want to connect with your call for my life in a meaningful way. I pray that the mission seeds that you have planted and continue to plant in my heart would spring to life. Father, I want to know you more intimately. Give me an impartation of your heart for your lost children. I want my heart to beat with passion for your purposes. Amen.

Faith in Action

What “mission seeds” can you identify in your own life?

Set life-goals that will produce a greater alignment to the Great Commission.

Go online and begin to research famous Christian missionaries. We can learn from and be inspired by those who have gone before us.

Intentionally cultivate a friendship with a family living near you from a different culture.

A Note from Coach Marty:

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

You did it!!! Completing *Thirty Days of Epic Faith* is a major accomplishment, and I am bursting with pride that you pushed through! All of your strict training is paying off in the prize of a more intimate relationship with God, and the fulfilling life of accomplishing his mission. Of course, you know that this completion marks the beginning of a whole new adventure with Jesus. I believe that this training program has laid a solid foundation for the next steps that Jesus has for you. Go for it. Press on to take hold of the fulfilling destiny that Jesus has prepared for you.

Answer Key:

- ¹ It was a joyful experience to interact with people from the small fishing village and to play soccer with the teens. His sadness was in connection to feeling God's heart for his lost children.
- ² Marty's mom served on the mission committee and told stories of missionaries from the field. His family sponsored a refugee family from Vietnam.
- ³ "God, where do you want me to go as a missionary?" and "Father, I want to know your heart and feel it beating inside of me."
- ⁴ Good deeds, hard work, perseverance, standard of holiness, and discernment.
- ⁵ "You have forsaken your first love."
- ⁶ Align your life with the Great Commission.
- ⁷ Jesus knew what his cross would accomplish—the redemption of the children of God. Knowing the ultimate value of God's children to the Father, he could consider it "joy" to suffer and die in order to accomplish that purpose.

ⁱ Barna report, "Translating the Great Commission," (March 27, 2018).

ⁱⁱ See Matthew 20:1-16.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from *Epic Faith* (YWAM Publishing: Seattle, 2016), 105-106.

EPIC PRAYER STRATEGY

Use this process to create your own epic prayer strategy. Learn to link your prayer requests to the Word, Voice, and Character of God. This page will walk you through the instructions, and on the following page you will list your prayer needs and build a prayer strategy for each need. Pray through each need thoroughly to Jesus in this way. (Remember to include, as one prayer need, someone who does not know Jesus!)

Prayer Need: Identify prayer needs that are so specific that you will know when an answer has come. Imagine Jesus asking the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” Write it as a very specific request.

“Father, I need you. I invite you to work in this situation...”

God’s Word: Ask Jesus to lead you to scriptures that address your prayer need. Record those verses to accompany your specific prayer request and pray these scriptures as you appeal to God.

“God, I trust you because your Word says...”

God’s Voice: Invite Jesus to speak and inform you how to pray. He has the best prayer strategy for your situation.

“Jesus, I invite you to speak to me, and to align my prayers to your heart...”

(Pause. Listen!)

God’s Character: Connect your prayer requests to the character of God. When you pray, appeal to an aspect of God that relates to your need: his love, justice, faithfulness, power, grace, etc.

“Lord, I trust you to meet this need because you are...”

God’s Response: An important part of our prayer life is recognizing God’s reply. Glorify God and give him credit by recording and then thanking him for the ways that you will see him move in response to your prayers. We can even thank him in advance! Record specifically how Jesus answered your prayer and praise him for it.

“I thank you in advance that you will...”

Spend time daily, expectantly praying through your list using the epic aspects of faith that you have added. We can expect God’s great response to what we pray because he is great, and he always acts in ways consistent with his character.

EPIC PRAYER STRATEGY

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Character:
Response:

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