

JESUS CARES

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For the sake of clarity, all Scripture quotations and parenthesized Scripture references have been placed in italics.

Introduction

Sometimes we feel like no one cares about us. We feel unnoticed, unappreciated, and even unknown. If you've ever been in a strange city by yourself, you know the feeling. You see other people walking, talking, and eating with their families and friends, and yet no one knows you. In a setting like that, it's easy to feel like no one cares.

There are times, though, when we can feel that way in our own hometown. You can live in a house filled with family members, work in an office full of familiar faces, go to school with the same classmates you have known for years, and still feel like no one cares about you.

Perhaps you feel that way now. You have problems, concerns, fears, and situations in your life, and you feel like no one really cares. That's a tough spot to be in.

I have good news for you, though. Someone does care. Someone knows what you are facing, how you are feeling, and what you are thinking. And not only does He *know*, but He also *cares*. Who is this Person who cares about you? Well, His name is Jesus. He's the Creator of the world, the risen Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The One who numbers

the stars and calls each one by name (*see Psalm 147:4*) has numbered the very hairs of your head (*see Matthew 10:30*). He cares about you.

He knows everything about you. When you stand up, He notices. When you sit down, He pays attention. He understands your silent thoughts better than you do (*see Psalm 139:1-4*). And not only does He *know* and *notice* and *understand*, but He also *cares*.

The Bible instructs us to cast all of our worries and concerns upon God because “*He cares*” for us (*1 Peter 5:7*). Think about that. The God who made everything, the God who knows everything, the God who holds everything together...He cares about *you*. He cares about your insecurities, your past, your present, and your future. He cares about your doubts, your fears, and your failures. He cares about your lonely feelings, your anxious thoughts, and your frayed emotions. He cares about *every part* of you.

One of the ways I know Jesus cares about us is because after His resurrection from the dead He remained on earth for forty more days before returning to heaven (*see Acts 1:3*). Why didn't He just return to heaven immediately after His resurrection? He could have. He had paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the

cross. He had conquered sin, death, and hell in His triumphant resurrection. The work He came to do was done. So why did He stay on earth for forty more days before returning to heaven?

That's an excellent question. Let me answer it this way: *Even though the work of redemption was done, His disciples still needed His help in many practical ways.* They had some issues that needed His attention.

Had Jesus returned to heaven immediately after the resurrection, He would have left some of His followers in a real mess. A lady named Mary Magdalene was filled with sadness. Two men from Emmaus were filled with hopelessness. Thomas was filled with doubts. Peter was filled with guilt. Others were filled with fear.

Jesus had such love and compassion for His followers that He didn't want to leave them like this. He knew they needed Him. He knew they needed His help, His forgiveness, and His reassurance. He cared too much about them to return to heaven with them in this condition. He knew that if He remained on earth a little longer that He could help them through their struggles. So, He stayed on earth for forty days after the resurrection to do just that. He did that because He cared about them.

The years have come and gone, but nothing about Jesus has changed (*see Hebrews 13:8*). He cared about them, and He cares about us. Let me say it more directly: *He cares about you*. He cares about your sadness, your loneliness, your hopelessness, your doubts, your guilt, your regrets, your questions, and your fears. He cares about your finances, your future, and your foes. He cares about *everything* that concerns you. Two of the sweetest and most comforting words in all the world are these: *Jesus cares*.

In the remainder of this booklet, we will examine some of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. We will analyze the specific struggles some of His followers were dealing with, and we will notice how Jesus helped them. As we do, my prayer is that it will become obvious to you (no matter who you are, where you may be, or what you may be facing) that Jesus not only *knows*, but He also *cares*.

Jesus Cares About Our Sadness

Sometimes we're sad, and we really don't know why. The psalmist felt this way. He was so despondent that he began talking to himself. He asked himself this question: "*Why are you cast down, O my soul?*" (*Psalms 42:5*). He

couldn't figure out the reason for his own sadness and depression. I've had that experience. Perhaps you have, too.

There are other times, though, when we are sad, and we know exactly why. Something has happened that has broken our heart. A dream has failed to become a reality. A relationship has unexpectedly ended. A loved one has died. Sadness naturally follows.

Such was the case of Mary Magdalene. Prior to meeting Jesus, she had been demon-possessed. In fact, she had been possessed by seven demons. Can you imagine the bondage she was living in? Can you imagine the torment, the evil thoughts, and the paralyzing fears? Can you fathom how negatively those demons would have affected every aspect of her life and of her relationships with others?

There came a day, though, when everything changed for her. She had an encounter with Jesus, and He cast out all seven of those demons (*see Luke 8:2*). Jesus literally changed her life. She went from bondage to freedom, from torment to triumph, from defeat to victory in a split second. After Jesus liberated her from demonic possession, she began to follow Him wherever He went. When we think about the followers of Jesus, we think about the twelve

disciples, but there were also a good number of women who followed Him, including Mary Magdalene (*see Luke 8:1-3*).

Mary gets her full name from the city she was from...Magdala. It was located "on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee."¹ She naturally followed Jesus on His travels through that part of Israel, but she also followed Him to Jerusalem where she witnessed His agonizing crucifixion (*see Matthew 27:55-56*). Her love for Jesus, because of what He had done for her, had made Mary Magdalene one of Jesus' most loyal and devoted followers.

It's not surprising, then, that Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection. The Bible says it this way: "*Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons*" (*Mark 16:9*).

On the Sunday morning following the crucifixion on Friday, Mary Magdalene, along with some other women, came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. When they arrived, they were amazed to discover that the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away (*see Mark 16:1-4*). In utter confusion, Mary found Peter and John and said to them, "*They have*

taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:2). She was sad because she couldn’t do the honor of anointing the body of Jesus and because she had no idea where His body was.

Mary’s sadness is summed up in these three verses: *“But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him’” (John 20:11-13).*

It is at this point in the story that Mary had another life-changing encounter with Jesus. The One who had cast out those seven demons from her was about to reveal Himself to her as the risen Christ. The way Jesus helped Mary through her sadness is the same way He helps us through ours. Notice what He did...

First, He met her where she was. Consider the biblical description of what happened to Mary after she expressed her sadness to the angels at the empty tomb: *“Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was*

Jesus” (John 20:14). It’s not clear where Jesus was when Mary initially came to the tomb. He was already risen, but His exact location when she arrived is not known. We see Him, though, coming back to the tomb area to comfort Mary. She didn’t recognize Him for who He was, but He was nonetheless there to help her.

This is what Jesus does for us, too. He meets us at the point of our sadness. Whether we’re in an empty dorm room, a hospital waiting room, a quiet house, or a funeral home, Jesus comes to where we are. He meets us there.

After He comes to where we are, He leads us to articulate the cause of our sadness. That’s what He did with Mary. The Bible records that Jesus simply asked her, “*Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?*” (John 20:15). Jesus knew that Mary needed to articulate her feelings. There is something about putting our feelings into words that helps us to better deal with them.

Perhaps you need to take a moment now and do just that. Just verbalize to Jesus why you are sad. He already knows, and you probably know, too. But part of our healing comes from putting our problems into words. Mary did that. Even though she didn’t yet know who she was talking to, she poured out her heart. She said,

“Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away” (John 20:15). Again, she was sad because Jesus had died, and she didn’t know where His body was.

After we express our innermost feelings to Jesus, He begins to reveal Himself to us in the most personal of ways. In this case, He called Mary by her name, and that’s when she knew who He was. Until this point, she thought He was the gardener (*see John 20:15*). But when Jesus called her name, the Bible says, *“She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’” (John 20:16).* When He called her by name, she knew it wasn’t the gardener she was talking to; she knew it was Jesus Himself. It proves, though, that sometimes we don’t recognize the presence of Jesus. But when He calls our name, we do.

Our name is the most personal part of us, and I’ve noticed that sometimes Jesus can call our name without actually calling it. Sometimes He reveals Himself to us in a different, but equally personal, way.

There have been many times in my life when Jesus has called my name without actually saying, “Jon.” During one difficult season in my life, it seemed like almost every time I turned the radio on I would hear the old

song, “*The Anchor Holds.*” There’s a line in that song that says, “The anchor holds in spite of the storm.”² That song became a lifeline for me. Jesus was calling my name by causing me to turn the radio on at the precise time that song was playing. It was His way of saying to me, “I’m with you, Jon. I’m your Anchor, and I’m going to hold you tightly during this storm. Don’t despair. Don’t give up. Keep on keeping on. This storm will pass.”

Jesus has called my name without actually calling my name in a lot of other ways as well. He has spoken to my heart and encouraged my soul through timely phone calls from friends, divine encounters with strangers, letters of encouragement, and most of all through His written Word, the Bible. I can’t tell you how many times I have found strength for the day through my daily Bible readings.

The presence of Jesus put a spring in Mary’s step and a song in her heart. She embraced Jesus and didn’t want to let Him go. He spoke these words to her: “*Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’*” (John 20:17). She was so invigorated at having had this encounter with

Jesus that she excitedly went and told the disciples what had happened (*see John 20:18*).

There's something about being in the presence of Jesus that comforts us, assures us, and puts things in proper perspective. It may not happen immediately, but eventually He will lighten that load of sadness and restore to you a sense of joy and peace.

Jesus Cares About Our Hopelessness

Hope is a powerful thing. Webster's Dictionary defines hope as a "belief that something good may happen."³ As long as you are expecting something good over the horizon, you will be able to endure whatever difficulty you may be facing.

But just as *hope* is a powerful thing, so is *hopelessness*. When you look out into the future and no longer have anything to look forward to, you are in a bad place. When a person loses hope, they have lost a great deal. Unless that lost hope is restored, depression will inevitably set in. No wonder the Bible says, "*Hope deferred makes the heart sick*" (*Proverbs 13:12*).

Someone has said, “Hope is *a desire* accompanied by *an expectation*.” A high school senior *desires* to get accepted by a particular university, and he is *expecting* to get accepted. A person *desires* to get married, and they are *expecting* to get married. A couple *desires* to have children, and they are *expecting* to have children. When a person has hope, he has both *a desire* and *an expectation*.

Hopelessness, though, is different. When a person has *the desire* for something but no longer *expects* it to happen, that’s when hopelessness sets in. Hopelessness is when we lose *the expectation* but still have *the desire*.

This is precisely what had happened to two men who had been in Jerusalem on the weekend of Jesus’ crucifixion. They had hoped that He was the Messiah and that He would deliver Israel. But they had seen Him die, and they didn’t believe He had risen from the dead.

These men were from a small village called Emmaus, “*which was seven miles from Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:13). On the Sunday of the resurrection, they left Jerusalem and headed home. They were disappointed beyond words that the One they thought was the Messiah had been so brutally crucified. And while they had heard that He had risen from the dead, they

simply didn't believe it. They had no faith in His resurrection, and because they had no faith, they had no hope.

Knowing what they were thinking and how they were feeling, Jesus left Jerusalem and headed towards Emmaus to chase these guys down. Think about that. On the actual day of His resurrection, when He could have been proving to those who had killed Him that He was alive, He instead left the crowds in Jerusalem and pursued these two hopeless men. He wanted to reveal Himself to them and restore their hope that He was indeed the Person they had thought Him to be.

When He caught up with them on the Emmaus Road, He asked, "*What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?*" (Luke 24:17). They didn't know this was Jesus who was talking to them. The Bible says that "*their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him*" (Luke 24:16). As they told Him what had happened, they expressed their despondency with these defeated words: "*But we were hoping...*" (Luke 24:21). They were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah. They were hoping that Jesus was alive. But since they hadn't seen Him with their own eyes, they had lost their hope.

At this point, Jesus began to explain to them how the Old Testament had prophesied that the Messiah must suffer like this in order to pay the penalty for the world's sins. They were wanting a political Messiah to liberate them from Roman oppression, but Jesus explained that the Messiah had to be a "Suffering Servant" who would pay the sin debt that everyone in the world owed to God.

Completely enamored with this conversation, they invited Jesus (still not knowing who He was) to stay with them that night. He agreed to do so. When they sat down to eat, Jesus took some bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. When He did this, *"their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight"* (Luke 24:31).

On one of our trips to Israel, our guide said that the reason these two men recognized Jesus for who He was when He gave them the bread is because at that moment, they were able to see the nail scars in His hands. When they saw those scars, their eyes were opened, and they knew He was Jesus.

In that moment, their hope was restored. They immediately returned to Jerusalem and told the disciples what had happened. Their *hopelessness* had separated them from the other

followers of Jesus; their *restored hope* reunited them. Hope is a powerful thing.

As these two men were walking back to Jerusalem together and reflecting on the time they had spent with Jesus, they said to one another, “*Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?*” (Luke 24:32).

Here we see how lost hope can be found again. The cure for hopelessness is a fresh encounter with Jesus and a better understanding of God’s Word. It was the *death* of Jesus that caused them to lose hope; it was the *resurrection* of Jesus that restored their hope. When they saw that Jesus was more powerful than the thing that had taken away their hope (namely death), they found their hope again.

Friend, the same thing is true in your case. You may have lost hope because some desire hasn’t become a reality. But let me say this as plainly as I can: *Jesus is bigger than that!* The ultimate joy in life is not wrapped up in a college or a spouse or a child or a career. These are wonderful blessings, but they were never intended to be the source of our deepest joy. That can only be found in Jesus. It is in His presence alone that we find “*fullness of joy*” (Psalm 16:11). Joy and hope are found in Jesus.

Jesus Cares About Our Fears

Fear is a terrible thing. Fear of the unknown. Fear of getting sick. Fear of being alone. Fear of running out of money. Fear of what others might think of us. Fear of failure. Fear of dying. These are just some of the fears that can keep us up at night. So what is the solution to these and other fears?

Well, once again, the answer is found in the presence of Jesus. After Jesus helped those two hopeless men on the road to Emmaus find their hope again, He appeared to His disciples in Jerusalem. They were afraid of what the ruling authorities might do to them. In their minds, since the authorities had put Jesus to death, they weren't safe either.

So they gathered together in a room in Jerusalem (probably the Upper Room where they had been with Jesus just a few days earlier), locked the doors, and recoiled in fear. Jesus hadn't been afraid of the authorities when they came for Him, but His disciples were terrified at the thought that the authorities might come for them. The Bible records it this way: *"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst,*

and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:19-20).

Jesus went out of His way to alleviate their fears. He spoke peace to them. And His presence gladdened their hearts.

I have often thought that if I had the physical presence of Jesus continually with me that I would never worry about anything. How could I? If a problem arose, Jesus would be right there to tend to it. There have been many times in my life when I have thought, “If I only had what the disciples had...the physical, visible presence of Jesus...”

I think most of us have thought that at some point in our lives. There is a sense in which our love for Jesus is what causes us to want to see Him. So the desire itself isn’t bad. It’s actually a reflection of how precious He is to us.

And yet, there is another sense in which it reveals that we really don’t understand who we have in the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus lives in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He is in our hearts. And He is always with us. This is why Jesus said it is better for us to have the Holy

Spirit *in* us than it would be to have Him physically *with* us (see *John 16:7*). In a physical sense, Jesus could only be in one place at a time. If He was physically with me today, He couldn't be with you. But in the Person of the Holy Spirit, He can always be with each of us, no matter where we are. And it is *His presence* that stops fear in its tracks.

If you think about it, most of the things we fear never happen. They are hypothetical fears. But I've learned something about fear: *Even if what you are fearing actually happens, it won't be as bad as you thought it would be.* Why is that? Because if it actually happens, God will give you grace to face it. He will make His presence obvious and real to you. Just like He did for those frightened disciples in Jerusalem, He will come into the room where you are and speak peace to your troubled soul.

In President Franklin Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address in 1933, he spoke these classic words: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."⁴ While that is a great line, it's actually not true. First, we *should* fear God. Second, we *shouldn't* be afraid of fear. Instead, we should face our fears with faith in God and with an awareness of His constant, unending presence with us. It is His presence, and our awareness of it, that fills our hearts with peace

and courage during those times when we would otherwise be an emotional wreck.

I encourage you to trust Jesus with whatever you may be fearful about at this time in your life. If you will just trust Him, those fears will melt away. *“Peace be with you” (John 20:19)*. Those are Jesus’ words to you today.

Jesus Cares About Our Doubts

Have you ever struggled with doubt? Doubt is when we question the Word of God, the goodness of God, or the ability of God to take care of us. Sometimes those who love God the most struggle the hardest with doubt. In fact, there is a sense in which believers struggle with doubt more than unbelievers. Unbelievers simply don’t believe. There is no real struggle. Believers, though, want to know for sure that what we believe is true.

Let me say plainly and clearly that there’s nothing good about doubt. I’m not saying that nothing good can come *from* doubt, but doubt itself isn’t good. Doubt divides the mind (*see James 1:5-8*). Doubt deprives us of what we’re praying for (*see James 1:6-7*). Doubt distances us from God and from other believers (*see John 20:24-29*). If that’s not bad enough, doubt can

dilute our commitment to God, damage our lives, and ultimately, for all practical purposes, destroy our faith. While it's true that sometimes believers do in fact doubt, God wants to bring us to a place where we don't doubt. He wants to bring us to a place where we simply believe Him and trust Him...sometimes in spite of what is happening *to* us or *around* us.

Jesus was so concerned with the doubts of one of His disciples, a man named Thomas, that He wouldn't return to heaven until He first helped Thomas overcome them. When Jesus first appeared to His disciples, on the evening of resurrection day itself, Thomas wasn't in the room where the disciples had assembled. He wasn't there because he didn't believe Jesus had risen from the dead. He didn't believe because he hadn't seen the risen Christ. And since he hadn't seen Jesus, he chose not to believe. His faith demanded proof, and without that proof he was a "no-show" amongst the disciples. He had lost all hope and saw no point in gathering with the other disciples.

Had Thomas only believed in spite of his doubts, even with a weak and wavering faith, when Jesus appeared to His disciples Thomas could have gotten all of his questions answered. But he wasn't there. Instead of believing in spite of his doubts, his doubts were causing him

to act like an unbeliever. He even said to the other disciples, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). Notice he didn’t say, *“I cannot believe.”* He said, *“I will not believe.”* He chose not to believe.

As is so typical of Jesus, He went the extra mile to help a feeble follower. One week after appearing to the disciples, He appeared to them again. This time, Thomas was in the room with them. Jesus said to Thomas, *“Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing”* (John 20:27). Jesus wanted to turn Thomas’ doubts into faith before they further deteriorated into unbelief. What patience Jesus has.

Upon seeing Jesus with his own eyes, Thomas declared, *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28). Jesus responded, *“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29).

While Jesus was gracious to give Thomas the evidence he needed, He also made clear that a special blessing is laid up for those who have not seen and yet choose to believe anyway.

Friend, that's us! We haven't seen the resurrected body of Jesus. We don't have the proof that Thomas had. And yet, we *choose* to believe. The Bible says, "*Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*" (1 Peter 1:8). The Scriptures go on to say that "*to you who believe, He is precious*" (1 Peter 2:7). I can honestly say that I believe in Jesus. I trust Him with all of my heart. And, as a result, He is precious to me. He really is.

Lest we be too hard on Thomas for his doubts, we need to remember that we have some evidence he didn't have. We have the full revelation of God's Word, the Bible. We have the Holy Spirit living in us. We have two thousand years of church history. Thomas didn't have all of that, and yet, that was no excuse. He had the promise of Jesus that after He was killed He would rise again (see *Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19*). He had the *promise*, but he demanded *proof*.

Interestingly, the Greek name for Thomas is Didymus, which literally means "the twin."⁵ While his actual twin is never mentioned in the Bible, sometimes we feel like his twin. With all the promises God has made to us in His Word and with a lifetime of His provisions for us, we sometimes still want proof. Shame on us.

So how do we rise above our doubts? I would suggest two things:

First, change your focus. Many times we doubt because we are focused on ourselves, our circumstances, or something else other than God. I think this is at the heart of much of our doubting. I have shared with our congregation on many occasions how God set me free from doubting my salvation. I doubted for a long time whether or not I was truly saved until finally, almost twenty years ago, I got that settled. But something dawned on me a while back that I never had thought of before. During all of my doubting, I never doubted God. Instead, I doubted myself. I doubted whether my repentance was pure enough, whether my faith was strong enough, whether my “salvation prayer” was perfect enough, whether my experience was genuine enough. I doubted because my focus was wrong. And I was set free when I changed my focus. When I said, “Jesus, I trust You,” my life changed. My heart became peaceful, and my mind became clear. Hallelujah! Trusting Jesus changed my life.

Perhaps you are making the same mistake I made. You are doubting, but you’re really not doubting God. You’re doubting yourself in some way. Listen, friend. As long as you look at yourself, your resources, your faith, your

strength, your life...you will always find something to doubt because we're not perfect. But if you will change your focus from *you* to *Jesus*, you won't find anything to doubt because Jesus is totally adequate, totally righteous, totally perfect, and totally able to forgive any and every sin. No wonder the Bible says, "*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You*" (Isaiah 26:3). It is *our job* to trust God and keep our mind on Him; it is *His job* to give us peace.

The second thing you need to do to overcome doubt is to make a decision to believe. Thomas did that. He made a decision to become *a believer* instead of *a doubter*. Believing, at the end of the day, is a choice. I encourage you, I appeal to you, whatever you are fretting and worrying about at this time, tell Jesus that you trust Him with it. Tell Him now. Tell Him out loud. Just say, "Jesus, with this situation, I choose, as an act of my will, to trust You. I trust You with this completely."

Now that you have transferred your faith to Jesus, just keep trusting Him. One pastor said it this way: "*Believers are supposed to believe.*" Yes, we are. And yes, we do. With all of our hearts, we trust Jesus. And, as we trust Him, the doubt goes out!

Jesus Cares About Our Basic Needs

Jesus is much more practical than you might think. We think He only cares about how much we pray, read the Bible, and go to church. He cares about those things, but only because He cares about us. He knows those things are good for us. And He only wants what is good for us.

But He doesn't just care about the "spiritual" aspect of our lives; He cares about every aspect. There's not any part of your life that Jesus doesn't care about.

After His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee to encourage and instruct some of His disciples. Early one morning, He came to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had been fishing all night, had caught nothing, but were still out in the boat. Jesus instructed them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. When they did, they caught so many fish that they were not able to draw the net into the boat. Jesus had supernaturally provided fish for His disciples (*see John 21:1-6*). It was an early morning miracle.

Peter recognized Jesus, jumped into the water, and swam to shore. The other disciples came to shore in the boat "*dragging the net*

with fish” (John 21:7-8). An interesting thing happened when they arrived on land. Jesus had built a little fire and was preparing breakfast for them. He was cooking them some fish and bread. It’s a tender scene (*see John 21:9-14*).

Think about what was happening here. The King of heaven and earth had taken the time to prepare breakfast for some of His disciples. That doesn’t sound particularly spiritual, but still Jesus did it. Why? Because He cares about every detail of our lives. He knows we need to eat. He’s not oblivious to that fact. And He’s not oblivious to our other needs either.

Jesus cares about your job, your bills, your mortgage, your rent, your expenses, your clothes, your car, your insurance, your taxes, your medical bills. He knows what they are, and He cares about all of these things.

Certainly, God expects us to work and be good stewards of the resources He has entrusted to us, but as our heavenly Father, He has promised to meet our every need. My advice would be to work hard, tithe to your church, and give above the tithe to the church and to others in need as best as you can. Additionally, save some money, invest some money, spend your money wisely, live well below your means, pay your bills on time, then

just trust God to provide. Jesus has instructed us to seek Him first and foremost, and He has promised to give us everything we need if we will do that (*see Matthew 6:33*).

As our Father, God has promised to take care of us. When King David was an old man, he made this observation: *“I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread”* (*Psalm 37:25*).

If you are God’s child, you *won’t* be forsaken. Your needs *will* be met. Jesus cares about the basic needs in your life. Do the best you can and trust God to provide for you.

Jesus Cares About Our Guilt

Not only did Jesus come to the Sea of Galilee to make breakfast for some of His disciples, but He also came to restore Simon Peter to the ministry. Peter, of course, had committed a serious sin on the night of Jesus’ arrest. Three times he had denied that he knew Jesus (*see Matthew 26:69-75*). After the third denial, the Bible records that *“the Lord turned and looked at Peter...So Peter went out and wept bitterly”* (*Luke 22:61-62*).

Peter had done the unthinkable. He had committed a sin he thought he would never commit (*see Matthew 26:31-35*). And now, he felt awful about it.

Have you ever done something similar? Have you ever committed a sin and then been overcome with guilt, shame, and regret? If we're honest, we all have. After all, which sin would you *not* feel guilty about committing? Which sin would you *not* regret doing? To say that you have never had any regrets would be to say that you have either never sinned or that you have no conscience and don't care.

I once saw a picture of a man who got a tattoo that was supposed to read, "No Regrets." The tattoo artist messed up, though, and the tattoo read, "No Regerts."⁶ I bet the man regretted that!

Regret is something we experience after we have sinned, but it isn't something God wants us to live with. And that's why Jesus wanted to talk to Peter.

The first thing Peter needed was forgiveness. Interestingly, we don't read an explicit account in Scripture about Peter's repentance and Jesus' forgiveness. I personally think the reason for that is because it took place

in private. When the two men from Emmaus returned to Jerusalem, they told the disciples that they had seen the risen Christ, and they also said that He had “*appeared to Simon*” (Luke 24:34). My understanding is that Jesus forgave Peter in private.

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, though, Jesus restored Peter to the ministry in public. Peter had been a fisherman before Jesus called him into the ministry. After his denials, Peter returned to fishing. He must have assumed that even though Jesus had forgiven him, He could never really use him again.

So, after the breakfast Jesus prepared for His disciples, He asked Peter three different times if he loved Him. Peter said that he did. And Jesus, three different times, told Peter to get back out there and minister to His people. Three denials were offset by three commands to serve again. Jesus did this in front of the other disciples. While Peter’s forgiveness was *private*, his restoration was *public*. Jesus wanted Peter to know that he was getting a second chance in ministry. And He wanted the other disciples to know it as well.

Interestingly, the biblical phrase “*fire of coals*” only occurs twice in the New Testament.⁷ The first time we encounter this

phrase is in the high priest's courtyard where Peter denied knowing Jesus three times (*see John 18:18*). The second time is here, by the Sea of Galilee (*see John 21:9*). By the first fire of coals, Peter messed up big time. Now, though, by another fire of coals, he was getting a second chance (*see John 21:9-17*).

All of us stand in need of forgiveness, and at times, we need restoration, too. We need our joy restored, our peace restored, our purpose restored, and sometimes, we need our life's work to be restored. We need a fresh touch from Jesus and a second chance in life. God is not only a God of *forgiveness*, but He is also a God of *restoration*.

So don't let your regret lead you to despair. Instead, let it lead you to repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. And let this be a reminder that we, too, should restore others. When someone has sinned, instead of kicking them while they are down, we should bend down and help them up. Who are we to condemn? Who are we to throw a stone? The Bible instructs us to *restore* the fallen, not *ridicule* them. Hear these words: "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*" (*Galatians 6:1*).

For whatever sin we may have committed, there is grace for that. And for whatever sin we haven't committed, it's only because God's grace has kept us from it. We need God's grace both ways.

To the person reading these words and wondering if God could ever really use you again, let me remind you how He used some Bible characters *after* they had sinned. Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt *after* he had committed murder. David wrote many of the psalms *after* he had committed both adultery and murder. Jonah preached a revival in Nineveh *after* he had rebelled against God. The woman at the well became a powerful witness for Jesus *after* she had been married five times. And Peter preached the first sermon of the church, the sermon on the Day of Pentecost, *after* he had denied knowing Jesus.

God wasn't finished with them, and He isn't finished with you either. Repent of your sin. Receive God's forgiveness. And let Him restore you to a place of usefulness and service.

Jesus Cares About Our Death

After Jesus restored Peter to a life of ministry, He told him how he would one day

die. Listen to these words: “*‘Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.’ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me’*” (John 21:18-19).

There are two things that are interesting to me about these words. First, they reveal that Jesus knew how Peter’s life would one day end. Jesus, of course, knows everything, so it shouldn’t surprise us that He knows how our lives will eventually end.

The psalmist said, “*Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them*” (Psalm 139:16). Think about that. God determined the length of our lives before we were ever born. I find great comfort in knowing that just as God set the date of my *birth*, He has also determined the date of my *death*. I won’t leave this earth a minute before that time arrives, and I won’t be here a minute longer.

The second thing that is interesting to me about this passage of Scripture is that it says

Peter would have an opportunity, in his death, to honor God. Consider these words again: *“This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God...” (John 21:19).*

We don’t usually think of glorifying God in our *death*. We think of glorifying God in our *life*. The truth is we should glorify God in *both*. Peter did. After Jesus restored him, he went on to faithfully serve the Lord for many more years. Peter wrote two books in the New Testament. He led many people to faith in Christ. He glorified God in his life.

But Peter also glorified God in his death. While his death is not recorded in Scripture, history tells us that he died a martyr’s death in Rome. The most traditional account of Peter’s death says that as he was being led out to be crucified, he asked his executioners to crucify him upside down because he did not feel worthy to die the same way Jesus died.⁸ Wow! The disciple who had denied knowing Jesus on the night of Jesus’ arrest was not denying Him now. He was a new man. He had been given a second chance, and he was determined to make the most of it. He honored God in his death.

As a minister, I have been blessed through the years to see the grace with which God’s people die. I’ve seen Christians walk through

“the valley of the shadow of death” hand in hand with Jesus (*Psalm 23:4*). As they did, they exhibited great peace. Their outward body was *“perishing,”* but their inner spirit was *“being renewed”* (*II Corinthians 4:16*). Many of them died in *pain*, but all of them died in *peace*.

I’ve also been blessed hearing the accounts of how some of God’s preachers have died. On his deathbed, Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 1800s, said this: “There is no valley here. Life is receding. Heaven is opening. This is my coronation day.”⁹

R.G. Lee, the longtime pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, was given a glimpse of heaven before he died. As other preachers were gathered around his bedside, Dr. Lee said this: “I saw heaven. I saw Jesus. I saw my mother. I have preached on heaven many times, but I never had the vocabulary to adequately describe it. I never did justice to heaven in my sermons.”¹⁰ Dr. Lee saw heaven before he got there. That made his dying easier.

Adrian Rogers, one of Dr. Lee’s successors at Bellevue and one of the greatest preachers of our time, was in a hospital about to be put on a ventilator. He knew he was in a critical situation, but before he was hooked up to that machine, he said these words to those in his

room: “I am at perfect peace.”¹¹ Those were the last words his golden voice would ever speak.

Charles Stanley, one of the most influential pastors in American history, got so frail at the end of his life that he was no longer able to preach. So, at 90 years of age, he spent his time working on a devotional book entitled, *Trusting God with Today*. That book was released about six months after he died. He was literally “*faithful until death*” (*Revelation 2:10*).

Billy Graham, the man who preached to more people in person (210 million people) than anyone in the history of the world, had a slow, difficult death.¹² At almost 100 years of age, though, he was still trusting Jesus. One of his daughters, GiGi, who has spoken at our church twice, told me an interesting story. On one of her last visits to his house, she had talked with her dad and was about to leave his room. As she was walking out the door, he said, “GiGi, come back in here for a minute. There’s something I want to tell you.” She walked back in his room and said, “What is it, Daddy?” He said, “GiGi, you have to focus on the cross and on the Person of Jesus Christ.” When she told me that story, I thought, “So that’s how Billy Graham died. He died focusing on the cross and on the Person of Jesus Christ.” In other words, he died trusting and glorifying God.

Listen friend, we don't know *how* or *when* we're going to die. But I promise you this: *We're going to die in the presence of Jesus, and as we do, we'll have an opportunity to glorify Him.* God has promised to be with us to the very end of our lives. He said it this way: *"Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you"* (Isaiah 46:4). Our job is to focus on His presence with us and to trust Him completely.

While none of us looks forward to dying, neither should we dread it. I believe with all of my heart that if we'll focus on the cross and on the Person of Jesus Christ like Billy Graham did, and if we'll think about heaven like R.G. Lee did, and if we'll view death as our coronation day like Dwight L. Moody did, and if we'll serve God as best as we can like Charles Stanley did, that we will be able to say like Adrian Rogers did, "I am at perfect peace." That, my friend, is how a Christian should die.

Jesus Cares About Our Life's Work

After Jesus restored Peter to the ministry and explained to him how he would one day die, Jesus spoke these words to His forgiven disciple: *"Follow Me"* (John 21:19). These

were the same words Jesus had spoken to Peter and his brother, Andrew, three years earlier when He was assembling His apostolic team. He had said, “*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19). Now, three years later, after so much had happened, Jesus issued that same call once again. And once again, Peter followed.

How we live our lives matters. It matters to God. It matters to others. And it matters to us. We can either live our lives for the Lord, or we can live our lives for ourselves. We can *invest* our lives, or we can *waste* our lives. The choice is ours. But Jesus cares how we live.

Jesus gave His disciples some clear instructions before He returned to heaven. He gave them what we know today as *The Great Commission*. Here’s what He said: “‘*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*’ Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus told His disciples that their life’s work was to share His story and His love with the whole world. This they did. In the years that followed, these men went in different

directions but with the same message. They devoted their lives to *The Great Commission*, and they died serving the Lord.

How about you? Is your life devoted to the Lord's work, or do you have some other pursuit? You don't have to be in full-time vocational ministry in order to be a full-time Christian. Whatever your profession, view it as an opportunity, a platform, from which you can share the story of Jesus and His love with those with whom you come in contact.

And before you write off the call of God into full-time vocational ministry as someone else's responsibility, let me at least ask you this question: *Have you ever thought that God might be calling you?* God has a unique plan for your life, and it's at least possible that it includes a lifetime (or whatever lifetime remains) of full-time vocational ministry.

It's hard for me to write about this subject objectively. I'm partial to the ministry. God's call came to me at an early age. I'm not really sure how early. I surrendered my life to preach at 18 years of age, and by the grace of God I've been preaching ever since. I can tell you this: *If I had a thousand lives to live, I'd be a preacher in every one of them.* It's the greatest life imaginable. I wouldn't trade places with

anybody in the world. I love my life, and I love what God has called me to do. As I said earlier, there was a lengthy season of my life when I doubted my salvation, but I've never doubted my call to preach. If I was given the option of preaching or being the President of the United States, I'd keep preaching. I wouldn't even have to think twice. In fact, I love what I do so much that I sometimes think everybody should be a preacher! I know that's not reality, but I say that to encourage you to at least consider whether a life of full-time ministry might be God's will for you. I'm glad it was for me!

Conclusion

In the actual writing of this booklet, I noticed something I had never thought about before. As I wrote about how much Jesus cares about every aspect of our lives, a common theme continued to emerge. During those forty days that Jesus remained on earth after His resurrection and before His ascension, all of the people He helped were helped in the same way.

What was it that helped Mary through her sadness? What was it that helped the two men on the Emmaus Road rediscover their hope? What was it that helped the disciples overcome their fear? What was it that helped Thomas

overcome his doubts? What was it that helped the disciples see that Jesus cares about the smallest details of our lives? What was it that helped Peter find forgiveness, restoration, and a second chance? What was it that enabled Peter to know how his life would one day end? What was it that helped the disciples know how to spend their lives? The answer to each question is exactly the same: *It was an encounter with Jesus!*

I'll tell you something else: *Jesus was the One who initiated each encounter.* He went out of His way to go to where His followers were so He could help them overcome their struggles.

As I think about *them*, I think about *you*. Do you know what you need more than anything else in the world? *You need a fresh encounter with Jesus.* Whatever you may be struggling with, an encounter with Jesus will help you.

As we think about encounters with Jesus, the first encounter we need is “the salvation encounter.” That’s how I came to the full assurance of my salvation. I came to Jesus as a sinner; I asked Him to forgive me and save me; and I trusted Him to do it. That’s when my life was forever changed.

If you've never done that, or if you're just not sure that you have, I'm going to lead you in a prayer that you can pray to God. If you will confess your sins, turn away from your sins, ask Jesus to save you, and then trust Him to do it, you will be saved. That is God's promise to us. The Bible says, "*For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'*" (Romans 10:13). So, if you would like to ask Jesus for mercy and grace, pray this prayer now:

"Dear Jesus,

What I need most is a relationship with You. I have sinned. I have messed up. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

I believe You died on the cross to pay for my sins and that You rose from the dead three days later. I believe You are the Savior of the world.

I ask You now to come into my heart, forgive my sins, save my soul, and make me a Christian. And, as I ask You to save me, I trust You to do it.

Welcome to my heart, Jesus. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

*In Your Name I Pray,
Amen."*

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, God just answered it. Congratulations! Welcome to the family of God! Jesus has come to live in your heart, and He will never leave you.

I encourage you to share your decision with a friend, make it public in a good Bible-believing church, and then read your Bible and pray every day. That's how we get to know God better.

As life goes on, we never know what we will face, but we know this: *We will never face anything alone. Jesus is with us.* He knows what we're up against. And He cares. He really does. As we continue to encounter Him daily, we will discover that He cares more than we ever imagined. And He is more than able to see us through every challenge that comes our way.

¹ "Magdala," *Holman Bible Dictionary*, Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, 1991, p. 909-910.

² "The Anchor Holds Lyrics," Lyrics.com, Stands4 LLC, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/3054204/Ray+Boltz/The+Anchor+Holds> (accessed January 9, 2024).

³ "Hope," *Webster's 21st Century Dictionary*, 1993 Edition, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1992, p. 128.

⁴ "Franklin D. Roosevelt: First Inaugural Address (1933)" <https://rivercity.wusd.k12.ca.us/documents/Academics/Social-Science/GRADE-11-US->

HISTORY/PRIMARY-SOURCE-DOCUMENTS/
7525206563888907214.pdf (accessed January 8, 2024).

- ⁵ Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*, “Thomas the Apostle,” December 30, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle Thomas Didymus (accessed January 8, 2024).
- ⁶ This illustration is based on a picture someone once showed Jon.
- ⁷ *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014, p. 1662.
- ⁸ “How Did the Apostle Peter Die?” Got Questions Ministries, January 4, 2022, <https://www.gotquestions.org/apostle-Peter-die.html> (accessed January 9, 2024).
- ⁹ The exact wording of this quote by Dwight L. Moody is the way Jon learned it in seminary. Other sources record the wording of this quote slightly differently.
- ¹⁰ Russell McKinney, “R G Lee’s Glimpse Into Heaven,” *The Disciple’s Road*, December 9, 2020, <https://russellmckinney.com/2020/12/09/r-g-lees-glimpse-into-heaven/> (accessed January 9, 2024).
- ¹¹ Michael Foust, “In His Final Days, Adrian Rogers Told Those Gathered Around Him, ‘I Am At Perfect Peace’,” November 16, 2005, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/in-his-final-days-adrian-rogers-told-those-gathered-around-him-i-am-at-perfect-peace/> (accessed January 10, 2024).
- ¹² Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*, “Billy Graham,” December, 24, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Graham#:~:text=According%20to%20his%20website%2C%20Graham,Eisenhower%2C%20Lyndon%20B. (accessed January 10, 2024).

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- *Never Alone*
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- *How to Make Heaven Your Home (Spanish)*
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