



# RICH WOUNDS

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The Countless Treasures of the  
Life, Death, and Triumph of Jesus

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DAVID MATHIS

“Scripture speaks of ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Ephesians 3:8). In *Rich Wounds*, David takes us into these endless riches with his beautiful reflections on the Savior. A deeply edifying book.”

DANE ORTLUND, Author, *Gentle and Lowly*

“Weaving together biblical truth, historical treasures mined from hymns, and contemporary challenging insights, Mathis has produced a masterpiece guaranteed to refresh even the most stagnant heart. Reading these short, simple yet deeply profound reflections, I was compelled to put down Mathis’s book, open my Bible, and worship.”

LINDA ALLCOCK, Author, *Head, Heart, Hands and Deeper Still*

“David Mathis takes one treasure at a time, drawn from the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, and reverently unpacks it and meditates on it. This book is well-written and edifying.”

D.A. CARSON, Emeritus Professor of New Testament,  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“There’s nothing I find more meaningful or satisfying to contemplate than Jesus himself. In *Rich Wounds*, David Mathis has written a warm, concise, and celebratory treatment of the Jesus who is everything we need and—may God use this book to help us realize this—everything we want.”

RANDY ALCORN, Author, *It’s All about Jesus*

“More than anything else in these troubled and troubling times, our souls need a fresh look at our Savior. *Rich Wounds* will help you drink deeply from the fountain of Christ’s love and discover in him life-giving pools of grace. Thirty days of savoring him and meditating on the griefs he bore on your behalf will be a sweet balm for your heart and will lead you to springs of deepest joy.”

NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH, Founder, *Revive Our Hearts*

“David Mathis has a keen ability to unpack theological truths with striking clarity. His gifting is on full display in *Rich Wounds* as he guides us through the life, sacrifice, and glorification of our Savior in reflections that are both poignant and profound. As Mathis directs our gaze to the person of Christ, the heart cannot help but stir with adoration and praise for the Son, who suffered wounds so that ours might be healed. Read this devotional slowly, and delight in the one who makes all things new.”

KATHRYN BUTLER, MD, Author, *Between Life and Death*

“Martin Luther famously said, ‘To progress in the Christian life is to begin again.’ *Rich Wounds* will help you begin again and again by taking you deeply into the surrender, suffering, and exaltation of Jesus. It is filled with profound insight and will help you not just understand but also feel the weight of Jesus’ atoning work.”

**J.D. GREEAR, Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC;**  
*Author, Just Ask*

“This book is a treasure trove of fresh biblical insights, deep devotion, and practical help. Each of its thirty chapters is engaging, moving, and perceptive, with useful prayers and Bible readings to help you immerse yourself in God’s love and compassion in Christ. This book will help you meditate more deeply on the ‘rich wounds’ of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour: his humanity, life, ministry, death, and resurrection and glorification.”

**PETER ADAM, Former principal, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia**

“This volume sings with an infectious enthusiasm of the Christ whose rich wounds are worthy of many crowns. Written in an accessible style, it moves from the wonder of God’s love displayed on the cross to the stunning eruption of his power in the resurrection, when joy triumphed over sorrow. *Rich Wounds* will help us sing as we think, and think as we sing.”

**DONALD MACLEOD, Former principal, Free Church of Scotland College**

“Let David draw your eyes away from yourself and on to the rich wounds of Christ—the only wounds that heal.”

**ABIGAIL DODDS, Blogger; Author, (A)Typical Woman**

“I have been nourished by many devotional books, but normally as a spiritual appetizer—an energy-booster—for the day. Mathis’ devotions are more like bite-sized meals. They are chock-full of robust theology and scriptural depth, feeding my soul with the glory of Jesus. The title is fitting: we feed from and are quickly sated by the wounds of Christ on each page.”

**MATT REAGAN, Director, Campus Outreach Charleston**



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DAVID MATHIS

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COMPANY



Rich Wounds

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*To Mercy*



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# INTRODUCTION

## The Many Crowns of Christ

*“His eyes are like a flame of fire,  
and on his head are many diadems.”*

*—Revelation 19:12*

Admiration may be the highest of pleasures, and particularly when we marvel at the life, death, and triumph of Jesus. The treasures of who he is, what he has done, and what he will do are countless. We were made for this: not just to trust and obey God, but to know him, and enjoy him, in Jesus. The joys of knowing Jesus are unsurpassed even now—and they will endure, and only deepen and develop, for all eternity to come.

This Jesus is a king unlike any other. Mere human monarchs and dignitaries have their strengths and weaknesses, their fortes and flaws, the particular glories for which they are remembered and the inevitable missteps they wish to be forgotten. Yet the man Christ Jesus—not only truly human but also truly God—eclipses and far surpasses every other human ruler and celebrity. He is worthy of more than a single crown. As King of kings, and Lord of lords, and Glory of glories, he is worthy of many crowns.

Because of how it helps me admire and marvel at Jesus, one of my favorite hymns has long been “Crown Him with Many Crowns” (Matthew Bridges, 1851). In my own life, it’s one of the few hymns that has been a common thread

from one church to another. I have been singing it for forty years, since I was a child, then in college, then as an adult. Now, my kids know I love it and get my attention when the first bars begin in church. “Dad, it’s your favorite!”

Over the years, in singing this hymn with congregation after congregation, I’ve often been moved to tears of joy as I have pondered, even just vaguely, the great coronation ceremony in heaven, where the risen Christ, always fully God and now in full glorified humanity, takes his seat on the throne of the universe. I love how the hymn’s stanzas celebrate Christ, in turn, as Lord of love, Lord of life, Lord of light, Lord of heaven, Lord of years, Lord of lords. Even as phrase after phrase tells of his glory, the one that has arrested me most over the years is “rich wounds.”

*Crown him the Lord of love!  
Behold his hands and side—  
Rich wounds, yet visible above,  
In beauty glorified.*

*Rich wounds* captures so well the strangeness and beauty—the peculiar glory—of Jesus Christ and his self-sacrifice at the cross for sinners. “Wounds,” of course, is no foreign word to modern ears. Today we speak with surprising frequency about “wounds:” not so much physical wounds as the emotional ones we’re newly aware of and attend to—the “daddy wound” of fatherlessness, the “wound” of harsh words against us, the “wounds” of some trauma that continues to haunt us. As a society, we’ve become freshly conscious of our wounds. We talk about them. We know them.

But here we celebrate *rich wounds*. Jesus was wounded for us: pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. “Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus bore

*our* griefs, *our* sorrows, *our* transgressions, *our* iniquities; he brought *us* peace; he healed *us*.

His wounds, horrific as they were when inflicted on the innocent Son of God, are indeed *rich* wounds, because he is God, and made us rich in becoming poor for us (2 Corinthians 8:9). They are wounds rich in meaning and significance: wounds that have not vanished on his resurrected body. They are still visible—gloriously so, as the hymn tells us, and as we'll celebrate in this book, especially in chapter 22.

“Rich wounds” flies as a banner over Jesus’ life and death and new life in the resurrection. First came his ability to be wounded, which he embraced by virtue of his becoming man and taking human flesh; then of course came the hand and foot and side wounds he endured in his death; and then, most significantly, came the scars which he now displays on his glorified body, celebrated in the hymn. “Rich wounds” not only brings to mind the cross and his death, not only the life and words and works that led him there, but also his resurrection: his exaltation to God’s right hand, his coronation as King of the universe, and his reign in heaven now. And “rich wounds” speaks to Christ’s ability to transform our wounds today, like his, into marks of beauty—wounds which are not without their pain, nor without subsequent glory.


The thirty chapters in this book are meditations on the many crowns—the many glories—of Jesus Christ, and in particular his redemptive work for his people in his life, sacrificial death, and world-turning resurrection.

Part 1 considers eight glimpses of his glory in his life and ministry, leading up to his Passion week. Then Part 2 pauses to consider his sacrificial death on the cross and its meaning for his people. Part 3 lingers in a place from which we can be prone to move on too quickly: his resurrection.

Many of us do make much of his resurrection—for one day each year. One aspect of this book that excites me most is this opportunity for abiding, pausing, remaining in the glory of the resurrection, which was so prominent in the early preaching of the apostles, yet can at times occupy a relatively small space in our own preaching and theology. Finally, in Part 4, I invite you to walk with me, as we walk with Jesus through his Passion week (often called “Holy Week”)—from Palm Sunday, to Good Friday, to Resurrection Sunday.

Over the years, my church and family have enjoyed recovering the ancient traditions of Advent, Lent, and Holy Week—celebrating these seasons with special meditations to draw our hearts afresh to the glory of Christ. I hope the chapters in this book will serve in this way for some, as devotions for the month leading up to Easter. Certainly, Part 4, which maps onto the eight days of Holy Week, may be particularly helpful then. I have included a passage of Scripture to read alongside each chapter for those who wish to pair it with daily Bible reading. But this book is not only for Lent. I hope that it will feed readers year-round—since we always have need of considering Christ Jesus, made flesh, crucified, risen, and exalted.

I love meditating on the many glories, the many crowns, the many wonders and excellencies of Jesus Christ. Ponder with me his life and ministry, his sacrificial death, his spectacular resurrection, and that one fateful week that was the worst and most wonderful in the history of the world.

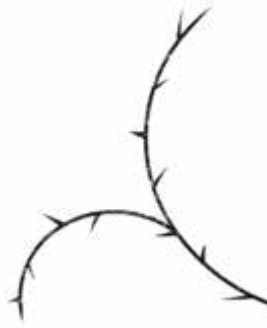



Part 1

# HIS LIFE

*“He has done all things well.”*

*—Mark 7:37*





# 1. HIS HABITS

## Time Alone for God

*“He went out to the mountain to pray,  
and all night he continued in prayer to God.”*

*—Luke 6:12*

**W**e may have only glimpses of Jesus’ habits and personal spiritual practices in the Gospels, but what we do have is no accident, nor is it scant. We know exactly what God means for us to know, in just the right detail—and we have far more about Jesus’ personal spiritual rhythms than we do about anyone else in the Bible.

### Quiet Times without a Bible

First, observe the place of Scripture in Jesus’ life. He did not have his own personal material copy of the Bible, like almost all of us do today. He heard what was read aloud in the synagogue, and what his mother sang, and he rehearsed what he had put to memory. And yet throughout his recorded ministry we see evidence of a man utterly captivated by *what is written* in the text of Scripture.

At the very outset of his public ministry, Jesus retreated to the wilderness; there, as he was tempted by the devil, he leaned on *what is written* (Matthew 4:4, 6, 7, 10; Luke 4:4, 8, 10). Then, returning to his hometown of Nazareth, he stood up to read, took the scroll of Isaiah (61:1-2), and announced, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your



hearing” (Luke 4:21). Jesus identified John the Baptist as “he of whom it is written” (Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:27), and he cleared the temple of moneychangers on the grounds of *what is written* in Isaiah 56:7 (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). He rebuked the proud by quoting Scripture (Mark 7:6; Luke 20:17). At every step of the way to Calvary, he knew everything would happen “as it is written” (see especially John’s Gospel: 6:31, 45; 8:17; 10:34; 12:14, 16; 15:25). “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him,” he said (Mark 14:21). “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31).

Let there be no confusion about the central place of God’s written word in Jesus’ life. He lived by what was written.

### How Often He Withdrew

For Christ, “the wilderness” or “desolate place” often became his momentarily sacred space. He regularly escaped the noise and frenzy of society to be alone with his Father, giving him his full attention.

After “his fame spread everywhere” (Mark 1:28) and “the whole city was gathered together at the door” (v 33), Jesus took a remarkable step:

*“Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” (v 35)*

*What a ministry opportunity he left behind*, some might think. Surely some of us would have skipped or shortened our private spiritual habits to hurry off and bless the swelling masses. To be sure, other times would come when Jesus would delay his personal routines to meet immediate needs. But how many of us, in such a situation, would have the

presence of mind—and the heart—to discern our need and prioritize prayer as Jesus did?

Luke also shows unmistakably that this pattern of retreat and re-entry was part of the ongoing dynamic of Christ's human life. Jesus “departed and went into a desolate place” (Luke 4:42)—not just once but regularly. “He would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (5:16).

So also in Matthew. After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus “withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself” (Matthew 14:13). Even then, the crowds pursued him. Yet he didn't despise them—here he puts his desire to retreat on hold—but had compassion on them and healed their sick (v 14). After feeding them, a crowd five thousand strong, he withdrew again to a quiet place. “After he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray” (v 23).

### Praying Alone and Together

*What is written* animated his life, and when he withdrew, he went to speak to his Father in prayer. At times, he went away *by himself*, to be *alone* (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46-47). “He went out to the mountain *to pray*, and all night he continued *in prayer* to God” (Luke 6:12).

He also prayed with others. The disciples saw him model prayer at his baptism (Luke 3:21), as he laid his hands on the children (Matthew 19:13), and when he drove out demons (Mark 9:29). He prayed with his disciples; even when he prayed alone, they were sometimes at hand (Luke 9:18; also 11:1). He took Peter, John, and James “and went up on the mountain to pray” (9:28). On the night before he died, he said to Peter, “I have *prayed for you* that your faith may not fail” (22:32). All of John 17 is his prayer for his disciples, in the hearing of the Twelve, minus Judas. Then they went out from that upper room and saw him pray over and over

in the garden (Matthew 26:36, 39, 42, 44). He not only modeled prayer but instructed them in how to pray. “Pray then like this...” (6:9-13).

### Come Away with Me

Jesus didn't only retreat to be alone with God but also *invited* his disciples to join him. In Mark 6:31-32, he tells them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” Mark explains, “For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.” So also, in the Gospel of John, as his fame spread, Jesus retreated from more populated settings to invest in his disciples in more desolate, less distracting places (John 11:54).

And this is his invitation to us, as well, today: to cultivate habits of withdrawing to hear from God and respond in prayer, and then of returning, with our hearts and minds renewed, to echo the heart of Christ in acts of love toward those he has put along our path. This is my prayer for you as we linger over the glories of Christ in the chapters of this book: that your soul would be fed and formed in quiet moments, meditating on his word, and that you would be newly energized in the callings he has given you.

In it all—in receiving his Father's voice in Scripture and in praying alone (and with company)—Jesus sought communion with his Father. His habits were not demonstrations of raw will and sheer discipline. His acts of receiving the word and responding in prayer were not ends in themselves. In these blessed *means*, he pursued the *end* of communing with his Father.

—

*Father, in our hurried and distracting times, grant that we would be more like your Son—that we would not rush off*

*incessantly to the next to-do, but that we would give our first and best energy to communing with you, hearing your voice in your word, and enjoying the gift of having your ear in prayer. Against the grain of our day, strengthen us to come away and retreat to meet with you, and in grace send us back to engage with our needy world, with our hunger first met in Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: Matthew 14:13-23*



## 2. HIS PURPOSE

### Why Jesus Lived

*“For this purpose  
I have come to this hour.  
Father, glorify your name.”  
—John 12:27-28*

NO one lived quite like Jesus. Ordinary as he looked, and was in many ways—with “no form or majesty” (Isaiah 53:2) to turn heads—his earthly life as a whole surpassed every other human life, not only those of his contemporaries but of all others before and since. In the final tally, Jesus stands alone. No other human has left such a deep and enduring impression on the world, and he did this in only three years of active public life.

He turned water into wine. He multiplied loaves and fish. He gave sight to the blind. He even raised the dead. But he also taught with a peculiar, unmatched authority. His words carried weight like those of no other human voice. “They were astonished at his teaching” (Mark 1:22). “All the people were hanging on his words” (Luke 19:48). Even those who opposed him had to recognize that “No one ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46). And still today we marvel at his words.

What was it that drove such a life and such timeless teaching? *Why* did Jesus live? What got him up in the morning and motivated him to open his mouth, even under great opposition? What was *the goal*—and, in the end, *the effect*—of his life, so far as we can discern?

### The Effect of His Life

No wonder that the angels declared, “Glory to God!” in announcing his birth (Luke 2:14). As Jesus began to teach and minister publicly, the reported effect, again and again, was not that the people praised *him*, but that they glorified *God*.

He healed the paralysed man, who “rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and *glorified God*” (Mark 2:12). As Matthew tells it, “When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and *they glorified God*, who had given such authority to men” (Matthew 9:8). Luke makes explicit that it was both the healed paralytic who glorified God (Luke 5:25) and the crowd (v 26).

In fact, *glorifying God* is Matthew’s summary of the effect of all Jesus’ miracle-working: “The crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they *glorified the God of Israel*” (Matthew 15:31). And when Jesus restored sight to a blind beggar, Luke tells us that both the man and the crowd directed their praises to God: “Immediately he recovered his sight and followed [Jesus], *glorifying God*. And all the people, when they saw it, *gave praise to God*” (Luke 18:43; see also 7:16; 13:13; 17:15).

The Gospel writers make *the effect* of Jesus’ ministry clear: the glory and praise of God.

### His Own Intent

But what about Jesus’ intent? What does Christ himself say about his goal in all he did?

The words of Jesus in the Gospel of John make this particularly plain. Christ says he comes *not in his own name but his Father’s* (John 5:43). He welcomes the Palm Sunday praises of Psalm 118: “Blessed is he who comes *in the name of the Lord*” (John 12:13). He says, in sum, about his life,

“I honor my Father” (8:49); all that he does is *in his Father’s name* (10:25).

Fittingly, then, when teaching his disciples to pray, his first utterance expresses his primary mission in life: “Father, *hallowed be your name*” (Luke 11:2; Matthew 6:9).

### The Intent of His Death

When he came to his final days, in those precious last moments before his crucifixion, his purpose in life grew all the more explicit.

*“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say?  
‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this  
purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify  
your name.” (John 12:27-28)*

On the night before he died, in his great high-priestly prayer, he scarcely could have been clearer about what had driven him in life and now led him to the cross. Three times he rang the bell with piercing clarity:

*“I glorified you on earth.” (John 17:4)*

*“I have manifested your name.” (v 6)*

*“I made known to them your name.” (v 26)*

Jesus dedicated his life to glorifying his Father, through making him known to his disciples. He so lived, and so spoke, that his Father would be truly revealed and duly received.

From beginning to end, without veil or apology, Jesus sought his Father’s glory. No one has ever been more consecrated to the glory of the Father than his Son. This was both the goal and effect of his life and death. So much so that



even a Roman soldier who witnessed his execution got the message: “When the centurion saw what had taken place, *he praised God*” (Luke 23:47).

### **Our Call as His People**

Jesus not only modeled this calling but also explicitly draws his people into it. Not only does he seek his Father’s glory, but he calls his disciples to do the same:

*“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)*

*“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)*

Now we, his church, fulfill what God intended us for. He made us *in his image*, and we display his value to the world. We, too, learn to live dedicated to God’s glory—and we do so in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

Jesus, as the ultimate human and the very “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), modeled for us what we were created to be and do: to display God’s glory and make him known. We now find our highest human calling: to image and reflect God’s glory by becoming increasingly conformed to the God-man’s image (Romans 8:29). Which means that the original destiny of humanity is realized in the gospel and in our growing likeness to Jesus. The more we are conformed to Christ, and faithfully display and testify to him, the more we fulfill that great purpose for which we were made.

*Father in heaven, we marvel at the life of your Son. We stand in awe that God himself, in the person of Christ, came down and dwelled among us, as fully human, and lived a life utterly devoted to your name and renown—the life we were all designed for. Flawed and frail as we are, we want to be more like that. Conform us to your Son's image, and fulfill in us the destiny for which you made us. Teach us, through your Spirit and the examples of your people, to walk more and more in the steps of Jesus, for your honor and praise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: John 12:20-28*



### 3. HE WORKED

#### Jesus' Unfrenzied Industry

*"My Father is working until now,  
and I am working."  
—John 5:17*

One human life in all the Scriptures towers above the others. All who came before anticipated him, and all who follow after orient to him. Nothing compares to God himself dwelling among us in a fully human soul and body. And no one accomplished the work that he accomplished.

Careful readers of the Gospels will beware of gathering up details about Jesus' life and unhitching them from where his whole life was going. Still, we do have more to learn from the life of Christ than from the events of his final week only. One theme, especially pronounced in the Gospel of John, is what we might see as the "work ethic" of Christ.

#### Jesus Worked

Observe, first, that Jesus did *work*—and consider what he meant by *work* rather than what we might assume. The night before he died, he prayed to his Father, as his men listened, "I glorified you on earth, having *accomplished the work that you gave me to do*" (John 17:4). In a sense, his whole life had been a single work—a "life's work," we might say. He had a calling and a commission. His Father gave him work to do. And this was *good*—a blessing, not a curse.

Jesus did not begrudge this work. Instead, he experienced a deep satisfaction in doing the work his Father had assigned him. In fact, his soul *fed* on accomplishing his Father's work, as he testified when standing by the well in Samaria. "My food is to *do the will* of him who sent me and to *accomplish his work*" (John 4:34).

Jesus also speaks in John 9 about *stewarding time* in such a life. Here he echoes Moses' prayer to "teach us to number our days" (Psalm 90:12) and Paul's exhortation to "[make] the best use of the time" (Ephesians 5:15-16). "Night is coming, when no one can work," he says; knowing this, "we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day" (John 9:4). He had an appointed season of earthly life. Eternity would come, but for now, he was on the clock. He had work to accomplish. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). He even "worked" on the Sabbath, or at least he was accused of it. And he answered the charge not by saying that he wasn't working, but that "my Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17).

### He Did Not Only Work

The Gospels not only show us a man who worked but also one who didn't *only* work. As we have seen, his life was more than his work. He slept and rested and retreated, and called his weary disciples away to rest with him. When they had returned from their mission and "told him all that they had done and taught"—and teaching, done well, can be really hard work—he said to them:

*"Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves."*

*(Mark 6:30-32)*

### What His Work Accomplished

That Jesus worked (and didn't *only* work) is plain enough, but what did his work mean?

Much of what we have from the Gospels about his work is from his own mouth. First, he was conscious that his work—his bodily movement, exertions, and actions in the world—bore witness to his Father. Indeed, his life's work, as we saw in chapter 2, was to glorify his Father: to make him known truly and admired duly (John 17:4, 6, 26).

And Jesus' works demonstrated that the Father had sent him. "The works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36; also 10:25, 32). Not that he was *sent* as a mere man. The way he taught (with authority: Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:32; John 7:17) and the miracles he performed pointed to his being more than a prophet—to the almost unspeakable truth that this manifestly human person was somehow God himself.

*"Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."*

*(John 10:38; see also 14:10-11)*

His works, performed in the world with human words and hands, showed who he was and whose he was—just as those who rejected him showed through their works who their own "father" was (John 8:38-41).

### Industry without Frenzy

Every indication we have of Jesus' life and ministry is that he was a worker, not an idler. He began by laboring in obscurity as a craftsman for thirty years. The tenor of his ministry was one of energy and industry, not laziness or lethargy.

His life was not without weariness (John 4:6); nor was it without physical rest and spiritual retreat (Mark 6:31). He did not think of his work as *his own* but as *his Father's*. And for the sake of the faith of the people his Father had given him, he expended the energy God gave him, day in and day out, to carry out his calling.

We get the clear impression from the Gospels that he was busy. He was in increasing demand. His days were long. Yet we never get the sense that he was anxious or frenzied—even when a desperate father tried to whisk him away to save a dying daughter (Mark 5:22-36). His life was busy, but he was not hurried.

He knew his calling and gave himself to it. Not without sleep or rest, but he plainly did not live for leisure. Jesus worked.

—

*Father in heaven, how sobering it is that Jesus, who labored from faith, calls us “laborers” too; we are to expend energy and effort, in his name, for the good of others. Father, we acknowledge the limits of our labors. Your word is effective in a way that our work is not. And for our acceptance with you, we do not work but trust in Christ’s work (Romans 4:5). Yet in him, and by the power of his Spirit, we work. Make our lives, in their own small ways, echo the imitable work ethic of your Son, even as we stand in awe of his inimitable finished work for us. In his powerful name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: John 9:1-7*

## 4. HE SLEPT

### The God-Man at Rest

*“He was in the stern,  
asleep on the cushion.”  
—Mark 4:38*

The Word became flesh and slept among us. God himself in full humanity—body, heart, mind, and will—closed his eyes and went to sleep. And not once or twice, but every day.

Of his thirty-plus years dwelling here bodily, God spent roughly one-third asleep. He ate, drank, cried, and celebrated, like every other human; he also became tired—“wearied as he was from his journey” (John 4:6)—just as we become tired and weary. And this was no sin, fault, or failing in the God-man. It was human.

Yet it’s one thing to sleep, and quite another to sleep through a great storm. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of Jesus asleep in the boat. “A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion” (Mark 4:37-38). *Waves breaking into the boat*. Not only is this a testimony to how *tired* he must have been, but also how *trusting*. What serenity of soul, what rest in his Father, that he slept in the storm.

#### Trusting God, Not Self

God made us to spend a third of our lives like this.



Unconscious. Inactive. Exposed. Dependent. It's a nightly reminder of our frailty and limitations. We are creatures, not the Creator. Sleep is telling us something profound. And it does so every night.

Sleep is an exercise of faith. When we lie down, close our eyes, and give ourselves over to sleep, we make ourselves vulnerable—like Saul before David, and Samson before Delilah. Jesus not only trusted his disciples—falling asleep in their presence—but he also entrusted himself to his faithful Father, to care for him and meet every essential need. “In peace I will both lie down and sleep,” said God’s anointed, “for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8). What does it say for the peace in Jesus’ soul that he could sleep even in the storm?

### A Divine Gift

Psalm 127:2 is perhaps the Bible’s signature statement on sleep:

*“It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.”*

God gives sleep as an expression of his love. As much as it may seem like a horrible inconvenience and a waste of time to those toiling under the sway of a productivity idol—eight hours lost every day!—sleep is a divine gift.

Life has its ups and downs, no doubt. For everything there is a season—a day to rise early, a day to go to bed late—but God did not design us to burn the candle at both ends. He doesn’t mean for us to always be “on,” to always feel productive. He does mean for us to recognize the glorious constraints of creatureliness, embrace the limits of our humanity, and own the humility of coming to the end of ourselves every day—

lying down, closing our eyes, and leaving not just the whole world, but also our own worlds, to him.

Bedtime rehearses the fact that *he is God and I am not*. Every night is an opportunity to “be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

### Awake All Night

But the sanctity of sleep is not the only lesson we glean from Jesus. Don't go away yet and miss what makes it Christian. Sleep is not only a divine gift to be received and appreciated, but also a good to be sacrificed, when necessary, in the cause of love. Jesus embraced the limits of his humanity and slept, but he was also willing to deny himself sleep to gain something greater.

We have two clear instances of Jesus denying himself this natural desire and forgoing sleep when something more pressing was at hand. The first came in choosing his apostles:

*“He went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.” (Luke 6:12-13)*

A significant decision lay before him: Which twelve men would “be with him” (Mark 3:14) and go out to represent him? Which “uneducated, common men” would one day astonish the rulers as “they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13)? Whose words would his church still be reading centuries later? Faith in his Father led Jesus, in this instance, not to sleep but to all-night prayer.

The second instance came as his defining hour approached, late at night in the Garden of Gethsemane. Doubtless Jesus and his men were exhausted. As much as he encouraged them to stay awake and prepare themselves in

prayer, and as much as their spirits may have been willing, their flesh was weak (Matthew 26:41). But Jesus himself, knowing what lay before him, did not give himself to sleep, but steadied and readied his soul in prayer.

“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (v 42).

### Jesus Sacrificed His Sleep

This echoes today in the lives of those who benefit from his person and work. Jesus not only *sanctified* our sleep; he also *sacrificed* his sleep. When the time came, he was willing to deny himself God’s good gift in pursuit of something greater. Sleep wasn’t his god. He did not bow his knee to sleep but to his Father—which meant having a normal pattern of sleeping and also denying himself sleep, when necessary, in dependence on God and in the service of love. Both were acts of faith.

So also today, most evenings, he says to us, by his Spirit, “Come away ... and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). But that is not all he says. At times and in seasons, he comes by his Spirit and says, in the service of love, “Sleep and take your rest later on” (Matthew 26:45). There are times to receive God’s gift and enjoy our sleep, and times to deny ourselves our natural desire in view of something more important.

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*Father, make us live, and sleep, like your Son: to rest in Christ, relinquish control, close our eyes, and go to bed. And to rise and forgo this good gift whenever you call us to meet others’ needs in love. Father, we praise you that you are sovereign and we are not. You don’t need us to run the universe. In Jesus’ name we rest in your care. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: Mark 4:35-41*

## 5. HE WEPT

### The Human Emotions of Christ

*“He was deeply moved in his spirit  
and greatly troubled.”  
—John 11:33*

He appeared to be composed as he approached the town of Bethany. The sister of his dead friend met him outside. He consoled her with truth and grace. But then he saw the other sister, manifestly more emotional. And then came his tears.

*Jesus wept.*

Just two simple words, and yet they carry a world of significance. John 11:35, “Jesus wept,” is the shortest verse in the Bible, but one of its most powerful and insightful. Rightly was this tiniest of sentences assigned its own number. Here we find a remarkable glimpse into the glory of the Lord of the universe.

#### His Human Emotions

“A man of sorrows,” the prophet foretold, “and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Yes, he was a man of sorrows, but not of his own making. “Surely he has borne *our griefs* and carried *our sorrows*” (v 4). Because his love is great, he made our pains his own.

It is not inherently impressive to have a king that cries. But it is a great comfort to have a sovereign who not only

knows our frame (Psalm 103:14) and what is in us (John 2:25) but also shares in our flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14) and is moved by compassion for his people.

God himself took our full humanity. And with it, our feelings. And with them, even our sorrows. We are finite and frail, but God gave us mighty emotions. We celebrate. We grieve. We rejoice. We weep. And we do so with Jesus as one of us.

“Christ has put on our feelings along with our flesh,” wrote John Calvin. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus clearly manifests human emotions. When he heard the centurion’s words of faith, “he marveled” (Matthew 8:10). He said in Gethsemane that his soul was “very sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38). Hebrews 5:7 says he prayed “with loud cries and tears.”

But no one shows us the truly human emotions of Christ like his beloved disciple John, who wrote the fourth Gospel.

### From Love to Tears

That Jesus loved dead Lazarus and his two sisters could not be any clearer in John 11. Verse 5: “Now Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” Verse 36: the people say, in response to Jesus’ weeping, “See how he *loved* him!”

Jesus wept not because he lacked faith but because he loved. In compassion, he wept with his beloved friend who wept. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was *deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled*” (John 11:33).

And this even when he knew that Lazarus would rise. He had already said to his followers, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (v 4). And again, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” (v 11). And yet, Jesus wept.

### From Anger to Tears

His tears did not flow only from his love. He had righteous anger at the realities of death and unbelief. John says he was “deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled”—literally, he was outraged and unsettled. He was indignant and disturbed.

The same word that is translated “deeply moved” here comes across as a stern warning elsewhere (Matthew 9:30; Mark 1:43)—even a scolding (Mark 14:5). It’s a serious term. In other Greek texts, as D.A. Carson writes, “it can refer to the snorting of horses; as applied to human beings, it invariably suggests anger, outrage or emotional indignation” (*The Gospel According to John*, p 415). And Jesus was thus “deeply moved again” when he came to Lazarus’s tomb in John 11:38.

But he was also “greatly troubled.” He was shaken up, unsettled. As he stood face to face with death, he knew what it would take to conquer this foe. He was about to take back Lazarus from its jaws. Next time, he would lay down his own life as the ransom.

### Here Comes Trouble

He would be troubled again. As his own hour came, he prayed, “Now is my soul *troubled*. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’” (John 12:27). As he recognized the traitor, “Jesus was *troubled in his spirit*, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me’” (13:21).

This was a trouble that was his own to face. His disciples could not do this with him. Indeed, he did it for them. And so he said, “Let not your hearts be troubled” (14:1), and again, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (v 27). He would face this fear, striding into the very furnace, so that they would be spared it.

But in John 11, the love of verses 5 and 36 and the outrage of verse 33 led to the tears of verse 35. Because he loved,

and because he was staring death in the face—because he was outraged at its evil and determined that it must not endure—Jesus wept.

Such tears stem from no lack of faith. This weeping is precisely the response of faith. “The same sin and death,” says Carson, “the same unbelief, that prompted his outrage, also generated his grief. Those who follow Jesus as his disciples today do well to learn the same tension—that grief and compassion without outrage will diminish to mere sentiment, while outrage without grief will harden into self-righteous arrogance and irascibility” (p 416).

### From Tears to Action

Jesus’ weeping did not come from despair and resignation. These were not the tears of one who had realized he was powerless and was ready to give up. Rather, these were the tears of mingled affection and anger, leading to action. He would raise Lazarus—and give his own life.

Lazarus’s death was overcome, but that didn’t mean it was not to be mourned. And Jesus’ own death would be the great overcoming, but it would not be without its excruciating pain. He would walk through the greatest of sorrows. He would cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

When Lazarus had been raised, Jesus would return to the Calvary road for his final showdown with sin and death.

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*O Father in heaven, what grace we see in the tears of your Son. He wept. In him we see that you do not stand aloof from the pains of our existence. You have drawn near. You have taken our flesh and blood in Christ. You have not called us to a humanity that your Son was unwilling to take. We suffer no pain he was unwilling to bear, no grief he was unwilling to carry.*

*And so we look forward to that day when you will wipe away every tear—not because you will suppress our sadness but because Christ has shed his own tears and has triumphed. In his precious name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: John 11:28-37*





## 6. HE WALKED

### The Pace of Christian Love

*Jesus went on from there and  
walked beside the Sea of Galilee.  
—Matthew 15:29*

Will you excuse me for wondering if the apostle Paul was a runner? Running is a curiously common theme in his sermons and letters. He referred to his own life and ministry as running (1 Corinthians 9:26; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16) and described the Galatians' (past) faith in similar terms: "You were running well" (Galatians 5:7). He also asked the Thessalonians to pray for him, "that the word of the Lord may speed [run] ahead and be honored" (2 Thessalonians 3:1). He preached in Antioch about John the Baptist "finishing his course" (Acts 13:25), expressed to the Ephesian elders his desire that "I may finish my course" (Acts 20:24), and wrote in his final letter, "I have finished the race" (2 Timothy 4:7).

While *walking* serves as his more common image of the Christian life (nearly thirty times in his letters), Paul had a place for speaking in more intense, even aggressive terms as well—of a kind of athletic capacity in the Christian life, as he wrote so memorably to the Corinthians:

*"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run,  
but only one receives the prize? So run that you may  
obtain it." (1 Corinthians 9:24)*

### Moving at the Pace of Love

Jesus, too, as we celebrated in chapter 3, was no stranger to effort and exertion. He had a sterling work ethic, and yet we never get the impression that he was in a hurry. He worked—and he walked.

The life of Christ was not idle, nor was it frenzied. He walked. And he walked. And he walked. From all we can tell from the Gospels, Jesus' days were full. He was busy, yet he did not seem to be rushing. One way we might say it is that Jesus *moved at the pace of love* (not that Paul didn't). And don't we all want to be like that?

### “My Little Daughter”

Of the many instances in the Gospels where Jesus is on his feet, moving from town to town and region to region, one stands out in my mind as a glimpse of the pace of love—a pace that neither stalls in idleness nor rushes ahead leaving hurting people in its wake.

It begins with him, again, on the move—first to “the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes” (Mark 5:1), and then back again to Galilee (v 21), where a synagogue official named Jairus approaches (v 22-24). This man falls to his knees to plead for help: “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live” (v 23). Jairus doesn't just say “daughter,” but “my little daughter.” It is a term of endearment and particular care—a glimpse into this father's heart.

### Time to Wake Up

Jesus picks up on Jairus's term of endearment, and later when he arrives at the house—after she has already died—and takes her by the hand, he says, “*Little girl*, I say to you, arise” (v 41). Not just “girl,” but “little girl”—an expression of compassion and holy condescension, like the term

her father used when he called her “my little daughter.” We learn she’s twelve years old, which isn’t “little” today, and wasn’t in the first century, when some 12-year-olds were on the brink of marriage. “My little daughter” and “little girl” are not statements of fact as much as expressions of a tender, affectionate, and protective fatherly heart.

The account ends, of course, with Jesus raising this young girl from the dead. It is a stunning sneak glimpse into who he is—not only a great teacher but God himself. Mark piles on language to describe how astounded are the girl’s parents and the three disciples. Literally, “they were astonished with great amazement” (v 42). They knew he could heal, but reclaim someone from death? This is an astounding display of his power and his identity.

By raising Jairus’s daughter, Jesus shows ahead of time that his Father has power over the final enemy. He treats death as if it were only sleep: “Sweetie, it’s time to wake up.”

### Another Daughter

But Mark 5:21-43 isn’t just about the little girl. There’s also an older woman—another daughter. This is where Jesus’ walking, his pace of love, shines.

On the way to heal Jairus’s daughter, with the crowd pressing in on Jesus, a woman with a chronic disease reached out and touched his garment from behind. Jesus felt that “power had gone out from him” (v 30), and the woman “felt in her body that she was healed of her disease” (v 29). Jesus stopped and turned around to ask who had touched him. Bewildered and impatient, his disciples asked, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” (v 31). Besides, Jairus’s daughter was on her deathbed! *Jesus, if ever there were a time to run, it’s now. There is no time for this woman when a 12-year-old girl is about to die!* But Jesus had the time.

### Go in Peace

The woman steps forward, and, far from rebuking her, Jesus shows her a father's heart for a daughter. "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (v 34). He wants her to know that it's not her superstitious reach that has healed her but her faith. And he calls her *daughter*. Just as Jairus has shown the unique tenderness and compassion of a father's heart for his little daughter, now Jesus shows us his heart—God's heart—for one of his daughters. And he does so when he is under pressure from Jairus and his own disciples to hurry on to something far more urgent.

Of course, we are not Jesus. We cannot raise a daughter who has already died, nor are we expected to. But oh, how we want to learn from the life of God himself among us—who in the midst of life's pressures trusted his Father. He was not distracted by the past or hurrying into the future. Fully present in the moment, Jesus walked.

—

*Father, in a day of acceleration, would you slow our souls and steps to the pace of love? Remind us again and again why you put us here, and why, for now, you keep us here. It is not for us to make a name for ourselves or secure our heaven with our work, nor to pretend we have our heaven now. Like Jesus, we want to walk in faith. One foot in front of the other. Day after day. To walk with you, to find the pace to which you've called us, and to see and meet the needs of others. Help us to walk like Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: Mark 5:21-43*

## 7. HE TAUGHT

### Marveling at the Words of Christ

*“All the people were hanging on his words.”*

*—Luke 19:48*

“**N**o one ever spoke like this man!” Even his enemies had to admit it.

Jerusalem was teeming with travelers during the Feast of Booths, and Jesus was teaching in the temple. A new excitement was in the air. And controversy. Some said he was a good man; others thought he was leading people astray (John 7:12).

The Pharisees overheard the muttering and conspired with their political rivals, the chief priests, to send officers, ready to arrest Jesus if he misspoke.

Some wondered if this was the Prophet who was to come. Or even the Christ himself. Others argued that David’s heir would not come from Galilee. The officers, equally stunned, returned with empty hands—and open mouths—to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked, “Why did you not bring him?” (v 45).

John then reports, as he loves to do, a word on the lips of Jesus’ enemies that is even truer than they know: “No one ever spoke like this man!” (v 46).

#### All Things Well

The words and teaching of Jesus are unmatched. But a tension runs through his ministry from start to finish. Time and

again, his fame spread because of his miracles. Word spread like wildfire because of his works. People wanted to see what the Gospel of John calls “signs.” Yet Jesus never self-identified as a miracle-worker. He was a teacher—whose words amazed his hearers as much as his healings, and more.

Nicodemus captures it well, even though he still has much to learn, when he comes to Jesus at night in John 3: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (v 2). The signs point. The *works* that dazzle the eyes are meant to open ears to the *words* of a teacher who has come from God.

Himself the Word of God, Jesus spoke words that were like the words of no other before him, in his day, or since. He opened his mouth to teach, and soon “all the people were hanging on his words” (Luke 19:48).

### Amazed and Astonished

Even at the age of twelve, two decades before he went public as a teacher, his words amazed and astonished people as he sat among the teachers in the temple: “All who heard him were *amazed* at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were *astonished*” (Luke 2:47-48).

When Jesus spoke, his words, not just his works, were arresting. He “amazed” the crowds with miracles (Mark 1:27; 2:12; 5:42), but he also “amazed” his disciples with his teaching (10:24, 32). As the masses were “astonished” at his works (Mark 7:37; Luke 5:9; 9:43; 11:38), so, even more, those with ears to hear were “astonished” at his words (Mark 1:22; 6:2; 10:26; 11:18).

Significantly, Matthew reports that at the end of the famous Sermon on the Mount, “when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). And when he taught in

his hometown, Nazareth, “they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?’” (13:54).

When he moved on to the next town, Capernaum, the people there, too, “were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority” (Luke 4:32). And when it seemed to matter most, during his Passion week, with the chief priests trying to trip him up, he not only answered flawlessly but went on the offensive. “And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching” (Matthew 22:33).

### They Marveled

Even more than being “amazed” and “astonished,” the Gospels report that Jesus’ hearers often *marveled*. They “marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth” (Luke 4:22).

When the Pharisees “plotted how to entangle him in his words” (Matthew 22:15), Luke reports the upshot: “They were not able ... to catch him in what he said, but *marveling* at his answer they became silent” (Luke 20:26). He could open his mouth and make them put their hands over their own. Which brings us back to John 7 and the clearest explanation of what made his teaching so marvelous.

### What Was It about His Words?

As Jesus taught during the feast, the establishment “marveled” and asked, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” (John 7:15).

Jesus answers with the most focused and penetrating words he has to say about his words. Here he pulls back the curtain, as it were, and *teaches about his teaching*. In doing so, he gives us a profound insight into what sets his words and teaching apart:

*“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.” (v 16)*



Beneath the enigma of “his teaching” not being “his” is this bracing clarity: Who gets the glory? Whose honor is it for?

*“If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.” (v 17-18)*

Who gets the glory? For most teachers, the answer is painfully plain: we seek our own. Apart from Christ, we teach for our own benefit, advancement, and praise. Yet the God-man himself—fully God, yes, and among us as fully man—*seeks not his own glory* in his teaching but pursues the glory of the one who sent him.

Yes, “no one ever spoke like *this man*”—because no man ever lived for the name and glory of God like the one named Jesus (John 17:4, 6, 26). What that dedication of mind and heart brought to his words made a difference everywhere he went and every time he taught.

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*Father in heaven, may we never treat “for your glory” as a throwaway phrase. We want to live for your glory, like your Son, and use our words for your honor and praise, like he did. Father, thank you for your word to us in Jesus, and his astounding, marvelous words to us and our world. Saturate our lives in your words. Change our lives with them. Empower our love with them. And make us, too, like Jesus, to make much of you with our teaching and the words we speak. In his name we pray. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: Matthew 22:15-22*

## 8. HE DISCIPLED

### Blessing the Masses, Investing in a Few

*“He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles)  
so that they might be with him.”*

*—Mark 3:14*

Perhaps one of the biggest surprises in a careful reading of the Gospels is how Jesus’ ministry revolved around his investment in his twelve men.

Jesus did indeed *bless the masses* with his public teaching, but he gave the lion’s share of his time to *investing in the few*: his followers, and especially the twelve men whom we call his “apostles” or “disciples.” After more than three decades of life in the obscurity of a backwater town called Nazareth, his entry into public ministry came not by gathering a crowd but by pursuing a small group of disciples and calling them to a particular season of learning under him. “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

For three and a half years, they learned under his personal tutelage and care. And having been discipled by him, there would have been little doubt in their minds about what their Master was calling them to when he said, after his resurrection, before his departure, “Make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

So also we see the echo of Jesus’ disciple-making in the ministry of the apostle Paul, who had been discipled by a rabbi in his youth. Though Paul himself did not study under Jesus

like Peter, James, and John, he did follow suit, as one untimely born (1 Corinthians 15:8) in his personal investments in younger associates. Timothy and Titus are well known among them; there were many others. And Paul charged Timothy to keep the pattern: to disciple the church's next generation of leaders, and to teach them to do the same (2 Timothy 2:2).

### What Is Disciple-Making?

*Disciple-making*, as I'm using the term, is the process in which a maturing believer invests him or herself, for a particular period of time, in one or just a few younger believers, in order to help them grow in the faith—including helping them to invest in others who will invest in others.

It's especially vital for new and young believers. A discipler is like a personal trainer to help get you going. The goal for the disciple isn't to always have the personal trainer watching over you, but to learn spiritual health and fitness for yourself, under God, and then to be able to train others.

Such disciple-making requires both structure and some margin that allows the discipler to speak spontaneously into teachable moments. It's both engineered and organic, trellis and vine, truth-speaking and life-sharing. Quantity time is the soil in which quality time grows.

The vast majority of Jesus' time with his men wasn't formal. Mark 3:14 says, "He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might *be with him*." Before he sent them out to preach on his behalf, they first needed to be with their Master. Not with a clock ticking in the background but with the space and time and overlap of everyday life that encourages the kind of effect that Jesus had on his men.

It is nothing short of amazing, what three years with Christ did for this ragtag band of young Galileans—fishermen and a tax collector among them. All of them were outsiders to

the religious establishment of the time; none of them were rabbi-trained like Paul. And yet, after Christ's ascension and the pouring out of his Spirit, the religious authorities could see with their own eyes the profound imprints of Christ on his men:

*"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)*

### Till Harvest Comes

Jesus' parable of the man scattering seed, while not narrowly about disciple-making, captures the dynamic of how God works life-change through the daily modest investments of disciplers.

*"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29)*

Disciple-making is often like that. The discipler scatters his seed. He sleeps and rises night and day. The seed sprouts and grows almost imperceptibly—"he knows not how." There are not clear cause-and-effect relationships between the various investments a discipler makes and the maturation and growth in those in whom he or she invests. But the discipler keeps investing. And God gives the growth. The blade, the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And all of a sudden, the

harvest comes. We see a changed life and say, “God did it! God did it again.”

As with farming, we typically don't see the organic progress in the day-to-day but over the course of months—and then it's amazing what a harvest can happen. All of a sudden, in a moment, God takes off the blinders, and we realize what kind of growth has been happening right before our eyes, hidden in plain view. It shows that the glory belongs to him, not to us.

We pivot now from the life of Christ—his purpose, his habits, his rest, his sorrows, his work, his pace, and his teaching—to the meaning and achievements of his sacrificial death. His massive investments in his Twelve (with, tragically, one to be lost) take on even more significance in light of what's to come. Jesus would not always be with them. In fact, his time among them would be only little more than three years. He would do his unique work at the cross and finish his course, and leave behind only a band of painfully ordinary Galileans. But Jesus did not cut corners on the preparation of his men. They were his first work, until it came time to do his cross-work. Then, they were ready. He would send his Spirit. He would change the world through them.

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*Father, give us the wherewithal, like Jesus, to invest in the lives of others in ways that cannot be replaced by mass production. Make us faithful in the seemingly small things which, in your economy, turn out to be big. In a world of distraction and hurry and overcommitment, give us the grace to go deep in the lives of a few. In our heart to bless many, may we not neglect to invest in one or two. Give us the foresight, patience, and steadfastness of your Son, and pour out your Spirit on us and on those in whom we invest. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.*

*Scripture reading: Acts 4:5-13*



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