

The Easy Bible® Volume Two

Days 32-62

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Finding your way around / Volume 2 in a regular Bible

Volume 2 contains excerpts from the following books of the Bible in bold type:

Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther Job **Psalms** Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi **Matthew Mark Luke John Acts** Romans **1 Corinthians** 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude Revelation

The Easy Bible[®] was created to make it easy and fun for you to explore the Christian faith. We know the Bible can be confusing if you don't know your way around. So consider this your guided tour, your bridge from no Bible to whole Bible. We took all the "read-me-first" passages from the Bible and arranged them into 365 daily readings. You're holding the first 31 days in your hands. We put these Bible passages into easy-to-understand, user-friendly language. We added notes to help you understand each day's selection. On each day we also added a section called *Discoveries* to help you with your spiritual journey. Finally, we include a set of questions. Beside each question is this box: □. If you plan to meet with friends to discuss what you have been reading, checked boxes will remind you which questions you wish to discuss.

"A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."
Theodore Roosevelt

The Easy Bible[®] symbols

◀B ▶ Matthew 6:10-13 → Find it here: ◀77% ▶ Malachi Matthew Mark

◀B ▶ This introduces a Bible passage.

Matthew 6:10-13 This gives the reference or "address" of the passage. This passage is in the sixth chapter of the book of Matthew, verses 10 through 13.

→ Find it here: ◀77% ▶ Malachi Matthew Mark

Our version of the Bible is arranged in a different order than other versions. This symbol shows you how to find each passage in a regular Bible. For example, 77 percent puts this passage about 3/4 of the way through the Bible. 50 percent would be in the middle. 0 percent would be in the first few pages. 100 percent would be in the last few pages. The words after the symbol will help you find it from nearby books of the Bible. If you have access to a regular Bible, you might try seeing if you can find the passage given these hints. Remember, different translations will read a little differently.

▶ Notes to help you understand the Bible passage

‡ *Discoveries*: Help for your spiritual journey

?? Questions for you to ponder and discuss

Are you a Bible pro?

The Easy Bible[®] is your tool to help your friends move from no Bible to whole Bible. It isn't a scholarly translation; throw that idea out the window right now. It isn't pretending to be. It's a conversation starter. It's a place to begin. It's a way to get traction on the uphill trek of faith. **So give these books to your friends who are new to the Bible.** Read each day yourself and fill in the answers to the questions. Then get together with your friends over pizza and pop, wine and cheese, beer and pretzels, coffee and donuts (or however you like to do it), and chew on this together.

For example, I was sharing a question from Day 1 with a young friend. I asked, "What does faith mean to you? How would you describe your faith (or lack of faith) in God?" His response: "I trust God, I mean, a little. I don't trust anybody completely." *What a great window into this young man's life!* So I followed up with the question, "What would need to happen for you to move from trusting God a little to trusting God completely?" He said, "Well, God would need to do something about all the suffering in the world." This led to a great conversation about God, suffering, faith and opportunity. This is how the process of exploring and embracing the Christian faith takes place. During our conversation, we read the *Discoveries* entry for Day 1. It spoke to this young man's question and was helpful in cementing some of the concepts I sought to communicate. By the way, we also tested the *Discoveries* section of this book on Bible veterans with 30, 40, 50 years of experience, and they were blown away. So there might be something in here for you, too.

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Day 32: The Death of a Friend

◀B ▶ **Mark 6:17, Luke 7:18-35, Mark 6:18-29, Matthew 14:13a**

→ Find it here: ◀78% ▶ ◀80% ▶ ◀83% ▶ Malachi **Matthew** **Mark** **Luke** **John**

King Herod married Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. This was wrong, and John the Baptist called him on it. Herod responded by throwing John in prison. ... John sent two of his followers to Jesus with a question. "Are you the One we've been hoping for, or should we look for someone else." They arrived with this question when Jesus was in the middle of many miracles. Jesus told John's followers, "Tell him what you just saw: Blind see, lame walk, lepers are cured, deaf hear, dead live and the poor hear good news. Those who hang in there with Me will be glad they did." After John's followers left, Jesus turned to the crowd. "When you went to see John the Baptist, what did you expect? A sissy in fancy clothes? Not by a long shot! John was the real deal, a prophet with a message from God just like the Bible predicted. As the one who got things ready for Me, He was the greatest of the great. But the coming Kingdom of God is so great that the doorkeeper will outshine John." This made sense to the regular people in the crowd because they had been baptized by John. But the snooty religious leaders who refused to be baptized by John kept right on saying "no" to God. Jesus said, "The people of this generation are like kids who complain, 'I sang a happy song and you wouldn't smile; I sang a sad song and you wouldn't cry.' John the Baptist abstains from wine or strong drink and certain foods. Your response: 'He's crazy.' I come along eating and drinking and you call me a glutton, a drunk and a friend of the ungodly. But God's people are vindicated in the end."

Meanwhile, Herodias hated John and wanted to kill him, but Herod protected John because he knew John was a man of God. That intimidated Herod and left him unsettled whenever he listened to John. But somehow he couldn't stop listening to him. Then something happened to tip the scales. Herod threw a party, and the daughter of Herodias came in and danced for Herod and his guests. Herod, completely carried away, offered the girl anything she wanted. She consulted her mother and came back with this request: "Hand me the head of John the Baptist on a plate." King Herod was stuck. Not wanting to lose face in front of his guests, he sent an executioner to the prison and granted her request. The girl gave the head to her mother, and John's followers buried his body. ... When Jesus heard about John, He left by boat and went to a deserted place to be by Himself.

► **Doubt** Even the greatest spiritual leaders sometimes struggle with doubt. God understands this. Jesus did not rebuke John the Baptist for his doubts; rather, He sent back a word of encouragement. God expects us to come to Him with our doubts. He will not condemn us; rather, He will point the way to faith. ► **Conflict** Two groups frequently clashed with Jesus: those who held power in religion and those who held power in government. In both cases, they seemed eager to hang on to their power, but showed little willingness to use their power to serve the people for whom they were responsible.

✠ Discoveries: Let the Children Come to Jesus

“Let the children come to Me; don’t put any roadblocks in their way. Children are deeply valued by God.” / Mark 10:14 [Day 34]

One of the things that grieves me most is the mistreatment of children. I have mourned my own mistakes and failings with my own children; many times I have cried out to God over this. And I have been in homes where parents were unkind to their own children. For a while, I worked helping hurricane victims. We can recover from almost any disaster. Homes can be rebuilt. Possessions can be restored. Even mourning for lost loved ones runs its course. But the mistreatment of a child can hurt that child for a lifetime and replicate itself into future generations.

Jesus welcomes, loves and defends those who have no power or status in this world. He has always been the Champion of little people, the powerless and the invisible. Do you want to measure God’s work in your life? Here’s one way you can do it—look for the love and care He has placed in you for little ones who have no strength of their own.

Jesus is teaching His followers a lesson about the value of every human being, regardless of age. But there’s something else in this passage—something that is often overlooked. If you dig deeper into this, I think you will find the basis for one of the most powerful prayers you will ever pray. We spend a great deal of time trying to deal with the fruit of sin, and not enough dealing with sin at its root. We find people caught in adultery, greed, lies, addictions, hate, gossip, whatever. And so, maybe we are shocked, maybe we are bold enough to confront these sins, maybe we pray against these sins. All of that may be fine, but it’s like pounding a brick wall with a baseball bat—we are not likely to make much headway. After all, what is an adulterer or an alcoholic? What is a greedy or lustful man? Each is an adult who is carrying around a little child within who has been sequestered from Jesus. When little child needs are met by Jesus

Christ, sinful adult choices no longer make sense to the redeemed.

Show me an adult in bondage, and I will show you a child who has been hindered from coming to Jesus. A powerful word from Jesus here is that He wants all these hindrances removed. The will and word of Jesus is stronger than all the forces of hell that keep people in bondage. Do you want to see people delivered? Pray that God will remove everything that hinders the little child within from coming to Jesus.

?? Have you had or do you have doubts about God or the Bible? How are you processing those doubts? (check the questions you wish to discuss later)

What do you see as the purpose behind Jesus' statement to the crowd? ("When you went to see John the Baptist, what did you expect?")

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to do something you didn't want to do in order to avoid losing face? What would you do differently next time?

After He learns of John's execution, Jesus withdraws to a secluded place to be by Himself. What do you conclude about Jesus from that action?

Your main take away from today's reading ...

Day 33: A Miracle Meal

◀B ▶ Mark 6:30-38a, John 6:8-9, Mark 6:39-44

→ Find it here: ◀80% ▶ ◀86% ▶ Matthew Mark Luke John Acts

Jesus and His followers were extremely busy; so He suggested they take a break. Getting into a boat, they departed for a secluded place. But the crowd swarmed to that place, pouring in from everywhere. Jesus saw that they were like children with no mother; so He welcomed them and taught them things they needed to know for life. When supper time came, His followers expressed concern. “We’re out here in the middle of nowhere,” they said, “and the people are getting hungry. Call it a day so they can go somewhere and get something to eat.” “Why don’t you feed them?” Jesus asked. The disciples looked at the crowd and did some quick calculations. “How can we do that? Half a year’s salary wouldn’t even cover this meal,” they said. Jesus answered, “Focus on what you have. How much food do you have?” Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, found a boy with a bag lunch. “Here’s a boy with five bread sticks and two fish,” he said. “But that’s not enough to give everybody even a taste!” Jesus said, “Let’s get organized. Have the people sit down in groups of 50 to 100.” Taking the five bread sticks and the two fish, He looked up toward heaven and spoke words of blessing for the food they had. Then He broke off pieces of the bread and fish and handed them to His followers to distribute. They then handed out the bread and fish to the people. After everyone ate until satisfied, Jesus’ followers gathered up twelve baskets of leftovers. Five thousand men were present.

◀B ▶ Matthew 14:22-36 → Find it here: ◀78% ▶ Malachi Matthew Mark

The meal ended. The crowd dispersed. Jesus climbed a mountain to pray while His followers were in a boat, fighting a headwind, trying to cross the lake. Before sunrise, Jesus walked on top of the lake to meet with them. His followers were terrified, thinking He was a ghost. But Jesus said, “No need to be afraid. It’s Me.” Peter replied, “Okay, Master, if it’s really You, invite me out there to walk with You.” “Feel free.” So Peter stepped out and walked on top of the water also. But then he started looking around at the wind-driven waves, fear got the best of him, and he started to sink. “Help, Master!” he cried. Jesus grabbed him and pulled him up out of the water. “What happened to your faith?” He asked, “Why did you doubt?” They climbed into the boat. The wind stopped. Those in the boat watched in awe. “You are the Son of God!” they exclaimed. The boat landed at a place called Gennesaret. People recognized Jesus. Word

spread. All the sick of the region were brought to Him, hoping to just touch the edge of His clothes. Whoever did was healed.

► **Feeding of the Five Thousand** The Bible contains four accounts of the life of Jesus: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Many of the incidents in Jesus' life are recorded in one, two or three of the Gospels, but not in all four. This is one of those events that is referred to in all four Gospels. The different accounts make it clear that five thousand was only the number of men present. Add in women and children, and the number of people fed could rise to ten to fifteen thousand or more. ► **Miracles** Why did Jesus perform miracles? According to the Bible, Jesus was an agent (maybe the Agent) of Creation. (See Day 8, John 1) As Creator God, He had the power to put on a dazzling display. But His purpose was not to show off. Rather, the vast majority of His miracles were acts of love and compassion meant to help hurting and needy people. They were also road signs on the journey of faith; God's way of reaching into our world and giving us a helping hand when it comes to the struggle between belief and doubt. Jesus' miracles acted as an identification badge confirming that He was who He claimed to be.

‡ Discoveries: Why Does Jesus Test You?

"Why don't you feed them?" Jesus said. / John 6:37 [Day 33]

God isn't wondering what to do. He has His part already planned out. Making five thousand meals is no big deal. But, before the miracle, He pauses to test His followers.

Are you being tested? I know I sure am.

Why does Jesus test you and me? So He can show us what's really there, just before He puts something better in its place.

Some time ago I read the story¹ of a woman in India who took her son to the market to buy bare necessities for their family. Her young son saw a stand of delicious mangoes while he was there. His mouth watering, he begged his mother to buy one. But she had no money, not even to buy a single mango. When they got home, she went into her room and wept. A couple weeks later, a friend of her husband who worked in Kuwait, purchased three boxes of mangoes to take back to Kuwait with him. But just before he left, Kuwait changed its import regulations, and the mangoes were not welcome. So the friend came to this family and said, "I have no place for these mangoes. Could you take them?" Now a family that was too poor to buy a single mango suddenly had

1 <http://gloryofhiscross.org/testimony2.htm> accessed 10/08/2011

three boxes of them.

What did Jesus do with this young boy who wanted a mango? He let him feel the hunger first, then He performed the miracle, giving him far more than he could ask or imagine. [Ephesians 3:20]

In today's passage, Jesus tested His followers and found them trying to figure out how to do the impossible with human effort. They were stumped. They didn't know how to solve the problem. But when Jesus finished with them, they would never look at a crowd, a meal or a problem the same way again.

Don't be discouraged if you don't like what you see when Jesus tests you. Just turn it over to Him. He is about to replace it with something better.

?? Why did Jesus tell His followers to focus on what they had? □

Jesus could have created a meal out of thin air. Instead, He chose to use a bag lunch as a starting point. Why? □

Why did Jesus invite Peter to walk on the water with Him? □

(How) would your perspectives change if you experienced miracles like these? □

Your main take away from today's reading ... □

Day 34: How to Approach God

◀B ▶ **Luke 18:1-14** → Find it here: ◀84% ▶ Mark Luke John

Jesus told a story to explain why you pray without giving up. “There was a judge who didn’t care about anybody—even God. A widow came to him again and again saying, ‘Protect me from my enemy.’ At first he ignored her, but then he thought, *This widow is driving me crazy! I’ll give her what she wants so she leaves me alone.*” Jesus added, “Consider what this evil judge did. Do you think God will do any less? No way! He will make sure you get justice without delay. But when I return to set things right, will I find anyone with this kind of faith?”

To the self-righteous who had contempt for everyone else, Jesus told this story: “Two men went to the place of prayer. One was a strict practitioner of religion. The other was a despised tax collector. The religionist prayed: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people—con men, robbers, adulterers, or like this disgusting tax collector. I fast twice a week and pay You a tenth of every penny I make.’ But the tax collector hid in a corner and wept before God. ‘Have mercy on me,’ he prayed, ‘for I am a sinner.’” Jesus said, “I’ll give it to you straight. The tax collector found peace with God, but not the other guy. Arrogant people will trip over their own pride and fall, but God invites the humble to be His friends.”

◀B ▶ **Mark 10:13-16** → Find it here: ◀81% ▶ Matthew Mark Luke

When people brought their children to Jesus, hoping He would touch them, His followers tried to keep them away. But Jesus was offended by their actions. He said, “Let the children come to Me; don’t put any roadblocks in their way. Children are deeply valued by God. In fact, if you don’t have the simple faith of a child, you can’t find your way into God’s kingdom.” Jesus embraced the children, and spoke words of blessing over them.

◀B ▶ **Matthew 15:21-28** → Find it here: ◀78% ▶ Malachi Matthew Mark

Jesus took a road trip up to Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman whose ancestors had been hostile to God’s people came to Jesus with a request. Addressing Jesus as the heir to King David’s throne, she said, “Please help. My daughter is tormented by an evil spirit.” Jesus said nothing. His followers lost patience with her and said to Jesus, “Can’t You get rid of her? She’s getting on our nerves.” Jesus said to her, “I was sent to help the needy in Israel.” She bowed before Him and said, “Please help me.” Jesus said, “Should I take food off the chil-

dren's plates and give it to the dogs?" She said, "No, but even the dogs eat leftover scraps from the table." Jesus said, "Good answer! Great faith! Request granted." At that moment her daughter was healed.

► **Persistence in prayer** Jesus often emphasized the importance of praying without giving up, even if you don't see an answer right away. An example of this creative persistence is seen, not only in the widow, but also in the woman from Tyre. ► **Tax collectors** See Day 27. While tax collectors were despised and a religionist (literally Pharisee) was admired, Jesus used this story to show how God looks at what's inside a person's character and how God honors humility. ► **Tyre** Up to this point, favor with God was closely associated with ancestry. Jesus begins a huge paradigm shift that eventually resulted in Christianity breaking away from Judaism. While it was from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the nation of Israel) that Jesus and the story of God entered our world, God's plan was meant to include all nations. In this situation, Jesus demonstrates that faith trumps ancestry when it comes to answered prayer.

Discoveries: The Silence of Jesus

Jesus said nothing. / Matthew 15:23 [Day 34]

This is where some of us are. We cry out to Jesus, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And what is Jesus' answer? Nothing. Nada. Not a word.

Soon after, the ever-helpful disciples come along and suggest that the woman in this story be tossed into the scrap heap so the great ship of their comfort can sail forward on a clear sea. Again, some of us have been there. Laugh with me.

What is going on? Why doesn't Jesus answer? And when He does, why does He appear to push her aside? Read the rest of the story. It's clear that Jesus was setting her up for more than just a miracle. He had bigger plans for her. He was drawing out her expression of faith so that it could be recorded and never forgotten. Twenty centuries later, it comes into our hands and whispers an encouraging word into our ears: "Go ahead. Ask the Lord for the impossible. Dare to believe. Dare to dream. Dare to receive."

"I was sent to help the needy in Israel ... Request granted." / Matthew 15:24,28 [Day 34]

Faith tries a different way.

The Lord changes a "no" to a "yes." In today's passage, it isn't so much a cry or a plea that the Lord honors, but rather persistent, creative faith. The Canaanite

woman begs Jesus to deliver her demonized daughter. He brushes her off, not once, but twice. Yet she understands that the love of God is big enough to include her family; so she doesn't quit; she asks a different way, and He grants her request.

This reminds me of a story I heard many years ago. There was a salesman who called on a businessman. The secretary carried the sales representative's card to the businessman. He promptly threw it away and told her that he was much too busy to see the sales guy. When she delivered the news, the salesman asked for his business card back. The secretary returned to the businessman who couldn't find the card; so he gave the secretary a nickel to give to representative to pay for the loss. The salesman smiled when he got the nickel, handed the secretary another business card, and said, "Tell your boss I sell two cards for a nickel."

God honors the faith that doesn't quit, that tries again, that tries another way.

?? Why does God want us to be persistent in prayer? □

What's the best way to avoid the pride of the self-righteous religionist? □

Why does God value children? □

Why do you think Jesus responded to the woman from Tyre the way He did? □

Your main take away from today's reading ... □

Day 35: The Path to Freedom

◀B ▶ John 8:1-19, 28-29, 31b-36 → Find it here: ◀86% ▶ Luke John Acts

After camping out on the Mount of Olives, Jesus went into the city of Jerusalem and began teaching the people in the temple courtyard. The experts in religion dragged in a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery, and dropped her in the middle of the courtyard. “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses commands us to throw stones at such women until they die. What about you? What do you say we should do?” Their motive was to trap Jesus so they could press charges against Him. At first Jesus said nothing. Instead, He began writing in the dirt with His finger. But they wouldn’t let go; so He stood up and faced them. “Which one of you has never sinned? Let that person be the first to throw a stone.” Then He went back to writing in the dirt. They weren’t expecting that. One by one, they began to slink away, beginning with the oldest. When they were all gone, Jesus turned to the woman. “Woman,” He said, “where are your accusers? Is no one left to condemn you?” “No one, Master,” she answered. Jesus replied, “Neither do I condemn you. Be free; live your life without sin.”

Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world. Follow Me, and you will clearly see the path of life. Ignore Me, and you’ll be stranded in the dark.” The religionists said, “There You go again, tooting Your own horn. Where are your references?” Jesus said, “Let’s get this straight. I tell the truth because that’s who I am. You’re clueless when it comes to Me, because you’re operating from such a limited frame of reference. But you want a reference—okay, here’s my reference: the Father Himself.” They didn’t get it. They didn’t understand that He was talking about Father God. Instead, they tried to get Him to produce a human father. Jesus shook His head. “You don’t know Me. You don’t know My Father. ... After you nail Me to a cross, then you’ll begin to understand who I am, and you’ll realize that I do exactly what Father God tells me to do. He is always with Me, and I always please Him. ... Hang on to what I say, and you will be My true followers. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered, “What do you mean, ‘set us free’? As Abraham’s descendants, we’ve always been free.” Jesus shook His head. “Sin once and the chains of sin’s slavery are already on your wrists and ankles. Remember that slaves come and go, but members of the family have a permanent place in the home. So let Me, the Son, set you free, and then you will really be free.”

► **Woman caught in the act of adultery** This is one of the few passages in the Bible that is not present in many of the early manuscripts, and some have questioned its inclusion in scripture. Conspicuously absent from the proceeding was the man with whom she was committing adultery. The law also commanded that he be punished (Deuteronomy 22:20-29). Some believe that Jesus was writing down the names of women with whom the religionists themselves had committed adultery. Whatever the case, it soon became clear that the whole incident wasn't about keeping the law or protecting the sanctity of marriage, but rather about discrediting Jesus whom they considered to be a dangerous rival. ► **Truth will set you free** Deception is a primary ingredient in temptation and sin. As a rule, when deception is removed, obeying God becomes a delight rather than drudgery, because we understand who God really is, who we really are, and how God really feels about us.

‡ Discoveries: Find the Pain, and You Will Find the Door to Freedom

“Woman,” He said, “where are your accusers? Is no one left to condemn you?” “No one, Master,” she answered. Jesus replied, “Neither do I condemn you. Be free; live your life without sin.” / John 8:10-11 [Day 35]

The more I meditate on this passage, the more wisdom I see in the approach Jesus used. As the story opens, a woman caught in the act of adultery is thrown down before Jesus to see if He will take a hard line on sin and insist that she be stoned according to the law of Moses. The opponents of Jesus thought this would be an ingenious way to trap Him, but God uses all the enemy's traps as opportunities for His glory.

The woman had been exposed. She had nothing to cover herself with except guilt and shame. But there in her place of shame, Jesus had exactly what He needed to transform her life. Why do people end up in extramarital affairs? Contrary to all the hype about marriage, sex and romance, people are unfaithful because they are searching for solutions to their own neediness, their own internal pain. Jesus was right there, dealing with the root cause—internal pain and shame.

This, by the way, is the reason so many approaches to curing moral impurity don't work. They magnify shame instead of correctly removing it. They leave the root cause intact.

But with one sweep Jesus takes out lifelong shame: “Neither do I condemn you.” Jesus doesn't condone her sin—He calls it what it is—but He demonstrates to her in her place of exposed pain that His pardon is greater than all

her sin. She is free. The shame is gone. The Master does not condemn her—the pain is gone. She is free to leave her life of sin because nothing now is holding her to it.

A while back, someone reluctantly admitted to me that he was entangled in an affair. After telling me, he cringed and said, “What do you think of me now?” I simply said, “I think you’re a guy looking for a solution, just like all the rest of us.” I say this not to minimize or excuse adultery. It is a terrible sin, disrupting lives and destroying marriages. But I say it so we can understand those who get caught in this trap. Inside, they are in pain, and they are looking frantically for a solution. When we begin to understand what we all have in common, then we can find a compassion that preserves respect for those who have stumbled. Yes, they have fallen, and so have we. We are all in this together. We all need the gracious hand of God. And He is here, ready to restore.

?? What do you think Jesus was writing in the dirt? □

How would you explain the significance of Jesus’ response to the woman caught in adultery? □

How is Jesus the Light of the world? □

In what ways do Jesus and the truth set us free? □

Your main take away from today’s reading ... □

Day 36: The Man Born Blind

◀B ▶ John 9:1-41 → Find it here: ◀86% ▶ Luke John Acts

One day Jesus and His followers walked by a man who had been blind since the day he was born. Jesus' followers asked, "Teacher, why was this man born blind? Did he sin, or did his parents sin?" "Neither," said Jesus. "This is not a blame game, but an opportunity for God to do what He loves to do. Let's grab every one of these opportunities while we can, as long as I'm here, because I am the Light of the world." Then Jesus spit on the ground, mixed some mud and put it in the eyes of the blind man. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (translation: sent). So he washed and came back seeing.

News spread, disbelief gave way to wonder as the man told his story. But then the religious police got tangled up in this and started interrogating the healed man, because he recovered his sight on the Sabbath. The religious police said, "Jesus is a fraud because He works on the Sabbath." But some shook their heads, saying, "How does a fraud do miracles like this?" The religious police dragged the man's parents into this, trying to verify that a real miracle had taken place. The parents didn't want to get involved, because word was out that the religious leaders would excommunicate and ostracize anybody who claimed that Jesus was the real deal, the awaited Messiah. Then the religious police brought the healed man back for a second round of interrogations. They listened to his story, looking for loopholes, trying to discredit Jesus. The man shook his head in disbelief. "All the evidence is right in front of you," he said. "God doesn't listen to frauds. Who ever heard of man opening the eyes of someone born blind? If Jesus wasn't the real deal, He couldn't do anything." They answered, "Why do you think you were born blind? Clearly you are a hard core sinner! How dare you pretend to teach us!" Then they tossed him out on the street.

Jesus heard what happened, found the man, and asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man said, "Who is he?" Jesus said, "You're talking to Him." The man said, "I believe," and he worshiped Jesus. Jesus commented, "I enter the world and the blind see, but those who think they see clearly are shown up for what they are—blind." The religionists said, "So, are you calling us blind?" Jesus answered, "If you were blind, you would have an excuse. You claim to see and you claim to be a source of enlightenment. That makes you culpable."

▶ **Religious police** literally "Pharisees" ... ▶ **Son of Man** This was one of

Jesus' favorite names for Himself. While the name suggests the humanity of Jesus, the title was certainly understood as a reference to someone far greater than an ordinary human. Most who heard it probably remembered the vision of the prophet Daniel recorded 600 years earlier, where he saw a "Son of Man" being brought into the presence of God and given authority and honor, with all peoples worshiping Him.

‡ Discoveries: A Miracle Waiting to Happen

One day Jesus and His followers walked by a man who had been blind since the day he was born. Jesus' followers asked, "Teacher, why was this man born blind? Did he sin, or did his parents sin?" "Neither," said Jesus. "This is not a blame game, but an opportunity for God to do what He loves to do. / John 9:1-3 [Day 36]

Every person is a miracle waiting to happen.

Notice the players here in this little story. There is the man blind from birth. He has given up. He knows he will never see. He doesn't even know what seeing is. He is helpless and there is no hope. Along comes average Joe Christian—the disciples. In their sin-centered world, they wanted to turn this man's misery into a theology lesson. Then Jesus arrives on the scene. He is the only One who sees the situation for what it really is: an opportunity for God.

Every one of us has problems that aren't going away. It's part of the human condition. It might be a problem with health or money or marriage or addiction or whatever. But if we have the guts to be honest, we have stubborn problems—and, apart from God, there's no solution. In fact, I will suggest that we need these kinds of problems if we are ever to learn something about who we are and who God is. Not that we go looking for them. No, they will come to us. To add insult to injury, we all will have people in our lives who will delight to point out our faults and failings, who will try to convince us that our problems are a result of some sin or shortcoming that we could have avoided.

Then there is God. He sees the problem for what it is: an opportunity for God to show us who He is. Some of us will discover God as our Healer. Some will discover Him as the One who mends broken hearts. Some of us will find Him as the One who makes a way when there is no way. Some of us will discover God as the One who sets us free. All of these discoveries started out as people with problems. But then the problem fades and the treasure remains.

?? Explain the difference between the perspective of Jesus and that of His followers when they encountered the man born blind? How have you observed or experienced people with similar perspectives? □

Why do you think Jesus healed the man the way He did? □

Why do you think the religious police had such a difficult time accepting Jesus? How would you characterize their journey of faith? Do you see any parallels today? □

Why do you think Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” in this context? □

Your main take away from today’s reading ... □

Day 37: Back from the Grave

◀B ▶ John 11:1-57 → Find it here: ◀86% ▶ Luke John Acts

Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany, was sick. His sisters sent word to Jesus: “The one you love is ill.” Jesus said, “This illness won’t end in death, but rather in displaying the goodness and greatness of God and His Son, Jesus.” Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But after getting the news, He lingered where He was two more days. Then He said, “Let’s go back to Judea.” His followers said, “Are You sure? The religious leaders in Judea just tried to stone You to death.” But Jesus answered, “Walk in the daylight, and you don’t stumble. Walk at night, and you trip and fall.” Then He added, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I need to wake him.” His followers said, “If he sleeps, won’t he get well?” Jesus clarified: “Lazarus is dead. For your sake, I’m glad I wasn’t there. Let’s go and experience something that will increase your faith.” Jesus’ follower Thomas said, “Great. Lazarus is dead. We’re probably next.”

When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Martha met Him outside. “Master,” she said, “if you had been here, my brother would still be alive. But even now I know God will give You whatever You ask for.” Jesus said, “Your brother will rise from the dead.” Martha replied, “At the resurrection at the end of time, yes.” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection. I am the life. Believe in Me and you will live, even if you die. In fact, you will never really die. Do you believe?” “Yes, I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God.” Then Martha returned to the house, whispered to her sister, “Jesus is here and He wants you to meet Him.” Mary hurried to Jesus, with mourners following. She fell at His feet in reverence and said, “If You had been here, my brother would still be alive.” When Jesus saw her weeping and her friends mourning with her, He was troubled; and being shown to the tomb, He stopped and wept. Some present said, “Look how Jesus loved Lazarus.” Others said, “A pity He wasn’t here to show that love when Lazarus needed it. Could He have prevented this death?” The tomb was a cave with a stone blocking the entrance. Jesus said, “Take the stone away.” Martha protested, “He’s been dead four days. The smell will be awful.” Jesus said, “Remember what I said? Believe and experience the glory of God.” So they removed the stone. Jesus prayed, “Father, thanks for listening to Me. I know You always do, but I’m saying this aloud to help these present with their faith.” Then Jesus commanded, “Lazarus, come out!” The man that was dead came out, wrapped in grave clothes. “Take the grave clothes off him so he can be free,” Jesus said.

When the religious leaders heard the news about Lazarus, they had a fit. In their paranoia, they thought that if they didn't stop Jesus, the Romans would take away their power and their nation. So the high priest, Caiaphas, said, "Don't you get it? Doesn't it make more sense that one man die for the people instead of the whole nation being wiped out?" Because he was high priest, God turned his words into a prophecy about Jesus dying to save, not only the nation of Israel, but all God's people everywhere. From then on, the religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus.

► **Resurrection** Some believe that your soul sleeps after death until your body is reconstituted and brought back to life in preparation for the final judgment. Most believe your soul remains conscious after death and is brought immediately to heaven or hell, and later reunited with your body at the resurrection. ► **Glory of God** This phrase usually means the display of God's goodness and greatness.

‡ Discoveries: God's Heart and Our Pain

"The one you love is ill." ... He lingered where he was two more days. ... Jesus ... wept. / John 11:3, 6, 35 [Day 37]

It's a simple prayer. Many times the more desperate we are, the more needy we are, the more simple our prayers become. "Help!" I remember times when I was so sick that all I could pray was, "O God! O God! O God!" over and over again because my brain couldn't contain anything more. There was no theology, just raw need and a Father in heaven. This is also a prayer of expectation. They knew that Jesus cared deeply about him. The implication is clear. They expected Jesus to clear His schedule and bring Lazarus back from the brink of death. God chose this prayer to do something extra, something far beyond what anyone imagined would happen. He chose this prayer as an opportunity to show us that no problem is ever too big for God to solve. How did He do that? He let the problem get worse. I mention this because this is where many of us are right now. We have a problem. We've asked God to take it away. And He has responded by letting it get worse. What is God doing? I don't know. I just know that when everything we hoped for dies, God is planning a resurrection. He is able, and He will bring it about for you.

The delay: Do the math. When Jesus got to Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. Even if Jesus had left as soon as He got the message that Lazarus was ill, He still would have been two days late to prevent the death of His friend. The delay of Jesus established a couple of important things: First, Jesus knew exactly what was going on. The death of Lazarus did not take Him

by surprise. Second, Jesus was completely in charge. This wasn't a matter of Jesus running frantically from one need to another, never quite able to keep up. No, He had a mission, and He would fulfill it. We can talk about these delays all day long. But until we experience one, it's hard to understand what's on the other side. But let me ask this: How do you imagine Mary, Martha and Lazarus were different after Lazarus was raised from the dead? Sometimes life's most transformational experiences will not happen without a delay.

Jesus wept. We can never understand human suffering without taking into account the suffering of God. Why did Jesus weep? Why didn't He smile? He was the only one present who knew that the grief of Mary and Martha would soon give way to delirious, dancing joy. He was the only one present with the power to reverse the tragedy, and He fully intended to use that power. Yet He wept. God is not aloof. Even moments before our deliverance, His heart feels every bit of our pain.

?? What's the most difficult loss you ever experienced? How did you get through that experience? □

What does Jesus mean when He says those who believe in Him never really die? □

Why did Jesus weep? □

Why did Jesus pray aloud? □

Your main take away from today's reading ... □

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