

life

- WITH -

GOD THE SON

student guide & devotions

This lesson series, “**Life with God the Son**” is dedicated to the memory of Dick Lee, a faithful servant of our Lord Jesus and a remarkable teacher of God’s Holy Word.

Dick has entered into his eternal rest after hearing his Lord and Savior say, “*Dick, welcome home My child and well done My good and faithful servant!*”

Table of Contents

4

January 7: sharelife

All Lives Do Matter

John 4:1-19

16

January 14: worshiplife

Doing the Right Thing the Wrong Way

John 4:20-26

27

January 21: disciplife

Seeing the Good in a Bad Situation

John 4:27, 31-38

37

January 28: communitylife

VIP'S

John 4:28-30, 39-42

▪ All scripture is from the New King James Version (NKJV).

Introduction

Thank you for your faithful participation during our study on “**Life with God the Son.**” I pray it will be an absolute blessing to you. To get the most out of this series, I want to encourage you to attend your **lifegroup** each week, take good notes as you follow along, meditate on the daily devotions, and pray for a mighty move of God upon your life and the life of our church.

Following each Sunday’s lesson, I have written some daily devotions for Monday through Friday. The devotions will complement and enhance your lessons. If you miss a devotion, you can catch up on Saturday. Please spend some time in prayer on Sunday morning prior to your arrival for **lifegroup**. Pray for God’s anointing to consume the lips of your teacher and the ears of each one who listens. May you be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.

My prayer for this series is that as a result of us examining a day in the life of Jesus from *John 4*, we will think, act, and talk more like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God!

Blessings!

sharelife: All Lives Do Matter



John 4:1-19

I. His Timing is _____ . 4:1-7a

II. His Tendencies are _____ . 4:7b-9

III. His Truth is _____ . 4:10-14

IV. Her Trust was _____ . 4:15-19

Monday, January 8

IS EVERYONE DESERVING OF THE GOSPEL?

“But He needed to go through Samaria.” John 4:4

The Hatfields and McCoys, two American Appalachian mountaineer families who, with their kinfolk and neighbors, engaged in a legendary feud that attracted nationwide attention in the 1880s and '90s and prompted judicial and police actions, one of which drew an appeal up to the U.S Supreme Court (1888). The families lived on opposite sides of a border stream, the Tug Fork - the McCoys in Pike county, Kentucky, and the Hatfields in Logan county, West Virginia.

The origins of the feud are obscure. Some attribute it to hostilities formed during the American Civil War, in which the McCoys were Unionists and the Hatfields were Confederates, others to Rand'l McCoy's belief that a Hatfield stole one of his hogs in 1878. However, although animosities had built up and occasional fights had broken out, the first major bloodletting did not occur until 1882, when Ellison Hatfield was mortally shot in a brawl with McCoys and, in revenge, the Hatfields kidnapped and executed three McCoy brothers - Tolbert, Phamer, and Randolph, Jr.

These murders sharpened the backwoods warfare, and thereafter Hatfields and McCoys repeatedly ambushed and killed one another. The feuding gradually abated and had ended by the second decade of the 20th century.

In the lesson this past Sunday, you discovered, like the Hatfields and McCoys, a shared hatred between Jews and Samaritans that was unmatched by any other race of their day. The vile feelings of hatred were equally felt. The Jews suggested even Jehovah God hated the Samaritans. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be a mistake, an unwanted people, and an illegitimate race. Even Jesus' disciples despised this race of half breeds.

In the text, Jesus deliberately moved toward eradicating this hatred. He went so far as to embrace the least of the Samaritans, a woman of ill-repute, with an offer to receive the greatest gift ever created, the gift of eternal life. To Jesus, all lives mattered because He was and always will be The Creator of all mankind who never creates junk!

The disciples were not opposed to advancing Christ's Kingdom but they were unwilling to include the Samaritans in His plan. The disciples, by their comments and actions, proved the Samaritans did not deserve to hear, much less receive, the gospel. However, Jesus set out to show the Jews and Samaritans that everyone deserves to hear and receive the gospel because God loves the whole world.

Do you believe everyone deserves to hear the gospel? If your answer is "yes," then do you demonstrate your affirmation with a willingness to share the gospel with anyone whom God created? If your answer is "no," do you consider yourself to be more deserving than others? While no one truly deserves the grace of God, including myself, everyone deserves the opportunity to receive the gift of eternal life.

The only way you can prove your belief that everyone deserves to hear the gospel is by following Jesus' example to share with anyone at any time. If you are not willing to share the gospel with anyone because of the color of their skin, their religious preference, or perverted lifestyle, then, to you, not everyone deserves to hear and receive the gospel. So, the question we must all answer is, *"Am I more like Jesus in my approach to others or more like the disciples?"*

Just as Jesus desired to change the heart of the disciples to love everyone no matter their difference, He desires to change our hearts as well. Just as Jesus needed to go through Samaria, I pray we will desire to take the gospel to whom the world and the church considers to be the most despised of peoples. May your prayer be: *"Here I am LORD, send me!"*

Tuesday, January 9

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

*“So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water.”
John 4:5-7a*

I am certain you have heard the phrase, *“Timing is everything!”* Natalie Hemby and Troy Jones co-wrote a song by this title. Although this song is of the country genre, it speaks to the sovereignty of God’s perfect timing. Notice the words...

“When the stars line up and you catch a break, people think you’re lucky but you know its grace. It can happen so fast or a little bit late. Timing is everything.

You know I’ve had close calls when it could’ve been me. I was young when I learned just how fragile life can be. I lost friends of mine, I guess it wasn’t my time. Timing is everything.

And I could’ve been the child that God took home, and I could’ve been one more unfinished song. And when it seems a rhyme is hard to find, that’s when one comes along just in time.

I remember that day when our eyes first met. You ran into the building to get out of the rain cause you were soaking wet. And as I held the door you wanted to know my name. Timing is everything.

And I could’ve been another minute late and you’d never would’ve crossed my path that day. And when it seems true love is hard to find that’s when love comes along just in time.

You can call it fate or destiny. Sometimes it really seems like a mystery. Cause you can be hurt by love or be healed by the same. Timing is everything.

It can happen so fast or a little too late. Timing is everything.”

Although Jesus knew before He ever left Judea bound for Galilee that He would cross paths with this woman of Samaria, this woman did not. She was not aware that the timing of Jesus was everything. Jesus arrived at Jacob's well and waited for her. As the woman approached the well, as she did every day at the very same time to avoid a public confrontation, do you think she thought about turning around or standing at a distance until this Jewish man left? Have you ever dodged someone indiscreetly that you did not want to engage? What compelled this woman to violate a known custom and approach this strange Jewish man at the well? Did the still small voice of God's Spirit urge her to stay? Did she sense a peace that everything would be okay?

Regardless of the answers, we know from this encounter that the timing of God's Son was perfect. If Jesus had not stopped at the right time, the Samaritan woman may have never met Him. Without the perfect timing of God's Son, she may never have received the living water of eternal life. If Jesus had not arrived at the right time, the Samaritan race may have never been introduced to the Savior of the world. To Jesus, timing is everything!

Just as Jesus interrupted this woman's daily routine, He will interrupt our daily routines for the sake of a "*divine appointment.*" He will intersect our life with the life of someone who, like the Samaritan woman, is in desperate need of the Savior. Jesus will put people in the cross hairs of your path for the sole purpose of giving you the opportunity to share God's love with them. You may feel inconvenienced or even irritated but understand that your delay is in God's perfect timing. Obey Him because He knows what He is doing and wants to accomplish through you.

How do you handle diversions or delays? Do you see them as "*divine appointments?*" Do you embrace or ignore these "*divine appointments?*" Do you direct people toward the church or other people who God intends for you to bless? May your prayer be, "*LORD, would you use me today to be a blessing to someone who desperately needs You? I will obey because your timing is everything!*"

wednesday, january 10

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

“Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink’. For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’.” John 7b-9

Bernard Madoff is an investment manager who defrauded investors of up to \$50 billion in what might be the largest swindle in Wall Street history. In 1960, at age 22, Madoff took \$5,000.00 he earned from his summer job as a Long Island lifeguard and started his own investment firm. By sharing his *“get rich quick”* story, he successfully bilked friends and colleagues of their money because of his persuasive ability to convince them that he could guarantee a greater return on their investments.

But it was all too good to be true. On December 11, 2008, FBI agents arrested Bernard Madoff at his Manhattan apartment, and charged him with *“massive fraud”* for running a *“multi-billion dollar Ponzi scheme.”* Madoff reportedly admitted to investigators that he had lost \$50 billion of investors’ cash. Bernard Madoff pled guilty to 11 felony counts on March 12, 2009, and on June 29, 2009 he was sentenced to the maximum penalty of 150 years in prison.

Like Mr. Madoff, oftentimes, *“random acts of kindness”* are performed for the intention of receiving a pay back of some kind. A husband may detail his wife’s car so she will graciously allow him to play golf on the weekend. The wife may allow her husband to play golf so she can go to the beach with her girlfriends. Children may clean their rooms for an opportunity to hang out with their friends. Although a thoughtful service is rendered to a *“loved one,”* the intention may be purely selfish.

When the Samaritan woman approached the well, Jesus asked her for a drink of water. I am sure she was not only caught off guard by His presence but also by His request. Did she perhaps think, *“Ok, what do you want?”* *“Why would a Jewish man be asking me, a Samaritan woman,*

for a drink of water?" "What does He really want from me?" Could she have considered Jesus to be no different from the Samaritan men? Was it possible that men had propositioned her for their own selfish desires? It could be one of the reasons why she had been married five times and presently living with a man. Was she easily swayed by their requests and promises to take care of her?

The intention of Jesus was not selfish but selfless. He was more interested in what He could do for her than what she could do for Him. He was willing to take a cultural risk to meet her need. Although He knew in just a few moments His disciples would chide Him for engaging her, He proceeded in meeting her greatest need - He gave her the gift of eternal life.

If and when you perform random acts of kindness, do you do so for the sole intention of getting something in return? Do you see it as a way of putting change in your pocket? Or, do you simply meet needs because you know it is better to give than to receive? Do you help others because you know that is what God commands of you? Do you help others because of your desire to act like Jesus? Do you see how meeting someone's physical need can open the door to meeting their spiritual need?

Do you help others in Jesus' name, not for what the person can and will do for you, but for what you expect Jesus to do for you? Do you bless others expecting the Lord to bless you? Are your acts of kindness selfish or selfless? From the hymn, "*Make Me a Blessing*" by Ira B. Wilson, the first verse and chorus says, "*Out in the highways and bi-ways of life, many are weary and sad; carry the sunshine where darkness is rife, making the sorrowing glad. Make me a blessing, make me a blessing, out of my life, may Jesus shine; make me a blessing, O Savior I pray, make me a blessing to someone today.*" May your prayer be, "LORD, allow me the privilege to help someone today, not for what I can receive but for the pure pleasure of being a blessing."

thursday, january 11

MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?’ Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life’.” John 4:10-14

Someone once said, “*You only get one chance to make a good first impression!*” Rebecca Knight, wrote an article for the Harvard Business Review entitled, “*How to Make a Great First Impression*”. Ms. Knight suggested five ways to make a good first impression. She stated the following...

Prepare Talking Points

Before meeting someone new - do your homework. Know who you're meeting, what he cares about, and what he might need from you. Your goal is to show that you understand the problem the other person is trying to solve and how your skills put you in a position to help.

Be Aware of Your Body Language

When meeting someone new, it's normal to be nervous but you don't want your anxiety to show. Your body language should be “*confident and comfortable*,” says Knight. Take long strides. Sit up straight. Walk with your chest held high. Even if this isn't your natural way of being, you can assume simple poses that will increase your confidence.

Play To Your Strengths

It's useful to have a “*trusted cabinet*” of friends and colleagues who can help you understand “*how you come across to the world*,” says Knight. Ask them what they see as your “*strengths, your winning traits, and the most likable things about you*,” and then try to emphasize those things when you're meeting someone new.

Find Something in Common

Another way to build rapport is to, “*find a bond or a point of commonality,*” says Knight. The goal is to create a connection on a human level. Finding out what you have in common with the person might require a bit of detective work on your part.

Engage and Be Engaging

“The most common mistake people make when trying to make a good impression is that they think they have to impress the other person with their vast knowledge,” says Knight. But the fact is, your aim is “*not to wow and dazzle*” but rather “*to create a conversation that’s memorable*” and engaging. So try to draw out the other person and listen to what they have to say.

From the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman, it appears as if Jesus read Rebecca Knight's article. With all joking aside, under normal circumstances, the chances of a Jewish man talking with a Samaritan woman were very slim. The most prominent barriers, religious, racial, and gender, would have kept a normal Jew from a dialogue with a Samaritan but Jesus was not your normal Jew - He was God in the flesh. He penetrated these barriers and not only made a good first impression but convincingly, established a relationship that sustained itself throughout eternity.

Jesus touched on every point Ms. Knight suggested in her article. Jesus, who is Omniscient God, knew everything about this woman. He knew and understood her deepest needs. Jesus spoke with confidence because He was the God who formed this woman in her mother's womb. Jesus was confident yet humble. He put this woman at ease in His presence. He told her if she knew who she was speaking to, she would have asked immediately for His living water. He established a rapport with her through their common need for water - His desire for physical water and hers for spiritual water. Finally, Jesus did not wow her with His credentials; rather, He established a conversation that was memorable and engaging. He drew her in by listening intently to what she had to say.

As a child of God, we must always be mindful of who we are in the presence of others. Our initial connection with an unbeliever could determine their receptivity to the gospel and the church. A positive experience could open the door for further conversations and a negative experience could close the door to you or anyone else who intersects their life.

When God intersects your life with the life of an unbeliever, do they sense your concern and compassion for them? Do they know you really care? John Maxwell said, *“A person does not care how much you know until they know how much you care.”* When your conversation concludes, are they impressed with you or with Jesus? Will people be in heaven one day because you made a good first impression of the love of Jesus or will they miss heaven because you did not? May your prayer be, *“LORD, anoint me daily to represent you well as you bring me in contact with unbelievers. May I make such an impression of Your love that it makes people hungry and thirsty for You.”*

Friday, January 12

TRUST ME

“The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’ The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet’.” John 4:15-19

My youngest child, Kayla was quite the daring one when she was a toddler and adolescent. We had to keep our eyes fixed on her at all times because her motto was: *“No Fear!”* When Kayla was four, one evening as I arrived home from work, she met me in the foyer on the first step of our second floor staircase. She yelled, *“Catch me Daddy”* and leaped into my arms. Of course, I caught her. This became a game we played every evening. However, over time, she would greet me from the next step up - the second, third, fourth, and so on. With every step, it became more difficult to catch her but I clutched her with all my strength. Finally, she reached the top step, number fourteen! To her, fourteen was no different from one. She yelled, *“Catch me Daddy”* and soared downward into my arms. Why did she feel at ease to jump from the top of the staircase? Was it her confidence in her leaping ability? No, it was her absolute trust in her daddy! She knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that I would catch her.

The point Jesus made to the woman during their conversation at the well was: *“Because of Who I am, you can trust Me!”* The question Jesus posed to her was: *“Will you trust Me?”* The woman said, *“Give me this water”* which meant *“she begged, pleaded with, and demanded”* that Jesus give to her the living water so she would never thirst again. Did she trust Jesus? Absolutely! Did she trust because of the confidence she placed in herself? No, she had very little confidence, if any, because of her past. After five failed marriages, she possessed no trust in men or matrimony as evidenced by her unwillingness to marry the man with whom she lived. Her ability to take a leap of faith was based on her absolute trust in the Son of God.

Salvation is obtained not only because you process the reason for Christ's death but you place your faith and trust solely in the One who died for you. You can know that Jesus died for you but if you never take a leap of faith and trust Him, you will never be saved. Your trust to leap into His saving arms will not only save you from the fall, it will sustain you throughout eternity. Once in His arms, He will never put you down. You are forever secure in Him.

Do you trust Him? The answer must be "yes" if you know you are saved. You could not be saved without trust. But, do you trust Him today, not to save you but to sustain you? Do you trust Him enough to obey His will today? It does not matter if you are on the bottom step or the top, just take a leap of faith. He will catch you!

From the hymn, "*Trusting Jesus*" by Edgar P. Stites, the first verse and chorus says, "*Simply trusting every day, trusting through a stormy way; even when my faith is small, trusting Jesus, that is all. Trusting as the moments fly, trusting as the days go by; trusting him what-e'er be-fall, trusting Jesus, that is all.*" May your prayer be, "*LORD, thank you for catching me when by faith, I leaped into your saving arms. As I trusted You to save me, help me to trust You to sustain me when you call on me to serve You.*"

worshiplife: Doing the Right Thing the Wrong Way



John 4:20-26

I. The _____ to Worship. 4:20-22

Three obstacles to biblical worship are expressed -
a belief that worship...

1. Occurred in a particular _____.
"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain ..."
2. Involved a particular _____.
"You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship ..."
3. Included all _____.
"for salvation is of the Jews."

II. The _____ of Worship. 4:23-26

Jesus mentioned two aspects of worship...

1. The _____ of God.
"the Father ..."
2. Our _____ with God.
"Father ..."

III. The _____ for Worship. 4:23-24

Jesus mentioned two objectives we must consider for true worship. Worship must be...

1. _____ breathed.
“true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit”

There are two distinct characteristics of a true worshiper...

A. A true worshiper will not be distracted by all the _____ of corporate worship.

B. A true worshiper’s worship stems from an _____ not an external motivation.

2. _____ based.
“true worshipers will worship in truth”

Worshiping the Father in truth involves three aspects - a true worshiper...

A. _____ the God of the Word.

B. _____ the truth of God’s Word.

C. _____ the truth of God’s Word.

Monday, January 15

READ THE INSTRUCTIONS

“Our fathers worshiped...” John 4:20a

It is in the DNA of every boy to build. Boys love to make guns out of sticks, cars out of blocks, and forts out of discarded lumber. Although boys love to build, it does not mean they always do it the right way. It is within the male ego to think something can be assembled without the instructions. Can I get an “A-men!” Ladies, how often has your husband said, “*I can put this together!*” When you suggest to him that maybe he should read the instructions, your loving husband replies, “*I don’t need those!*” He thinks you have insulted his intelligence. Although it looks fairly simple, it often takes more time to assemble than what is suggested on the box. It’s like the man who was so proud of his ability to work a 100 piece puzzle in five days. He bragged of his accomplishment to his wife, “*The box says 2 to 3 years!*”

Failing to follow the instructions often times leads to “extra” parts once the item is “assembled.” We assume some pieces were added to the supply list that were not intended for this item or we think the extra pieces are not important otherwise, we would have found a place for them. Instead of taking the item apart and reading the directions to assemble it properly, how many of us just toss the extra pieces in the trash? The item may look complete but over time, the functionality of the item will be affected. It may not work properly or not work at all simply because we would not follow the instructions. We had good intentions! We did the right thing when we assembled something for a loved-one but we did it the wrong way!

Just as it is in the DNA of a boy to build, it is in the DNA of every human being to worship. When God created us in His image, He made us with the desire to worship. However, just because we are created to worship does not mean we will worship the right way. This was true of the Samaritans. The Samaritan woman made a point to tell Jesus that her kinfolk were religious because they worshiped. Yes, they worshiped but they worshiped the wrong way. One cannot assume that those who

worship Jehovah God are correct and those who do not are wrong. The Jews worshiped Jehovah but they too were wrong in many ways. Therefore, Jesus, being fully aware of the flaws in their worship, and in His fellow Jews as well, explained to her the biblical way to worship.

From yesterday's lesson, you discovered the biblical way to worship. Now that you have read and heard the biblical instructions, were you convicted of worshiping the wrong way? Did you confess this to God? If you did, He forgave you for doing the right thing the wrong way. Can you imagine what we could experience in corporate worship if we all worshiped the right way? Our "true worship" would definitely be a glimpse of heaven! May your prayer be, "LORD, thank you for creating me with a desire to worship. May I always do the right thing the right way. May our church be known as a body of 'true worshipers' who hunger and thirst for You!"

Tuesday, January 16

ROADBLOCKS AHEAD

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews'."
John 4:20-22

Recently, while traveling home from work, I came upon an accident within a mile of my home. Police cars, with blue lights flashing, had blocked the road from both directions. A truck had turned over in the ditch. Since the road was impassable, I had a decision to make. I could sit and wait or, like every other vehicle in front and back of me, I could turn around and go back the way I came. I decided to back-track over the river and through the woods to get home. It took me approximately fifteen minutes to drive around the roadblock but at least I made it home. Once I got on the other side of the roadblock, I noticed it was still in place. Who knows how long I would have remained in the roadblock if I had waited for the accident to clear.

Problems have the potential of creating roadblocks in our life. Our adversary, the devil, loves to create roadblocks. His purpose for roadblocks is simple: to keep us from arriving to our destination. He will settle for a delay in our arrival although he would rather we become so frustrated because of our roadblock that we become idle and complacent or we turn around in defeat and proceed in the opposite direction. Either way, we will never fulfill our purpose for being created and greater still, for being redeemed.

In the text, we discovered several obstacles or roadblocks to worship - perceptions and practices that keep us from worshiping the Father the right way. Thinking you can only worship in a particular place can become a roadblock to worship. Should you worship with other believers in a church building? Of course you should but it is not the only place you can and must worship. If you are not experiencing a daily, personal quiet time, then the devil has put a roadblock between you and God. Worshiping idols instead of Jehovah God is a roadblock to worship. If something or someone consumes or demands more of your time than Jehovah God, then you, my friend, have an idol. Your idol has become a roadblock between you and God. And, if you think or lead unbelievers into thinking they are worshiping God, then you have placed a roadblock in their life that could potentially keep them from knowing the Father. Should you invite the lost to worship? Absolutely! Just as Jesus lovingly explained to the woman who can and cannot worship, we must, likewise, lovingly explain who can and cannot worship the One True God. If the lost assume they are worshiping, the enemy could use it as a roadblock to convince them that they are saved.

Have one or more of these perceptions and practices of worship become a roadblock between you and God? Have you confessed this to the Father? Although God will allow the devil to place a roadblock in your path, He is more than capable of removing it. May your prayer be, *“LORD, thank you for saving me and giving me the awesome privilege of worshipping You. Remove every roadblock that stands in the way of my worship to You. May I never allow another roadblock to form in front of me that could keep me from fulfilling my purpose!”*

wednesday, january 17

HOW'S YOUR FOCUS?

“But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father...; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” John 4:23

I have an extreme case of glaucoma. It is one of those gifts I inherited from my parents. My optic nerve has been damaged beyond repair to the point that I am slowly losing my peripheral vision and, oftentimes, the ability to focus. I cannot see objects to my right or left unless I make a concentrated effort to do so. If I do not consciously think about what or who is beside me, then I cannot and will not see them. I have to constantly remind myself to concentrate peripherally or I will be caught off guard. Although I have learned to compensate, to some degree, for my visual deficiency, I will never see (until I get to heaven, hallelujah) like a person with perfect vision.

With or without glaucoma, one thing I, nor anyone else, can do is focus on two objects, in broad expanse of each other, at the same time. People can multi-task, women especially, but no one can multi-focus. To focus is the ability, or discipline to see an object, and only that object, clearly.

In the text, Jesus explained to the woman the object of our worship. He specifically said the object, or focus of our worship is the Father. This does not mean that we should not acknowledge Jesus in worship but when we do, we do it in light of His relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. To focus on the Father alone takes discipline. If God's child does not consciously think about the Father, then he or she will be caught off guard and easily distracted.

When we focus on the Father, we focus in two ways. First, we focus on the reality of who God is. Jesus used the definite article “*the*” which means that God is “*the*” One and only God. He is never to be compared or likened to anyone else. The Samaritans were polytheists which means they believed in more than one God; therefore, they worshiped more than one at a time. If you compare, liken, or focus on any one more than you do God the Father, then you are polytheistic

in your worship. Is there anyone (spouse, children, or friend) to whom you show more attention and affection than you do to your heavenly Father? If the answer is “yes,” then your focus is not on the Father. Second, we focus on our relationship with God - He is our “Father.” Jehovah God created and redeemed His children to worship Him while the Samaritans created their gods for whom they worshiped. They could only speak “of” their gods but God the Father speaks “to” His children. God is the Father who relates personally and intimately to His children. He shares in a loving relationship with His children.

Is your worship an expression of your love for the Father and the Father’s love for you? Do you truly know He loves you? You cannot worship Him freely and fully if you doubt His love for you. Doubt can cause damage to your spiritual optic nerve that over time will make it very difficult to focus on the Father. How’s your focus? Can you see the Father and only the Father? May your prayer be, “LORD, anoint me to worship You. Touch me with the ability to focus solely on You.”

thursday, january 18

HAVE YOU GOT THAT SPIRIT?

“... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24

I prefer high school and college sports over professional sports for several reasons. One reason in particular is the atmosphere or spirit of high school and college sports, to me, is much greater than in professional sports. I love to hear the bands playing in the background and the cheerleaders working their respective crowds. To me, the atmosphere of a high school and college football game is absolutely electrifying. The fans are whooping and hollering before they get in the stadium. The crowd really gets in the mood when the band strikes the first chord and plays the fight song. The whole point of the band and cheerleaders is to work the crowd. Their goal is to get the home crowd fired up so it possibly motivates their team to perform at optimal level while making it difficult for the visiting team to execute.

One cheer that comes to mind from my college days is *“Have You Got That Spirit?”* This cheer definitely required crowd participation. The cheer says, *“Have you got that spirit, yeah man! Have you got that spirit, yeah man! Have you got that spirit, yeah man, then show it in your feet (while stomping your feet...boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!) Have you got that spirit, yeah man (3x), then show it in your hands (while clapping your hands...clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap!) Have you got that spirit, yeah man (3x), then show it in your shoulders (while shrugging your shoulders back and forth six times.) Have you got that spirit, yeah man (3x), then show it in your head (while bobbing your head back and forth six times.) Have you got that spirit, yeah man (3x), then show it all over (stomp your feet, clap your hands, shrug your shoulders, and bob your head six times each.)”*

Did this cheer motivate the crowd? I don't know but it sure was some good exercise! Did it motivate the team? Not hardly! To be quite honest, the crowd cheered for their team without the assistance of the band and cheerleaders. It did not take an external stimuli (band and cheerleaders) to motivate the crowd to stand to their feet, yell loudly, and clap emphatically for their team. While the external stimuli may have enhanced the crowd's enthusiasm, it did not produce their enthusiasm. Their desire to be present and their love for their team and the game was enough to motivate their enthusiasm.

During their encounter, Jesus told the woman of Samaria that one of the signs of true worship would be that those who worship the Father would do so in spirit. True worship would be spirit breathed. Jesus made this point after the woman said her ancestors worshiped on the mountain. The Samaritans worshiped in a pagan fashion. Although they worshiped false idols, they did so with enthusiasm. Since they did not possess the Spirit of God, external stimuli was required to work the crowd up into an ecstatic frenzy.

The motivation for worship, Jesus spoke of, was unfamiliar to the Samaritan woman. *“In spirit”* is not so much the level of enthusiasm as it is the level of desire to do so. *“In spirit”* means a worshiper is motivated to worship from within. Their worship does not require the assistance of an external stimuli. If your worship requires someone telling

you to worship (to stand, yell, clap, and raise holy hands), then your worship is not in the spirit. Worshiping in spirit is a missing component of corporate worship. Often, worship leaders become cheerleaders who feel it necessary to work the crowd for an optimal response. A true worshiper responds to the Father from an inward desire not because they are told to do so.

Have you got that spirit? I hope the answer is “*Yeah Man!*” You are engaged in worship to the Father because you are internally motivated to do so. It is not necessary for someone to ask or demand from you to give the Father some praise. May your prayer be, “*LORD, You and You alone are the motivation for my worship. My inner desire to praise and please You is all the stimulus I need!*”

Friday, January 19

CAN YOU HANDLE THE TRUTH?

“... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24

A Few Good Men is a 1992 American Film Classic starring Tom Cruise, Jack Nicholson, and Demi Moore. Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) is a military lawyer defending two U.S. Marines charged with killing a fellow Marine at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. Lieutenant Commander JoAnne Galloway (Demi Moore) convinces Lt. Kaffee that the two Marines were most likely carrying out an order from their commanding officer, Colonel Nathan R. Jessup (Jack Nicholson). In the movie, Lt. Kaffee calls Col. Jessup to the witness stand. Lt. Kaffee wants to know if Colonel Jessup gave the order to kill the marine. At the height of the interrogation, Lt. Kaffee told Col. Jessup, “*I WANT THE TRUTH*” to which Col. Jessup replied, “*YOU CAN’T HANDLE THE TRUTH!*”

What is there about truth that would be hard to handle? People have often said, “*The truth hurts!*” Why would truth hurt someone? Is not truth good for cleansing the mind, heart, and soul? Truth is good when its revelation edifies godly character and is bad when its revelation

exposes ungodly character. Can you handle the truth? Does the truth edify or expose you? Jesus addressed this question in the next sign of true worship.

In the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jesus not only said true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit but in truth as well. In order for worship to be true, it must be scripturally based. Spirit and truth always go together, they can never be separated. The Jews focused on truth without spirit and the Samaritans focused on spirit without truth. True worship must be biblically grounded in both. A true worshiper can and will handle the truth accurately.

Worshipping in truth involves three aspects. First, a true worshiper will honor the God of the Word. He knows there is no one but God. Jehovah God knows and the true worshiper knows that God is the priority of his life. Second, a true worshiper will hear the truth of God's Word. He hungers for the truth. He is more interested in hearing what God has to say to him rather than what he has to say to God. Third, a true worshiper will heed the Word of God. He will obey the will of God contained in His Word.

A true worshiper can and will handle the truth. Can you handle the truth? Can you handle the truth when God convicts you of unconfessed sin? Can you handle the truth when God desires your confession of sin and cleansing from all unrighteous living? Can you handle the truth when God commands you to follow Him? Can you handle the truth or will you ignore the truth? Just because you attend a time of worship, it does not mean you will worship.

I sense God is calling His children back to authentic worship - worship that is spirit breathed and scripturally based. Matt Redman wrote a song that calls for the children of God to return to a heart of worship.

The Heart of Worship by Matt Redman

*When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your heart.
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required. You search much deeper within through the way things appear, You're looking into my heart.*

Chorus

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship and it's all about You,
it's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You,
it's all about You, Jesus.*

*King of endless worth no one could express, how much you deserve.
Though I'm weak and poor, all I have is Yours, every single breath!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required. You search much deeper within through the way things appear, You're looking into my heart, yeah!*

Chorus

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship and it's all about You,
it's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it when it's all about You,
it's all about You, Jesus, it's all about You, Jesus.*

How are you handling the truth in worship? Just as God requires? Is your worship spirit breathed and scripturally based? If not, will you return to Him with a heart of worship? May your prayer be, “LORD, I desire to honor You as the One True God. I will delight in hearing You speak and will heed what You ask me to do.”

disciplelife: Seeing the Good in a Bad Situation

John 4:27, 31-38

I. _____ 4:31-36a

To sow seeds for the kingdom, you must first understand the process of...

1. _____ the Sower. *"lift up your eyes"*
2. _____ the Soil. *"look at the fields"*

Penetrating the soil involves the practice of cultivation. According to *Luke 8:4-8*, to cultivate the soil, you must...

- A. _____ the need to soften the soil.
- B. _____ the degree of hardness.
- C. _____ up the soil. *Colossians 4:3; Luke 9:51-56*

II. _____ 4:36b-38

Jesus shared three important truths about reaping...

1. The _____ for Reaping.
"I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored, and have entered into their labor:"; 1 Corinthians 3:6-8
2. The _____ for Reaping.
"do you not say, 'there are four months and then the harvest comes'?"; Matthew 9:37
3. The _____ for Reaping.
"they are already white for harvest."

Monday, January 22

I WILL GIVE YOU THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT!

“And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, ‘What do You seek?’ or, ‘Why are You talking with her?’” John 4:27

Webster’s Dictionary defines the phrase, *“The Benefit of the Doubt,”* as *“the state of accepting something/someone as honest or deserving of trust even though there are doubts.”* It is regarded as an act of kindness that produces good and helpful; results or effects, or that promotes well-being.

In the text, it appears as if Jesus gives the disciples the benefit of the doubt. The Samaritan woman left the well in haste to share with her family and friends about her salvation experience with Jesus the Messiah. As she was leaving, the disciples were returning with lunch. I can imagine the woman paid no attention to the disciples when their paths crossed but the disciples did a double take. Do you think the disciples asked each other, *“What was that all about?”* The scriptures implied this because they marveled (could not believe) that Jesus talked to a woman, and not just any woman, but a stinking, no good Samaritan woman. I can hear Simon Peter whispering, *“We can’t leave Jesus alone for a minute without Him doing something radical!”* The disciples were livid over Jesus’ actions but they did not openly discuss their complaint with Jesus.

It is obvious why Jesus told the disciples to go into town and pick up lunch because they would have interfered with His ability to share the gospel. Jesus knew, although the disciples were chosen to follow Him, they still held contempt in their hearts for the Samaritans. Based on the disciples disdain, the Son of God could have refused to use them from this point forward but He gave them the benefit of the doubt. While the woman was back home recounting her experience, Jesus gathered the disciples around Him and shared his heart concerning His love and willingness that all peoples would come to Him through His saving grace. As the disciples huddled up close, Jesus invested

in their future ministry. Their fervor for souls did not take effect in this setting but as time passed they caught their Master's heart and became just like Him in reaching people with the gospel. Jesus trusted them enough to give them a chance to prove themselves to be faithful servants.

Has Jesus ever given you the benefit of the doubt? Can I answer for you? Yes He has! It is called mercy! He withheld from you what you rightfully deserved. You and I deserved hell but He rescued us from sin and death. From your point of salvation, have you always been faithful to Him? Can I answer again? Absolutely not! Jesus could have refused to use you but He gave you the benefit of the doubt. He gave you another chance to serve and to share. Have you or will you take advantage of His second chances? Jesus is counting on you to make the kind of impact the disciples eventually made on the world. May your prayer be, *"LORD, thank You for giving me the benefit of the doubt. Anoint me today to share and to serve!"*

Tuesday, January 23

A FIVE STAR RECRUIT IS NOT A FINISHED PRODUCT

"In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But He said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' Therefore the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest?' Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together'." John 4:31-36

I am a sports nut! As I shared in a previous devotion, I love high school and college sports. One of the keys to a college football team's success on the field is the coach's ability to recruit quality players. During the recruiting process, high school players are given the designation of a numerical star as to their skill level. Players are ranked as high as a "five star." Five star athletes are a coach's dream. Many five star

recruits have the attitude that they are ready for the college game. It is not until they step onto the practice field that they discover they are not as ready as they think. Five star recruits are not finished products! Coaches have a way of bursting their bubbled egos. Whether a player is considered a three, four, or five star, he must be “*coached up*” to become an impact player. Therefore, preparation is of the utmost importance.

In the chapter, during this discipleship moment, Jesus taught His followers that before they could go out into the fields to sow and reap the souls of mankind for the kingdom, they must be prepared to do so. While most of them were “*five stars*” who knew how to fish for fish, they did not have a clue how to fish for men. Jesus told the disciples to lift up their eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest. The disciples could not see what Jesus saw. They could not recognize with spiritual eyes the lost state of peoples of all religions and races who were ripe for the picking. As they lifted up their eyes, all they could see was a bunch of Samaritans headed their way. Jesus knew they were ready to be saved but the disciples did not. If Jesus did not prepare them, they would forever miss opportunity after opportunity to sow and reap. Therefore, knowing how to look at people with spiritual eyes was crucial to kingdom growth. It was the goal of Jesus to teach His men how to see people as He saw them. In order to see people as Jesus sees them, they must be willing to love everyone as Jesus loves them. If they did not learn to love, they would never sow and reap the harvest. Learning to love all people was difficult for the disciples but they eventually caught on because Jesus broke their bubbled egos and coached them up!

Are you prepared to serve? Can you see an opportunity for ministry coming toward you? Are you looking for it with spiritual eyes? Do you wake up every morning asking the Father to bring people into your life who desperately need Jesus? You will never see a “*divine appointment*” if your spiritual eyes are not open! May your prayer be, “*LORD, open my spiritual eyes so I can see and love people as you see and love them. I humbly admit I am not a finished product, so prepare me today to be your servant and to embrace whomever you bring my way!*”

wednesday, january 24

LIFE ON THE FARM IS KINDA LAID BACK

“Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” John 4:35b

The late John Denver recorded a song entitled, *“Thank God I’m a Country Boy.”* In the first verse he sang,

“Well life on the farm is kinda laid back, ain’t much a country boy like me can’t hack. It’s early to rise, early in the sack. Thank God I’m a country boy.”

I did not grow up on a farm so I cannot relate to this song. I grew up in the city - the asphalt jungle of Northwest Indiana. So, that makes me a *“city slicker!”* However, my dad and mom grew up on a farm in Middle Tennessee. After hearing their stories about farm life, I am convinced that life on the farm is far from being laid back. Yes, farm life is definitely *“early to rise and early in the sack”* but I believe John Denver possibly consumed too much *“corn squeezins”* to say that *“it’s kinda laid back!”*

My parents worked on the farm without all the modern machinery and conveniences. Farm life was extremely hard. The most time consuming task was not feeding or milking the cows, slopping the hogs, feeding the chickens, gathering eggs, planting seeds and harvesting crops, slaughtering livestock, baling hay, or chopping wood. The most time consuming task was cultivating the fields. I recall them talking about plowing acres upon acres while walking behind a mule. It took weeks to till the hardened soil. Sometimes it required several passes before the soil was softened enough to plant. They would not even consider planting seed into a hardened field because the seed was too valuable to waste and the success of the harvest was crucial to their livelihood.

If you have been a Christian for a while, then you realize that life in God’s Kingdom is definitely not laid back. In the text, Jesus continued His teaching moment by stressing the importance of preparing king-

dom fields for seed time and harvest. Before the gospel seed can be planted into the soil of an unbeliever's mind and heart, the soil must be cultivated. Casting seed on hard soil will never produce a harvest. Likewise, casting the seed of the gospel onto a hardened soul will never produce eternal life. The Samaritan hearts had been hardened because of the way the Jews mistreated them. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman, He knew her hardened soul, caused by religious, racial, and gender barriers, must be cultivated. Jesus was certain she would not receive the living water if her mind and heart were not first softened.

The cultivation of a hardened soul is the most time consuming task in kingdom work. It can take days, weeks, months, and even years to soften a hardened heart. The reason people are resistant to the gospel usually stems from a hardened heart caused by a painful past, a tragedy, a loss, a bad church experience, or an unanswered prayer. As Christ followers, we must be willing to invest time into loving and meeting the needs of hardened people. Once an unbeliever sees how much we care, then the soil may be soft enough for us to plant a gospel seed into their life.

Has anyone ever rejected your attempt to share the gospel? If yes, could it be the soil of their heart was never cultivated? May I challenge you to cultivate before you sow. It does take time to cultivate but cultivating a hardened heart is never viewed as *"wasted time"* to Jesus. May your prayer be, *"LORD, anoint me to discern the condition of people's minds and hearts. Help me to invest the time necessary to cultivate a soul so they will be receptive to the gospel seed."*

thursday, january 25

WHAT IS GOD'S FAVORITE SEASON

“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’ And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.” John 4:35a, 36-38

The question is often asked, *“What is your favorite season of the year?”* Since I have lived in several regions of the US during my lifetime, the response to this question varies from region to region. Growing up in Northwest Indiana, the answer to this question began with a negative response, *“Definitely not winter,”* because winter usually lasted from the first of November till the end of March. In Northwest Indiana, the favorite season is summer because it does not get unbearably hot. The constant breeze coming from Lake Michigan makes the short summer months very enjoyable. In the Southwest, spring is the favorite season. The fresh cool breezes are a welcome sight after a cold, icy winter. In East Tennessee, fall is the favorite season because of the beautiful colors that emanate from the trees. In the Deep South, the favorite season varies. When it is cold, we cannot wait for it to warm up and when it is hot we cannot wait for it to cool off. The favorite season bounces around from spring to fall. Personally, my favorite season is fall. I enjoy the pleasant temperatures. Spring would be my favorite season if it was not for all the pollen - my allergies detest springtime!

If we were to ask God, *“What is Your favorite season,”* what would He say? Would He begin with a negative response and say, *“I cannot stand winter and summer because one is too cold and the other is too hot!”* Would He prefer spring or fall? I believe He would say all four seasons are His favorite because He did create all four seasons for specific reasons. In the late 1950's, Pete Seeger wrote a song entitled *“Turn, Turn, Turn.”* The song was recorded and made popular by The Byrds in 1965. *“Turn, Turn, Turn”* is taken directly from *Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*. The chapter and song say *“to everything there is a season.”* The first verse says,

“To everything, turn, turn, turn. There is a season, turn, turn, turn. And a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die. A time to plant, a time to reap. A time to kill, a time to heal. A time to laugh, a time to weep.”

God created each season with a specific purpose in mind. Did you notice the song and chapter say, *“A time to plant, a time to reap?”* Sowing and reaping occur in specific seasons, namely, spring and summer. Crops are typically planted in the spring and reaped during the summer. Jesus knew this because He posed a question to the disciples asking if they agreed that there were still four months until the harvest. Jesus and His disciples knew this to be true; yet, Jesus told them to look at the fields because they were already ripe for reaping.

It was obvious Jesus was not referring to the physical fields; rather, He was making a reference to His kingdom fields. He could see in a distance the Samaritans who were headed His way ready to receive the gospel. While there are specific seasons for planting and reaping physical crops; there are not such seasons in the Kingdom realm. Every season provides the potential for a life to be reaped for the glory of God. At the same moment, one could be cultivating a hardened heart, while another witness is planting a seed. While one is planting, another witness could be watering and nurturing a seed. While nurturing is happening, a plant could be ready for harvest. During a given day, a Christ follower has the potential to cultivate, plant, nurture, and reap in four different lives.

A Christ follower should live each day of every season anticipating a moment to sow or reap, or both because a season does not restrict an opportunity for kingdom growth. In *2 Corinthians 6:2*, the apostle Paul referenced *Isaiah 49:8*, *“Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.”* Every day should be considered a great day because that day provides an opportunity to participate in the salvation process of many unbelieving lives. Today, will you look at the fields and see where people are in the process for kingdom growth? May your prayer be, *“LORD, open my eyes to see people as You see them. I am ready to go to work in Your field to sow or reap, or both!”*

Friday, January 26

DID YOU MISS THE SIGN?

“Behold, I say to you, ‘Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest.’” John 4:35

During my more youthful days, I enjoyed playing the game of baseball. Now that I am in my 60’s, watching, rather than playing, suits me just fine! Baseball not only requires great athleticism (as most sports do) but it also requires a tremendous ability to think and think quickly. Relaying signs is a vital part of a baseball game. Signs (hand signals or touching areas of the head and upper torso) are revealed so each player will know what to do on a given play while hiding that information from the opposing team. It is to your disadvantage to tip your hat to the opposition. Signs are relayed from the coach in the dugout to the team concerning their position on the field. Signs are relayed from the third base coach to the batter indicating what the batter should do on the next pitch. Signs are relayed from the third base coach to the first base telling the runner(s) what to do in coordination with the next pitch. Signs are shared between players as to what their responsibility will be on the next pitch. Signs are vital to the strategy and success of the game.

Oftentimes, signs are missed. A batter, a runner, and even the defense occasionally misses a sign. It is obvious when a sign is missed because something goes wrong with the execution of a play. The coaches, players, and even the fans know someone missed a sign. During the course of a game, teams often change certain signs because the opposing team figured out their signs. It would be extremely difficult to play a baseball game without signs.

Jesus told the disciples to raise their heads up and look out at the fields because they were white for harvest. From the last devotion, you discovered the fields Jesus referred to were not the physical fields within view but the spiritual or kingdom fields. I am certain the disciples were confused because there were no signs of any mature physical crops that were ready to be picked. The disciples missed the sign! However, Jesus knew and could see the sign indicating a host of

Samaritans who were ready to be harvested for the Kingdom of God. So, what was the sign indicative of a spiritual harvest? Can we, as followers of Christ, see the sign of someone's readiness to be picked from a life of sinful rebellion into everlasting life? Yes, we can!

When Jesus first met the Samaritan woman, He engaged her in the physical realm. He asked her for a drink of water. From this request, the cultivation of her mind and heart began. When Jesus eased the tension from the racial, religious, and gender barriers, He planted the seed of the gospel when He said, *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water. Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst."* He watered the seed when He said, *"But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* Jesus knew she was ready (sign) to be harvested when she said, *"Sir give me this water that I may not thirst."* The evidence of her picking was her willingness to go home and share the good news of her conversion and to invite her family and friends to come to Jesus and do likewise.

Like the Samaritan woman, when an unbeliever begins to ask questions about spiritual matters and ultimately asks what they must do to receive eternal life, then they are ripe for the harvest. It will not be necessary to coerce or manipulate a person who is ripe into making an eternal decision. Many times unbelievers are *"picked"* before they are ripe. They are encouraged to pray *"the prayer"* before they show any sign of repentance. Unbelievers are often picked before the seed has been planted or watered. Of course an unbeliever wants to go to heaven but they may not be ready (ripe) to commit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught the disciples and us how to know the sign of the harvest so we would not be guilty of picking prematurely. Have you missed the sign? Have people passed you by who were ready to be harvested for the Kingdom of God? Have you prematurely picked someone who was not ready? May your prayer be, *"LORD, anoint me today to see the sign that someone is ready for the harvest. May I, with confidence, reap them for Your glory and may I never be guilty of plucking a life prematurely."*

communitylife: VIP'S



John 4:28-30, 39-42

I. They were willing to _____ to Jesus. 4:29
Mark 8:27; John 10:27; Acts 17:11

II. They were willing to _____ to Jesus. 4:30
James 4:8; John 10:10; Luke 19:1-10; Acts 2:44

III. They were willing to _____ to Jesus. 4:39

According to *Hebrews 6:4*, the process of belief involves an...

1. _____ belief - a _____
knowledge of factual information.
2. _____ belief - a _____
knowledge of confessed truth.
3. _____ belief - a _____
knowledge of surrender to Christ's lordship.

IV. They were willing to _____ in Jesus. 4:40
John 15:4-8; Genesis 2:24; Genesis 17:1-2

V. They were willing to _____ Jesus. 4:42
James 2:14-26; Hebrews 10:24

VI. They were willing to _____ for Jesus. 4:41
Romans 1:16; Acts 2:47

Monday, January 29

YOU ARE MORE THAN A SPECIAL GUEST!

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did’.” John 4:39

Tickets for Kids Charities provides free access for low income and at-risk children to various entertainment venues in their communities. Established in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1994, the inspiration for TFK came to founder Susan Weiner during a ballgame. Weiner thought the empty seats seemed so wasteful and so unnecessary. Couldn't those seats be filled by the communities' disadvantaged kids?

Through partnerships with approved nonprofits serving disadvantaged kids and families, TFK has distributed more than 2.6 million tickets valued in excess of \$51.3 million for experiences in arts, culture, education, sports, recreation, and family entertainment.

Without the help of TFK, none of the children, who have been recipients, would have ever been fortunate enough to attend one of these sponsored events. The children's resources, or the lack thereof, would have never been sufficient to guarantee such an adventure. TFK has made it possible for many underprivileged children to be considered *“Very Important Persons”* for one night. Being a special guest, at one of the local venues, would be a dream come true for each child.

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman, He did for her what she could never do for herself - redeem her from her sin. While being considered socially underprivileged and disadvantaged by the Jews, she became a *“Very Important Person”* in the kingdom of God. On her own merit, she would have never become a VIP. She was more than a special guest to Jesus, she became a forever member of the family of God. This experience was not a one-time event, it was an experience for all eternity.

Jesus did not exclude the gospel to the woman only, He invited and included many Samaritans in His divine plan. Once and forever community members of a despised race, many of her fellow Samaritans,

who believed in Jesus, likewise became members of the community of faith. They too knew what it was like to be “*Very Important Persons*” in the eyes of Jehovah God. They were more than just invited guests, they were heirs to an eternal kingdom.

I am blessed, and so are you, to be a citizen of the USA. You may know but I do not know what it is like to be considered underprivileged or disadvantaged. I have never been despised, rejected or humiliated by another race, religion, or gender. Yet, of my own merit, I could never be good enough or do enough to become a child of the Most High God. Because of my sinful nature, I was underprivileged and disadvantaged in the eyes of God. If Jesus did not come to me, as He also did for the Samaritan woman, I would be eternally lost. He was not looking past me to someone else when He interrupted my life, He was intentionally coming for me. I became a VIP in the family of God. I am not God’s “*special guest*,” I am His forever child!

If you too have been redeemed from your sin, you are a “*Very Important Person*” to Jesus! You are not a special guest in God’s hotel, you are a permanent resident in God’s heaven! You are a forever member of God’s community of faith. Live like it, act like it! May your prayer be, “*LORD, thank You for doing for me what I could never do for myself. Thank you for redeeming me from my sin. Thank You for making me one of Your ‘Very Important Persons.’ I declare: ‘I am more than a special guest, I am a forever member of Your community of faith.’ Anoint me today to live like it and act like it!*”

Tuesday, January 30

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

“And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him’...” John 4:4-42

In 2002, Verizon Wireless introduced a slogan, “*Can you hear me now*” to promote their network quality. Verizon boasted of its wireless reception to be greater than any of its competitors. The slogan depicts

a plethora of dissatisfied customers whose signal was weak or lacked connectivity. The commercials attracted a host of new customers to Verizon who gained the satisfaction of making quality calls without the threat of interference or interruption. Customer satisfaction meant they could now hear.

Prior to the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus, she nor her fellow Samaritans ever heard from Jehovah God. They could not hear from Him because they did not know Him. God spoke but their reception was lacking. When this woman and her fellow kinsmen received the gift of eternal life, their ability to hear from God was connected. The Samaritan believers became part of God's community. One of the characteristics that proved their communion with God was their confirmation to the woman of their willingness and ability to hear and understand the words of Jesus. There was a hunger to know Jesus through the words He spoke. They heard and understood His voice clearly.

One of the characteristics of a faith community is the willingness of each member to hear and understand the Word of God. There is a distinct hunger for God's Word. The community stands in agreement as to what God is revealing to them because of their compassion and consistency to search the Scriptures. In *John 10:27*, Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me." The more the community listens to God's Word, the more they can distinguish His voice from others who are not true and consistent with His Word.

Can you hear the voice of God clearly? Do you hunger consistently for His Word? Do you know beyond the shadow of a doubt when God is speaking to you? Can you distinguish His voice from the adversary? Is the willingness and ability to hear and understand God's Word a common characteristic amongst your community (**lifegroup**)? Is your **lifegroup** in communion (agreement) with the Word of God but, more specifically, with God's unique word for your group? May your prayer be, "LORD, thank You for anointing me to hear Your voice clearly through Your Word. Because of my hunger for You, I am willing to hear and understand Your truth; therefore, speak to me today. May I contribute to the strength of my community of faith by being a doer of your Word and not a hearer only."

wednesday, january 31

DON'T LET GO OF MY HAND!

“So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.” John 4:40

One of the many unique traits of children is their inquisitive curiosity. Since it is impossible for them to sit still, their simple minds compel their little bodies to explore unfamiliar territory. If you take your eyes off a child, they are quickly out of sight. Curiosity sometimes gets the best of them in a department store. Moms and dads instruct their little tykes to hold their hand or stand close by but it is hard to resist the toys when men's and women's apparel are not as appealing. A child will test the waters by venturing out in proximity of mom and dad to see what can be found interesting in men's and women's clothing or another section within sight. When the child realizes there is absolutely no contentment in hanging around a bunch of clothes racks, he feels the urge to expand his boundaries by wandering off to uncharted territory, namely the toys. Once in the toy section, he is so mesmerized with all the goodies that he forgets about his parents. The parents soon realize their *“Dennis the Menace”* has fled the scene. Whether it be a frantic search, loud screams of *“Dennis, Dennis, Dennis,”* or a Public Address Announcement asking Dennis Mitchell to return to Women's Apparel, little Dennis must be found. Once he returns, mixed emotions flood his parent's heart and minds - do we hug him, discipline him or both? Again, the imperative will be stressed, *“Don't let go of my hand!”*

I realize in today's world, parents cannot risk letting their children out of their sight for fear of child abductions. Evil preys on our children to snatch them up and carry them off to distant places. Because of the enemy's tactics, parents are more aware of their children's whereabouts.

Children, as well as adults, often struggle with the feelings of curiosity verses contentment. Curiosity persuades us to search for other things when contentment is lacking in our lives. If I am content, then most likely, I will not become curious!

The Samaritan woman urged her kinsmen to come and see a Man who told her everything about her life. Why did they accompany her back to the well? Curiosity! They were curious to meet this man who knew everything. Once they realized that everything she said was true, they also did what she had done - they committed their lives to Him. They were no longer curious because they had found the One in whom they had been searching for to fill the void in their lives. They were content to search no more. The text says that when they came to Jesus, they asked Jesus to stay with them. Jesus honored their request and stayed with them for two days.

Another characteristic of a community of faith is each member's desire to stay with Christ and each other. The word "to stay" means "to abide." It was more than an invitation to hang out, it was an invitation to solidify and strengthen their new community relationship with Christ. The word "abide" is a covenant term. Just as God the Father promised (vowed) to remain (abide) with Abraham, God the Son promised (vowed) to remain (abide) with His children. God would never leave nor forsake His own. Within the community of faith, God will always fulfill His responsibility to us - He will provide for us and protect us. Our responsibility to God is to trust and obey Him. In *John 15:4* Jesus said, "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." It is impossible to fulfill our responsibilities to Christ unless we abide in Him. The more we abide with Christ, the more our contentment in Him grows. If we are content in Him then we will not be curious for anything or anyone else. If we are content in Him then we will never see the need to wander beyond His boundaries.

The wonderful aspect of our community relationship with Christ is that we do not hold His hand, He holds ours. He will never let go! He knows our adversary deceives and tempts us into wandering off from God's will so he can draw us away to distant places. It is sad that we keep our eyes on our children in public places but we fail to watch and protect fellow believers from the devil's calculated and cunning snatches. Although God knows the devil's plan, He will allow us to wander if curiosity consumes us but He will always have us in His sight. Because of His great love for us, He will convict us to return to Him. He will hug

us, most definitely, but He will discipline us for being disobedient. He will remind us once again that He will never let go!

At this very moment, are you completely content with Jesus? If curiosity for the satisfaction of other people or possessions consumes or pleases you more than Christ, then you are not content with Jesus. Are you abiding in Him? If so, the evidence of your willingness to abide with Jesus will be found in your earnest desire to abide with others within your community of faith. May your prayer be, “*LORD, I realize today that my flesh will tempt me to become curious for things that will never satisfy but anoint me to remain content in You and You alone. You are all that I need, I need nothing more, and I will settle for nothing less!*”

thursday, february 1

FOLLOW THE LEADER

“And they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that He is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” John 4:42

While I was in seminary, I worked in a furniture store to support my family. I was the customer service and floor display manager. I handled customer complaints (great training for ministry by the way), scheduled service calls, and kept up with the showroom inventory. I recall a time when the Owner-President and Executive Vice President attended the Furniture Mart in Dallas, TX. This was an annual spring trip for the two. Their purpose for attending was to purchase the entire displays of several well-known companies. Upon their return, it was my job to dispatch trucks from Ft. Worth to Dallas to load all the furniture and bring it to either the warehouse or the main store.

The Executive Vice President gave me specific orders as to the destination of each piece. I always followed his orders for two reasons: he was my boss and I was literally afraid of the man! On this one particular purchasing spree, before we commenced loading the furniture, the Vice President said he wanted to change the order and send a portion of the purchase to one of our stores in Dallas. I asked if Mr. Stewart,

the Executive Vice President, requested this change, to which he replied, “*No, I am making the change!*” I asked him if Mr. Stewart would agree with the change to which he said, “*Absolutely!*” So I followed his orders, since he was my boss too, and sent his requested portion to one of our Dallas stores. The next day when I arrived at work, Mr. Stewart summonsed me into his office. He asked me why I sent a portion of the furniture to another store and whose idea was it? (I should have typed that sentence in all caps because he was screaming!) I said, “*Mr. Beck told me to do so. I **thought** (emphasis is mine) you were okay with it!*” Mr. Stewart replied, “***YOU THOUGHT, YOU THOUGHT!** “I DON’T PAY YOU TO THINK!” “I PAY YOU TO DO WHAT I TELL YOU TO DO!”* Although our relationship as employer - employee would not be considered a healthy relationship, still, my job was simply to follow my leader.

These born again Samaritans entered into a healthy relationship with Jesus. They said they believed Jesus was who He said He was because they heard and experienced Him for themselves. The word “*believe*” means “*to place one’s faith in by proof of words and works.*” They were ready to follow their new Master by doing what He commanded them to do because of what He said and did.

Another characteristic of community is the willingness of each member to follow Jesus wherever and whenever He may lead. Living a life of total surrender and obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the goal in community life. If you are a true follower of Jesus then you will do the works that prove you belong to Him. In *James 2:14-26*, James mentioned three times “*faith without works is dead.*” This does not mean that works are necessary for salvation; rather, works are the proof of salvation.

By “*works*” it does not mean anything the believer chooses to do that seems good. A follower will do exactly what the Lord is commanding him to do. A community of faith will embrace the specific commands their Master imparts to them and encourage one another to accomplish them for God’s glory.

Are you obedient to the commands of Christ? Are you listening to the words of Jesus? Are you doing what you want to do or what Christ wants you to do? Anything short of full obedience is considered in the eyes of our Lord to be total disobedience. Your job is simply to follow your leader! May your prayer be, *“LORD, may I hear and listen to You as You speak to me today. May I follow exactly what it is You have chosen for me to do for You. I will follow You, my Master, for Your glory!”*

Friday, February 2

DO YOU SWEAR TO TELL THE TRUTH?

“And many more believed because of His own word.” John 4:41

In a court of law when a witness is called to the stand, the witness places his left hand on the Bible and raises his right hand. The witness is asked by the court bailiff, *“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”* The witness replies with a *“yes!”* The witness, who is not the one on trial, promises to share the facts just as he witnessed them, nothing more and nothing less.

The tradition of requiring witnesses to swear an oath dates back to Roman times. The Latin word for witness is *“testis”* meaning *“three.”* A witness is the third person who observed the event in question. It is the responsibility of the witness to tell the whole truth about the event in question. To falsify a witness under oath is considered perjury. In Roman times, if a witness committed perjury, the witness was hurled off a steep cliff. In the US, perjury is a criminal offense. People who are charged with perjury may face a variety of legal ramifications, such as, jail time, probation, or court fines. Also, a witness, once summonsed to appear in court but refuses to appear, could be held for obstruction of justice. Similar consequences to perjury could apply. Thus, the purpose for a witness is to gather enough information concerning an event to draw a just conclusion.

More than the initial group of Samaritans, who accompanied the woman back to the well, made professions of faith in Jesus. The woman’s enthusiasm for sharing Jesus rubbed off on them. Just as the

woman left her water pot and hurried home to tell her friends what Jesus did for her, the Samaritans hurried back to their village to share and invite others to come to Jesus. When the folks in the village, who had been invited to come, heard Jesus speak over the course of two days, they too believed and followed Jesus. Their new found faith in Jesus compelled them to cultivate the hearts of their fellow, sinful kinsmen, to sow seeds of the gospel into the fertile soil, and finally, to reap a bountiful harvest of Samaritan souls for God's kingdom. They became bold witnesses who shared the whole truth and nothing but the truth that Jesus and the woman had shared with them.

The final characteristic of a community of faith is their willingness to share the gospel. As the apostle Paul proclaimed in *Romans 1:16*, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." A community of faithful believers will never be ashamed to witness about Jesus. They will never become content over the size of their group. There will always be room for one more.

The faithful witness does not take an oath every day before he ventures out into the world. Before leaving his home, he does not swear to tell the whole truth to whomever the Lord may lead. The oath was taken at the moment an unbeliever committed his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He promised to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God. The oath was our seal of a covenant relationship with Jesus. Without one's committal to the oath of the covenant, he cannot be saved. Salvation is more than one's desire to go to heaven after death, it is a covenant agreement to deny yourself of all earthly rights, to take up your cross of selflessness, sacrifice, and suffering, and to follow Jesus every day of your life. The refusal to obey and share Jesus is an obstruction to the will of God. Likewise, to falsify the gospel story to any degree is considered spiritual perjury. The consequences for both could be the forfeit of earthly and heavenly blessings.

Do you know when Jesus saved you, He called you to the witness stand of this world to be a voice for Him. You took an oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Have you ever ob-

structed the will of God when it came to an opportunity to share? Have you ever perjured yourself because you conversed with unbelievers about earthly things but stopped short of sharing the truths of eternal things? Are you a faithful witness for Jesus? Are you sharing with unbelievers who Jesus is, what He did and is doing, and how He can make a drastic change in their lives? May your prayer be, *“LORD, forgive me for not taking the oath seriously to tell the whole truth. Cleanse me of every thought and desire that hinders me from following You daily. Anoint me, with a fresh oil of Your power, to share today with whomever you bring my way. I promise to share the whole truth with them as You lead!”*

Enjoy life with God the Son as you worship, share, emulate, and fellowship with Him. *“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26*

