

Introduction: How you respond to invitations shapes who you are

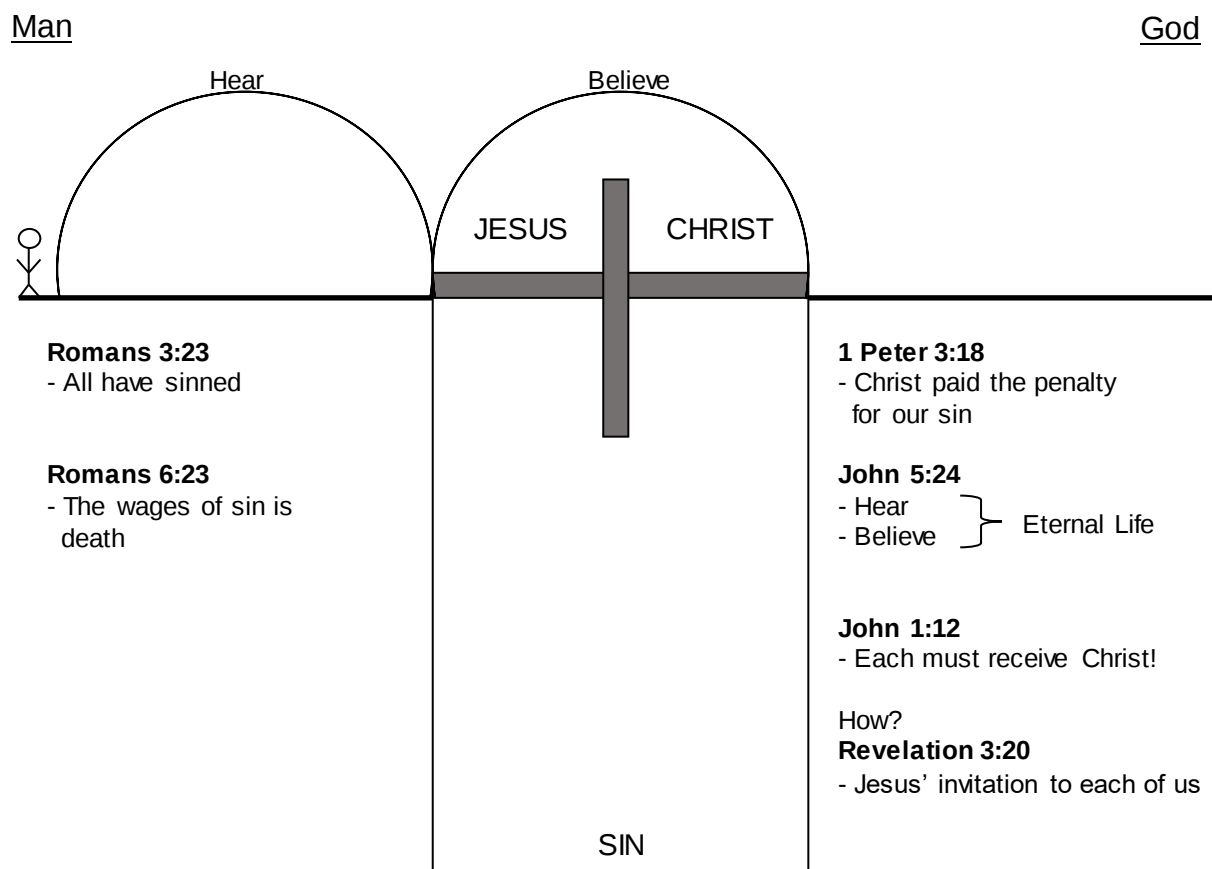
Invitation #1 – Come to Me

²⁸ “*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*” ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ *For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*”

Matthew 11:28-30

1. There's an INVITATION.
2. The audience is people that have EARS to HEAR.
3. There's a promise of REST.
4. There's a process of taking up His YOKE and learning from Him.

The bridge illustration



"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

John 5:24

Discussion Questions:

1. What invitations have you said “yes” to that have positively impacted your life? Negatively?
2. What in Chip’s story caused you to think more deeply about your own journey with Jesus? Why?
3. How is “Coming to Jesus” both a first-time event and an ongoing process?
4. What temptations, lies, people, or situation’s keep you from coming to Jesus?
5. What specifically would it look like for you to “Come to Jesus” today in your life and relationship with Him?

Review:

Invitation #1 → Come to Me

Matthew 11:28-30

The promise = Peace, rest, wholeness, guidance, acceptance.

Invitation #2 → Follow Me = An intentional apprenticeship to Luke 6:40

“...Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:19

Context of the invitation:

- Peter already believed Jesus was the Messiah. John 1:40-42
- Peter witnessed Jesus' power and love. Luke 4:38-44
- Peter's personal invitation. Luke 5:1-11

¹ Now it happened that while the **crowd was pressing around Him** and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; ² and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. ³ And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began **teaching the people** from the boat. ⁴ When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷ so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and **filled both of the boats**, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And **Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."** ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

Luke 5:1-11

What did Jesus teach Peter to follow?

Answer

- His **DEPENDENCY** – John 5:30
- His **MISSION** – Luke 19:10
- His **HEART** – Matthew 25:34-46
- His teaching – Matthew 7:26
- His **MOTIVES** – John 4:34
- To **DIE** well – John 12:24
- His **RESURRECTION** – Luke 22:29-30

Peter's Journey

Crawl → Leaves all

Walk → Boat

Stand → "Declares!"

Stumble → Rebukes Jesus

Fall → Betrays

Crawl → Forgiven

Walk → Restored

Run → Leads/Teaches others

Jesus invites you to follow Him

²³ And He was saying to them all, "If anyone **wishes to come after Me**, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. ²⁵ **For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?**

Luke 9:23-25

Discussion Questions:

1. What characterized those who accepted Jesus' invitation to follow Him?
2. Who do you know that exemplifies following Jesus the way the disciples did?
3. What did the disciples see and believe about Jesus that motivated them "to leave everything to follow Jesus"? What are the rewards? (Mark 10:29-31)
4. What in Chip's story encouraged you to follow Jesus despite the cost and challenges to be faithful to Him?
5. What specific steps do you sense God is calling you to take today to fully follow Jesus and His good plan for your life?

Introduction: The Christian life is not a matter of doing more or behaving better. It's a matter of going **DEEPER**.

Invitation #1 → Come to Me

The promise = Peace, rest, wholeness, guidance, and acceptance.

Invitation #2 → Follow Me

The promise = Purpose, direction, meaning, and fulfillment.

Invitation #3 → **ABIDE IN ME** = Intentionally staying connected to Jesus.

The promise = Freedom, joy, power, and fruitfulness.

Why it's hard to abide:

1. **DISTRACTIONS**
2. **DISTORTED DESIRES**
3. **DISCOURAGEMENT**

Context of the invitation

John 13-17

Chapter 13 – The Lord’s Supper and Jesus washes the disciples’ feet.

Chapter 14 – Jesus is going to prepare a place.

Chapter 15 – Jesus uses a metaphor to say, “I’m leaving physically, but I want you to stay connected to Me.

Chapter 16 – Jesus says, “The Holy Spirit is going to dwell in you and manifest My presence.”

Chapter 17 – Jesus is praying for the disciples and for us.

¹ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ **Abide in Me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it **abides** in the vine, so neither can you unless you **abide in Me**. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides in Me** and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not **abide in Me**, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ If you **abide in Me**, and My words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. ⁹ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; **abide in My love**. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will **abide in My love**; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and **abide** in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

John 15:1-11

What did Jesus teach the disciples about abiding?

The answer (John 15:1-11)

A metaphor (v.1)

A process (v.2-5)

A warning (v.6)

A promise (v.7)

The outcome (v. 8-10)

The purpose (v. 11)

Disciples – “process to abide”

Fearful – Confused, anxious

Failure – They flee

Hopeful – Death defeated

Promises – Trust His Word

Prayer – Receive power of the Holy Spirit

Preach – Acts 2, fruit

Jesus invites you to abide in Him



The Wheel Diagram – created by Navigator
founder Dawson Trotman in 1930

WHEEL ILLUSTRATION

- ⇒ The wheel serves as a guide in our own personal growth, and as a basis for abiding in Christ.
- ⇒ A wheel is dynamic, always moving.
- ⇒ When a wheel moves the hub is seen, not the spokes; power comes from the hub.
- ⇒ Balanced spokes make for a smooth and directed ride.
- ⇒ The emphasis of the spokes is relationship. Love is the goal.
- ⇒ Vertically, between God and us.
- ⇒ Horizontally, between people and us.
- ⇒ Obedience is where the rubber hits the road.
- ⇒ A wheel moves in a particular direction. As the wheel of the Christian life moves, ask yourself:
 - Why is it going (purpose)?
 - Where is it going (goal)?

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Jesus teach about abiding at this point in His ministry?
2. Why is it so critical to stay connected to Jesus and His power daily?
3. What are your biggest challenges/barriers to abiding in Jesus?
4. What in Chip's story was most encouraging, helpful, or new to you?
5. What specific step do you need to take this week to abide? Who will you ask to help you make and keep your commitment?

Review:

Invitation #1 → Come to Me

Invitation #2 → Follow Me

Invitation #3 → Abide in Me

Invitation #4 → **GO MAKE DISCIPLES** = An unspeakable privilege to join Jesus in His rescue mission to bring life, light, and love to a broken world.

“...the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

John 20:21

Context

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

Matthew 28:18-20

3 Timeless principles from Jesus:

Luke 6:39-41

1. You cannot **IMPART** what you do not **POSSESS**. (v. 39)
2. More is **CAUGHT** than **TAUGHT**. (v. 40)
3. We must “**BE**” what we want others to “**BECOME**.” (v. 41)

Become a Romans 12 Christian (A grace-based relational profile of an authentic follower of Jesus)

5 Key relationships – r12 Biblical responses:

1. Relationship with God – SURRENDER to God.

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:1

2. Relationship with the world – SEPARATE from the world.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

3. Relationship with yourself – SOBER self-assessment.

³For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Romans 12:3-8

4. Relationship with believers – SERVING in love.

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

Romans 12:9-13

5. Relationship with nonbelievers – SUPERNATURALLY responding to evil with good.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:14-21

A new paradigm to consider:

- The power of a "to be" list.
- 4 key words: objective, prioritize, schedule, discipline

3 Relationships to pursue:

1. A Paul – to learn from.
2. A Timothy – to invest in.
3. A Barnabas – to do life with.

The Four Great Invitations: A Personal Assessment of Your Journey with Jesus

Where Are You in This Process?

Growth is hard to quantify. Christlikeness is even harder, especially since measuring ourselves against Jesus always reveals that we are significantly short of the goal. But transformation is nevertheless noticeable. We recognize the difference between before-and-after pictures, between a caterpillar and a butterfly, or between a seed and a harvest.

Transformation looks like people who have been lost, broken, or stuck becoming loved, healed, and free—and eager to offer what God has given them to others.

Where are you on the path of transformation? The following diagnostic tool will help you assess where you are—again, not in or-der to get lost in introspection, lament your lack of change, or make you feel like a failure, **but to get a clear idea of where you’re going from here.** It will give you some perspective on your transformation into the image of Christ and, I hope, be an encouragement one day when you look back and see how far you’ve come.

Rank yourself (or better yet, ask a friend to help rank you) on the scale from 0% to 100% in the following areas. Don’t worry if you aren’t completely sure what to mark; this is a tool for personal reflection and discussion with fellow believers.

1.) I am currently involved in activities and training that are equipping me to do the work of the ministry.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sporadically</u>	<u>Consistently</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

2.) I am regularly participating in intentional, meaningful, biblical worship.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sporadically</u>	<u>Consistently</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

3.) I am currently in an apprentice or mentoring relationship with an older believer who is stimulating my spiritual growth.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sporadically</u>	<u>Consistently</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

4.) I am currently ministering and building into the lives of others.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sporadically</u>	<u>Consistently</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

5.) I am becoming more like Christ, as evidenced by a desire to read God’s Word, a disciplined study and understanding of His Word, and an ability to see through false teaching.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Sporadically</u>	<u>Consistently</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

6.) I am becoming more like Christ, as evidenced by enjoying one or more deep, authentic Christ-centered relationships.

<u>Not Currently</u>	<u>1-2</u>	<u>3 or more</u>
0%	50-60%	90-100%

7.) I am currently in a small group where speaking the truth in love is common. I have three or four gut-level accountability relationships that are helping me through the most sensitive areas of my life.

<u>Not Currently</u>	<u>Hit and miss</u>	<u>3 or more</u>
0%	50-60%	90-100%

8.) I am becoming more like Christ, as evidenced by a desire to become more deeply involved with God’s people, to worship, to learn, to serve, and to meet the needs of others. I have a clear sense that I fit in the body of Christ. I am loved by others, and I find myself caring and helping them in increasing measure.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Significantly</u>	<u>Yes</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

9.) I am becoming more like Christ, as evidenced by compassion for and acts of service on behalf of “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40, 45)—those who need provision of food, clothing, shelter, and other acts of mercy.

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Significantly</u>	<u>Yes</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

10.) I am following Jesus’ Great Commission by sharing God’s love verbally and as a lifestyle to make disciples and witness to the gospel (Matt 28:19–20).

<u>Never</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Significantly</u>	<u>Yes</u>
0%	10-15%	50-60%	90-100%

Introduction: Hope is the oxygen of the soul

- Everyone puts their hope in something or someone.
- Hope is “*a feeling that what is wanted is likely to happen.*”
Webster’s Dictionary
- We hit “rock bottom” when what or who we hoped in cannot or will not come through for us.

Rock bottom usually happens in two predictable places: The **PIT** and the **PEAK**.

When you hit rock bottom, the only direction you can look is up.

Where is God when you hit “rock bottom”?

Jesus’ Answer - Luke 15

- The occasion Luke 15:1
- The conflict Luke 15:2
- The parable Luke 15:3-32

This one parable has three mini stories:

1. The lost **SHEEP**
2. The lost **COIN**
3. The lost **SON**

Each story has five things in common:

1. Something valuable is **LOST**.
2. An intensive **SEARCH** occurs.
3. That which was lost is **FOUND**.
4. A great **CELEBRATION** follows.
5. The spiritual application is **EXPLAINED**.

What do we learn from this parable?

- God deeply values irreligious, immoral, lost people.
- God is actively drawing them to Himself.
- Heaven rejoices when one lost person repents.
- The value of that which is lost exponentially increases in each story.
(Sheep ▲ Coin ▲ Sons)
- The father in story #3 represents God.
- The two sons depict the “immoral sinners” (younger son) and Pharisees (older son).
- Both sons are equally lost, but not equally aware of their lost-ness.

Jesus Offers Hope . . . when we “blow it” big time

Luke 15:11-22

- The son’s request: “I want MINE now.”
- The son’s message: “I wish you were DEAD.”
- The implications for the Father: SOCIAL and ECONOMIC.
- The father’s unprecedented response: THUNDEROUSLY SHOCKING to his listeners.

- The son hits “rock bottom” = HOPELESS Luke 15:13-17

- The son’s response to his hopelessness: Luke 15:18-20

1. I will RETURN - go back home.
2. I will REPENT - my sin to my father and God.
3. I will MAKE RESTITUTION - as a hired hand.
4. I will DO IT NOW - so he got up and went.

- The father’s response: Luke 15:20-24
 1. The best robe
 2. The ring
 3. The sandals
 4. The fatted calf

Jesus' message: There is hope!

It's never too late! Failure is never final!

The Father is waiting, watching, and longing for RESTORATION!

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you need hope in your life right now?
2. Which part of this story resonated the most with you?
3. Who in your relational network has hit "rock bottom" and needs to know God values them through you?
4. What step of faith do you need to take to draw near to your heavenly Father?

Introduction: Two well-worn paths of life

← **Self-Discovery . . . Moral Conformity** →

← **Progressives . . . Conservatives** →

“Our Western society is so deeply divided between these two approaches that hardly anyone can conceive of any other way to live. If you criticize or distance yourself from one, everyone assumes you have chosen to follow the other, because each of these approaches tends to divide the whole world into two basic groups. The moral conformists say: ‘The immoral people – the people who ‘do their own thing’ – are the problem with the world, and moral people are the solution.’ The advocates of **self-discovery** say: ‘The bigoted people – the people who say, ‘We have the Truth’ – are the problem with the world, and progressive people are the solution.’ Each side says: ‘Our way is the way the world will be put to rights, and if you are not with us, you are against us.’”

Timothy Keller, The Prodigal God

Jesus’ parable (Luke 15) teaches both approaches are wrong.

**Where is God when being good
isn’t “good enough”?**

- The Occasion and Conflict Luke 15:1-2
- The one parable with **THREE** mini stories Luke 15:3-32

Jesus Offers Hope . . . When Our Goodness Fails

Luke 15:25-31

- The elder son's response: Anger - "I won't go **IN**."
- The elder son's reason: Pride - "I've never **DISOBEYED** you."
- The elder son's message: "You **OWE** me, I've been slaving for you."
- The elder son's attitude: It's a **TRANSACTION**.
Bitter and resentful, his motives exposed.
He wants what the father has, not the father himself.

What do we learn from the elder brother?

- Very good, moral, religious people who believe the Bible can be as lost as the most immoral sinner.
- Jesus extends forgiveness to elder brothers (Pharisees then, many of us now) – "come in to My house."
- Elder brothers' lives are as miserable as prodigals.

Traits of elder brothers and their relationship with God is characterized by . . .

- Duty and **OBLIGATION** = **DRY** prayer life.
- Thinking God owes them a **GOOD** life.
- Guilt because they feel they never quite **MEASURE UP**.
- Feeling pressured - **RULES**, **LAWS**, and **LEGALISM**.
- Performance - feeling loved only when you are **DOING** what you ought to do.
- Right living is the **MEANS** to getting what you really want from God.

Traits of elder brothers and their relationship with other people is characterized by . . .

- Feeling **SUPERIOR**, critical, prejudice, judgmental.
- The legalistic letter of law; not the **SPIRIT**.
- Championing God's **JUSTICE**; not mercy.
- **REPEL** irreligious people.
- Espousing correct doctrine, but acting in **UNLOVING WAYS**.
- Struggling with **DEPRESSION** and often having secret sins.

How do elder brothers experience God's love & forgiveness?

- Repent of their **GOOD WORKS** as the basis of their relationship with God.
- Repent of their **SELF-SEEKING** motives.
- Repent of their desire for **MEN'S** approval above God's.
- Repent of their **PRIDE** and humble themselves (admit their need).
- Refuse to **COMPARE** themselves with others.
- Refuse to **JUDGE** others.
- Draw near to the Father, just to **PLEASE** the Father.
- **SUBMIT** to God's authority in their lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Jesus shatter our preconceived “2-path” perception of doing life and finding happiness?
2. Read the quote by Timothy Keller out loud; what is it both sons have in common that make them equally lost?
3. What elder son tendencies do you have? How does a “performance-orientation” impact your relationship with God and others?
4. What does repenting look like for you? Who can you share your journey with and who can you help?

Resources: *Tired of Trying to Measure Up* by Jeffrey VanVonderan
The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning
The Return of the Prodigal Son by Henry Nouwen

Introduction: WHY would God let our most difficult problems go from bad to impossible, if He really loves us?

Jesus' Answer: John 11

A problem is brought to Jesus:

¹ Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one You love is sick."

John 11:1-3

Jesus responds to the problem:

⁴ When He heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days...

John 11:4-6

Jesus announces His plan to solve the problem:

⁷ and then He said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." ⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone You, and yet You are going back?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." ¹¹ After He had said this, He went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. ¹⁴ So then He told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

John 11:7-16

Jesus' better gift to Martha and Mary:

¹⁷ On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

²² But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him.

[continued]

John 11:17-37

Jesus' better gift to Martha and Mary:

[continued]

³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met Him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" He asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

John 11:17-37

Jesus solves the problem:

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," He said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me."

⁴³ When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

John 11:38-44

Epilogue:

⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

John 11:45-48

Conclusion:

Sometimes God lets our problems go from "bad" to "impossible" so we **MIGHT BELIEVE**.

1. In the **depth** of His **LOVE** for us.
2. In the **extent** of His **POWER** available to us.

Discussion Questions:

1. Where in your life do you have a bad or impossible situation?
2. Read out loud Romans 5:1-5. From this passage, how does God use the process of adversity to give us hope?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How does Paul respond to God not changing his circumstances? What would it look like for you to rejoice in your weakness, difficulty, or adversity?
4. What was your biggest take away from this message? What did Jesus want to give Mary and Martha that was even better than relief?
5. Who could help you go through this journey to experience the life of Christ in the midst of your pain? Who might need your help to come through their impossible situation?

Introduction: Our story – “The Empty Bucket Syndrome”

Where is hope when success doesn't satisfy?

Jesus' Answer: Mark 10

The Context: Three Issues

1. The issue of **DIVORCE** Mark 10:1-12
2. The issue of **CHILDREN** Mark 10:13-16
3. The issue of **IDOLATRY** Mark 10:17-31

An Observation: This story is present in all three synoptic gospels. Success in the world's value system is the acquisition of **SEX**, **POWER**, and **MONEY!**

Jesus offers hope to a very...

Wealthy
Successful
Moral
Powerful
Sincere
Intelligent

} ...person who recognizes
his success has left him
EMPTY!

- The successful man's **question reveals** his perceived need: Mark 10:17
"What must I **DO** to inherit eternal life?"
- Jesus' **answer reveals** the rich man's **HEART** need. Mark 10:18-21
- The rich man's **response reveals** the condition of his Mark 10:22
HEART and the **GOD** that he served.

- Jesus warns of the dangers of EARTHLY WEALTH. Mark 10:23-27
- Jesus promises great reward for those who TRUST and FOLLOW Him. Mark 10:28-31

Jesus' offer of hope to YOU today...

COME unto Me all of you who are exhausted with the weight and burdens of life and I will give you rest. Take My YOKE upon you and learn to FOLLOW Me; for I am gentle and want what is BEST for every aspect of your life.

Jesus – Matthew 11:28-29

(Paraphrased)

Discussion Questions:

1. What aspect of today's passage/message was most meaningful to you? Why?
2. What motivated Jesus to command this rich man to give all his money to help the poor?
3. How does the young ruler's money expose the deeper issues (external behavior vs. internal purity and trust) in his life?
4. Discuss the concept, "Money is not evil, but dangerous," as it relates to our relationship with God. When and how does it become evil? What are our safeguards with regard to the "deceitful" impact of money/things in our life?
5. Discuss Peter's crude but honest question, "What is in it for us?" What are the present and future rewards of following Christ? Why is it worth it in your opinion? Share some of the most meaningful rewards (material and/or spiritual) you've experienced in your relationship with God.

Introduction — What's the world coming to?

We live in a day of uncertainty!

- Rapid change
- Technological explosion
- Moral chaos / increasing violence
- Family disintegration
- Global economic instability

Uncertain times tend to produce certain predictable fears!

- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of failure
- Fear of abandonment

Uncertain times are NOT new:

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses My servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. ⁵ 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.

⁶ "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ 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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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."

Joshua 1:1-9

3 Keys to confidence:

1. Believing **God's PROMISE** for our future is the key to overcoming our fear of the **UNKNOWN**.

Joshua 1:3-4
(see also - John 14:1-3)

Key word = HOPE

2. Appropriating **God's POWER** for victory is the key to overcoming our fear of **FAILURE**.

Joshua 1:5, 7, 8
(see also - John 16:33, 1 John 4:4)

Key word = FAITH

3. Recognizing **God's PRESENCE** with us is the key to overcoming our fear of **ABANDONMENT**.

Joshua 1:5, 9
(see also - John 16:13-14, Hebrews 13:5)

Key word = LOVE

Life Application Questions:

1. What are your top two fears about the future?
2. How does Joshua's life and time of uncertainty parallel today?
3. Read verses 3-5 out loud and identify the three promises God made to Joshua about his future, his enemies, and God's presence. Now discuss Jesus' promises that parallel these concepts for us as New Testament Christians.
4. Where do you need to grow in confidence? Read verses 7-9. How do your intake, meditation, and obedience to God's Word develop confidence in your life? Describe your spiritual diet and what steps God would have you take to grow in confidence.

Introduction:

1. **The problem with confusion** = It immobilizes, paralyzes, demotivates, and neutralizes individual and corporate progress and effectiveness.
 - **Confusion** – 1) to mix up, jumble together, put in disorder, 2) an inability to distinguish between things, bewilderment, 3) a lack of coherent, orderly thinking in the midst of complex problems, relationships, and decision making opportunities.
 - **Synonyms** – disorder, disarray, chaos, muddled
2. **The cure for confusion** = A lesson from master teachers:
 - Reduce complexity = K.I.S.S.
 - Increase clarity = G.B.T.T.B.

Psalm 90

¹Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ²Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God.

Basic: God is **GREAT**

Question: Am I rightly related to God?

Key Word: **PERSPECTIVE**

³You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." ⁴For a thousand years in Your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

⁵You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning - ⁶though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

Basic: Life is **SHORT**

Question: Am I prepared to die?

Key Word: **PRIORITY**

⁷We are consumed by Your anger and terrified by Your indignation. ⁸You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence. ⁹All our days pass away under Your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. ¹⁰The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

Basic: Sin is **SERIOUS**

Question: Am I taking sin seriously?

Key Word: **PURITY**

¹¹Who knows the power of Your anger? For Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due You. ¹²Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Basic: Wisdom is **ESSENTIAL**

Question: Am I spending or investing my life?

Key Word: **PURPOSE**

¹³Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on Your servants. ¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. ¹⁵Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

Basic: Mercy is **AVAILABLE**

Question: Am I experiencing the joy of the Lord?

Key Word: **PRAYER**

¹⁶May Your deeds be shown to Your servants, Your splendor to their children. ¹⁷May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us--yes, establish the work of our hands.

Basic: Success is **POSSIBLE**

Question: Am I impacting my world for good?

Key Word: **PRODUCTIVITY**

Life Application Questions:

1. In what area of your life are you experiencing the most confusion?
 - Spiritual?
 - Relational?
 - Vocational?
 - Emotional?
 - Future Plans?

2. Place an asterisk next to the section of Psalm 90 which spoke most powerfully to you. Share with your group (or write privately) why you think this section of the Psalm impacted you.

3. How does asking “the big questions” of life help us move from confusion to clarity? Which of the six questions helped bring clarity or a need for re-evaluation in your life?

4. What one action step would demonstrate that you are serious about “numbering your days to gain a heart of wisdom?” Who will hold you accountable and encourage you for the next 45 days?

Introduction: Dealing with doubt

- **An ancient story worth remembering**

Jehoshaphat - 2 Chronicles 20

- **A story I can't forget**

Manila - 1988

- **A timeless principle for our times of doubt**

PRAISE - the antidote for doubt

Praise: The antidote to doubt

Psalm 145 - A Classic Model to Follow

- ❖ **Step #1: CHOOSE to praise God**

¹ *I will exalt You, my God the King;
I will praise Your name forever and ever.*

² *Every day I will praise You
And extol Your name forever and ever.*

Psalm 145:1-2

❖ **Step #2: VERBALIZE specific evidence of God's greatness**

³Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
His greatness no one can fathom.
⁴One generation will commend Your works to another;
They will tell of Your mighty acts.
⁵They will speak of the glorious splendor of Your majesty,
And I will meditate on Your wonderful works.
⁶They will tell of the power of Your awesome works,
And I will proclaim Your great deeds.
⁷They will celebrate Your abundant goodness
And joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

Psalms 145:3-7

❖ **Step #3: FOCUS on God's character and adore Him**

- **He is Good**

⁸The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and rich in love.
⁹The LORD is good to all;
He has compassion on all He has made.

Psalms 145:8-9

(A.W. Tozer: Knowledge of the Holy)

- **He is Sovereign**

¹⁰All You have made will praise You, O LORD;
Your saints will extol You.
¹¹They will tell of the glory of Your kingdom
And speak of Your might,
¹²So that all men may know of Your mighty acts
And the glorious splendor of Your kingdom.
^{13a}Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And Your dominion endures through all generations.

Psalms 145:10-13a

- **He is Faithful**

*^{13b}The LORD is faithful to all His promises
And loving toward all He has made.
¹⁴The LORD upholds all those who fall
And lifts up all who are bowed down.
¹⁵The eyes of all look to You,
And You give them their food at the proper time.
¹⁶You open your hand
And satisfy the desires of every living thing.*

Psalm 145:13b-16

- **He is Righteous**

*¹⁷The LORD is righteous in all His ways
And loving toward all He has made.
¹⁸The LORD is near to all who call on Him,
To all who call on Him in truth.
¹⁹He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him;
He hears their cry and saves them.
²⁰The LORD watches over all who love Him,
But all the wicked He will destroy.*

Psalm 145:17-20

❖ **Step #4: Invite others to praise Him with you**

*²¹My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise His holy name
Forever and ever.*

Psalm 145:21

Life Application Questions:

1. In which of the following areas are you most prone to doubt God's love and plans for your life?
 - God will meet my financial needs.
 - God will guide me concerning big decisions I must make.
 - God will protect my children/loved ones.
 - God will use my life in a significant way.
 - God cares about my life, my dreams, and my future.
 - God will give me power to overcome areas of temptation and struggle.

2. Discuss with your group the boxes you checked and why.

3. How did praising God impact "the battle" in the story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20?

4. What role does praise have in your prayer life currently? What did you learn about the importance of and practice of praising God from this message?

5. What one thing could you do to make praising God more a part of your everyday life?