

# The Weirdest Summer Ever?

The last three months of school took place at home/online.  
Graduations and birthday parties were celebrated with car parades.  
Millions protested around the world for equality and racial justice.

Statues were tumbled.

Summer camps and vacations were canceled.

Parents worked at home.

Some lost work.

Friends couldn't get together.

Family dinners became a tradition again.

**It's a weird summer.**

Like any weird moment, maybe there are things to be learned from this time. This devotional is meant to help you reflect on how we might grow even in the midst of this very weird summer.

One of the things this summer means for many of us is more time on our hands. Maybe that time is a gift. Maybe that time is an opportunity to connect on deeper level with ourselves and our God. Try it out and see what you think...

Some brief notes about this book. (Skip this part if you'd like.)

This is your book. You don't have to share with anyone. Not only do you not have to share your book you don't even have to share what you wrote or drew in it. It's entirely yours... kinda like a journal or diary if you're into those.

Speaking of writing and drawing, please do write and draw all over this thing. There are questions and prompts to help us all reflect together and dig a little deeper into our understanding of ourselves and God.

While days are numbered in this book don't feel like you have to do them in order. It is a weird summer after all so do them however you want. Again, this is your book. Nobody should know the difference anyway!

Some of you may want to start on day 18 so you'll feel like you've already accomplished something. That's not even weird. That's genius!

So do them forwards, backwards, in random order... do 1 a day, 5 a day, do them all at once! Do them however they benefit you!

You could even do all of them every day of the rest of summer. The three of us writers think that would be nice. 😊

Next, if you're reading this on a screen of some sort you'll find on occasion links to portions of the Bible for deeper reading. If you're reading this on paper, good for you! Grab your Bible and read along.

If you want to inspire others, we'd encourage you to post to your Stories or Feed of your work on this Weirdest Summer Ever devotional book. Someone swiping through may see you and be reminded to draw closer to God in some way shape or form. You can always tag/find us on the socials @WPCTiburon

Finally, we hope this book brings you closer to God and teaches you to love others and love yourself.

It's been a weird summer. Enjoy!



## Day 1 - **My Weird Family** (part 1)

Family time.

Who has more family time than imaginable? For some of us that's great! We love our families, even our siblings. We play together well; our homes are full of laughter and joy. For others of us... well... These people in our home we call family? Yea, we love 'em. Sure. But they might enjoy a break from me. Or I might enjoy an extended break from them.

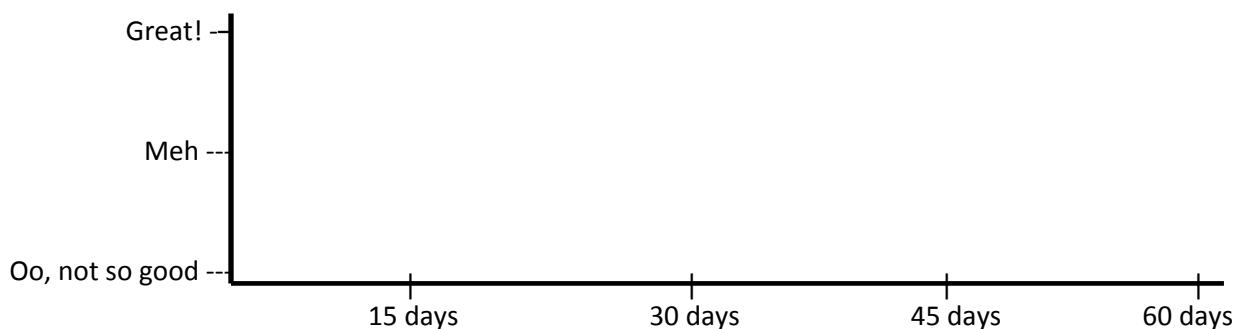
Here's the kind of picture we all have hanging in our house:



But this might the picture we'd get if popped in, unannounced, on a random afternoon:



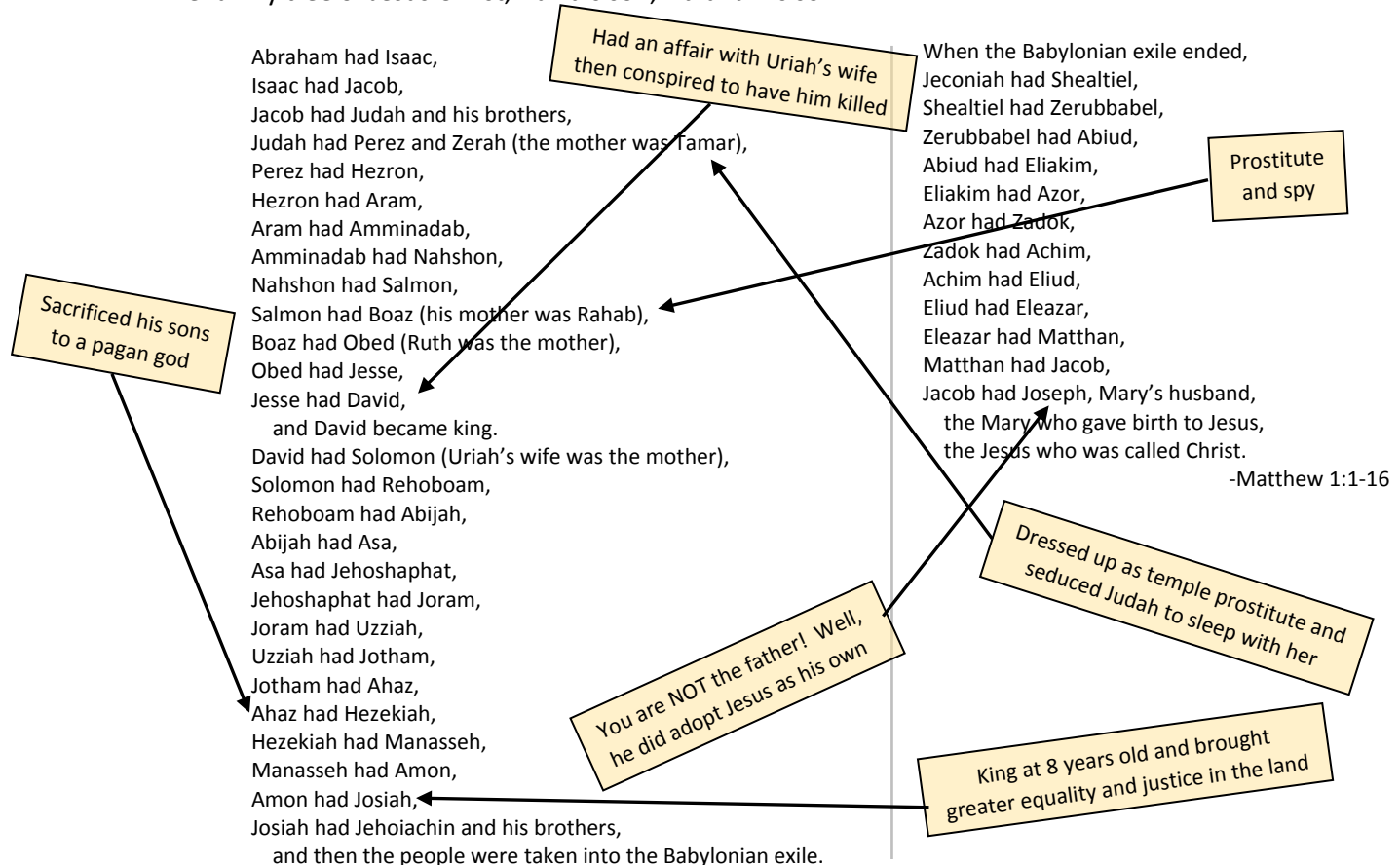
If you were to put it on a line chart how would you say your family has gotten along over these past couple months?



Families are weird. I know, you may be thinking that you have the only weird family, the only weird brother or sister, the only weird dad or mom.

Something many of us don't really consider is dysfunctional Jesus Christ's family must've looked to others. **His ancestors were truly colorful!**

The family tree of Jesus Christ, David's son, Abraham's son:



O, but that's only his ancestors you say?! Take a moment to read how Jesus' siblings reacted to their half-brother (Jesus "biological" parents would be God and Mary not Joseph and Mary) and answer the questions below.

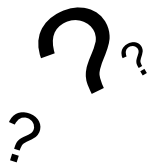
Read [John 7:1-13](#). Did Jesus and His brother's always get along? How would you describe their relationship?



It's important for us to recognize that Jesus faced many of the same issues that we do today. So did other people in the Bible, in our churches, and in our neighborhoods.

Knowing Jesus had a family that didn't always get along, what does that make you think or feel?

Jesus family had so many issues that they couldn't even get straight who his grandfather was:



... and **Jacob the father of Joseph**, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.  
-Matthew 1:16

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of **Joseph, the son of Heli...**  
-Luke 3:23



Wait a minute! Matthew says that "Jacob is the father of Joseph," but Luke says that Joseph was "the son of Heli?" Did Joseph have 2 dads? Are they the same person? How did this happen?

Unfortunately, you'll have to wait for another devotion buried in this book to find out. 😊 Just like any family, it takes some work to get to know the full story of everyone and how they're all related.

For now, though, as we play, talk, argue, and fight with our families (who we are spending way more time with) this season may we be reminded that our Savior and Lord knows what it like. Hopefully, our prayers will change when we talk to Our God knowing that what we're going through is understood and felt even in the heavens.



## Day 2 - **How are Stereotypes at Work in our Thinking?**

We've been learning a lot about the things people assume about each other. How are stereotypes at work in us?

Without judging yourself for what you write, describe what you see in the pictures below. What might people assume about the subjects? What negative things might some people say about them?





Jesus tells a parable (a story about something that didn't happen but challenges how we think) about a person helping another. It goes like this...

Luke 10:30-37 The Message (MSG)

"There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way **he was attacked by robbers**. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him, he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

<sup>33-35</sup> "A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.'

<sup>36</sup> "What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

<sup>37</sup> "The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded.

Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

It was powerful enough that one person helped another, but this parable is doubly powerful because the helper was a Samaritan.

**Samaritans were enemies of Jesus' people** (and the person who was beaten up). For the most part, Samaritans didn't like Jesus people and Jesus' people didn't like them. They avoided each other unless something made them interact. Most people couldn't imagine a Samaritan would do such a kind thing.

Why would they? There was a cultural divide between the two groups.



Part of what Jesus is trying to teach us is that it's important **not** to listen to the bad things we are taught about each other.

1. What bad things have you been taught about others?
2. Who are the "Samaritans" of your school? Of our community?
3. When have you seen people cross lines to help others in a surprising way?
4. How can we work to "unlearn" bad things we've been taught about various people?





## Day 3 - Loving Kindness

Did you know that there is a “random acts of kindness” week? It happens in February every year. It’s great that there is a week to focus on kindness, but really, our goal should be kindness all of the time. Acts of kindness can make such a difference in the lives of others.

Paul and Silas were good friends and traveling companions who **ended up in jail when they healed a slave**. (The slave’s owner did not appreciate this healing.) While in jail, something pretty amazing happened ...

Acts 16:25-29

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

Paul and Silas had a perfect chance to escape the cell in which they were jailed. They would have been home free! But, had they escaped, the jailer would have been in serious trouble. So much trouble, in fact, that he considered killing himself. So, rather than escaping, they stayed. What a moment of unexpected kindness!

**They set aside what would have been best for them in order to do what was best for someone else.**

What acts of kindness might you do for another this week?

Can you complete all the squares on this board? Or, if these squares don’t make sense for your life right now, create your own board of acts of kindness.

Be kind!			
Help someone with a job around the house without being asked.	Make a card for someone thanking them for all they do.	Give someone a hug when they really need it.	Write a letter to the Josh Stevens Foundation listing 5 kind things you've done.
Organize an afternoon of games for your friends or family.	Do a good deed for a neighbor.	Write a letter to your teacher.	Read a book to a younger child.
Make a thank you card for a community helper.	Hold the door open for people entering or exiting a shop or restaurant.	Go somewhere with your family and smile at everyone you see.	Clean out your bedroom and donate toys and clothes to a charity.
Make "Be Happy" notes and pass them out.	Let someone go ahead of you in line.	Make a bookmark for a friend.	Learn a joke and tell it to a clerk at a store or a server at a restaurant.

Challenge: This week let's see how many squares you can complete.

eCynDle Dunn

For more kindness ideas, see [www.randomactsofkindness.org](http://www.randomactsofkindness.org)



## Day 4 - **Walking with God**

The story continues following Paul and Silas' act of kindness, as they continue to interact with the jailer.

Acts 16:30-34

Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Paul and Silas' moment of kindness gave them the opportunity to teach about Jesus to the jailer. **In their kindness, he recognized something extraordinarily special, and he wanted to know more about it.** There are so many ways to share about God's love, through both our words and our deeds. Who knows when an act of kindness can help someone else to recognize God's unconditional love?

Have you ever been surprised by God's unconditional love? Maybe it was something **spiritual**. Maybe you felt like God was speaking to you. Maybe you felt something in the air or inside your heart. Write about it (or draw a picture) below...

Think about a time when **someone** shared God's love with you. Was it something they said? Something they did? What about that moment showed you that person was walking humbly with God? Write about it (or draw a picture) below...



Take a moment to write down in the first footprint the important moments and learnings from that memory. In the second footprint, write down how you might “walk the walk” to share God’s love with another.



## Day 5 - **What are the three most important things God wants?**

There was a great prophet named Micah. In the Bible, a prophet wasn't someone who told the future. A prophet was someone who told the truth even when it was unpopular because it would mean people had to change.

Here's what Micah said about what God wants people to do:

Micah 6:8

"It's quite simple...do justice...love kindness and...walk humbly with your God."

Those words get used a lot, especially justice, but do we really understand what we're talking about?

**Doing justice = helping things to be fair**

What are some examples of doing justice that you see?

**Loving kindness = enjoying doing and being good**

Who do you know that seems to really love kindness? What do they do to show it?

**Walking humbly with God = not bragging, practicing faith regularly, putting God first**

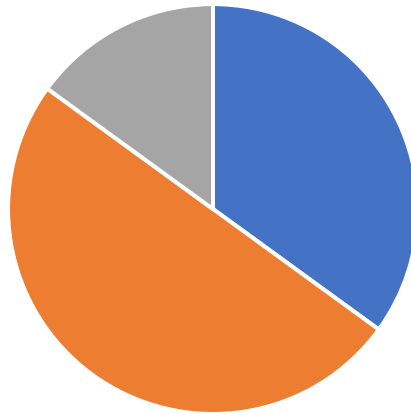
What does this look like?

Some of these three things are easier for us, some are harder. For example, maybe you're good at being kind, but you find it hard to stick up for those who aren't being treated fairly. Or, you're really good at standing up for others, but sometimes the way you go about it is mean. Or, you are kind, but you don't really practice your faith.

How much more of one do you do than the other? On the next page is an example... In it, you can see being kind is the thing easiest for the person, followed by doing justice, with walking humbly last.

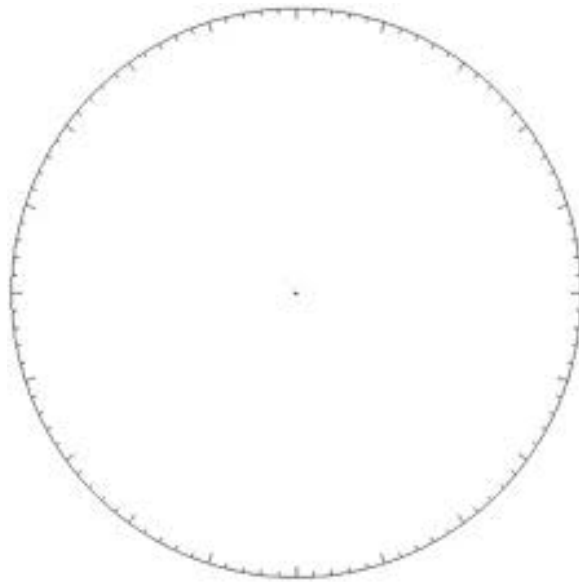


### What's easiest for me? Sample Profile



■ doing justice ■ loving kindness ■ walking humbly with God ■

Draw what *your* profile would look like? What's easiest for you? Harder?



What are some ways you can take advantage of your strengths?

What are some ways you can work on the things that are harder for you?



## Day 6 - **Getting Drunk on Communion? What?**

If it's the weirdest summer ever then how about one of the weird moments in the Bible?

Have you been a part of one of those virtual Communion yet? Maybe you have. We are all invited to bring our own "elements" to the screen in order to take Communion together. The first time we did it my family used goldfish (thinking Jesus would approve of the fish reference) and apple juice.

Communion has always caused mixed emotions in me. Maybe it's because I didn't grow up doing it. There's something special about doing the same thing that literally millions of people are doing, for the same reasons, all around the world. Literally billions of people have done this!

The references to Jesus' blood in the cup and broken body in the bread make me think about the sacrifice and suffering Jesus went through. It makes me think about my sacrifices and sufferings.

But then again, I've taken Communion so many times now, even led and served others who are taking Communion so many times now that it doesn't always make me feel anything. Sometimes I feel just as much excitement waiting for the bread and cup as I do waiting for a burrito coming out of the microwave.

What do you think about when you partake of the Lord's Supper?

Some people have been hesitant to allow others to eat and drink whatever they want for one of these "virtual Communion." You know officially, our denomination had stated that it can **only be bread and either grape juice or wine** served only by people authorized by the church.

What do you think about that?

If you could plan Communion what would you have everyone eat and drink? Circle the items below or draw in your own.



Who would you have serve it?



Did you know that Communion wasn't always *just* bread and wine? That's right. In the beginning it was a full-blown feast!

That may sound like fun but, it wasn't fun at all for some people:

And then I find that you bring your divisions to worship—you come together, and instead of eating the Lord's Supper, you bring in a lot of food from the outside and make **pigs of yourselves**. Some are left out and go home hungry. Others have to be carried out, **too drunk to walk**. I can't believe it! Don't you have your own homes to eat and drink in? Why would you stoop to desecrating God's church? Why would you actually shame God's poor? I never would have believed you would stoop to this. And I'm not going to stand by and say nothing.

-1 Corinthians 11:20-22

You read that correctly. In the earliest days of Christianity, at least some in the city of Corinth would "pig out" on food and drink at church while their fellow Christians went hungry. And the worst part is it was all done as a holy act. They believed they were honoring God by doing so!

What would you say if you saw inequality in our church like that?

There is something very simple about Communion. It's a piece of bread (or cracker) and a sip of grape. That's it. Nothing too fancy.

What we're eating and drinking is but one part of a wider meal that Jesus and His friends would have had together on that fateful night. It's the parts that He brought attention to because of the metaphor they would play in His sacrifice on the cross.

And I know what you're thinking, "I would never do something like that!" But how often do we show off how much more we have based on the:

- Clothing we wear
- Cars we ride around in
- Types of iPhones we use

Anything else?  
Write them all here.

God, forgive me when I show off what I have that others could never attain. Forgive me if it brings feelings of insufficiency to others.

Help me empathize with those who have less than I do. Help me to share generously the blessings You have given me. Help me exemplify the kind of equality that exists in Your Communion.

Amen.



## Day 7 - Listening, Part 1

What does it mean to listen for God's voice in the stillness?

### **Sometimes, God makes Godself known in big and bold ways!**

*Other times, it is in the quiet that we hear God's voice.*

In Biblical times, prophets sometimes brought good and hopeful messages from God to the people. Other times, they had to do difficult and challenging things. One thing God asked the prophet Elijah to do was help convince the people that God was the only God. For people who had been worshipping other gods, this was a difficult message to hear. At one point, the people got so mad, that **Elijah had to flee for his life!** When he was on the run, Elijah probably expected God to make God's presence known in a big way.

However, it ended up happening a little differently.

1 Kings 19:11-13

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire *a sound of sheer silence*. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

What voices are the loudest in your life?

Parents

Coaches

Advertisements Counselors

Peers

Teachers

Music

Your "gut"

Your mind

Your heart

Others \_\_\_\_\_

The voice of God can be heard through any and all of these things. And sometimes in other ways. (In the quiet, outside in creation, etc.)





**The important thing is to recognize that these voices can also lead you away from God.**

**Discerning what is of God...**

**and what is not...**

**is a practice...**

**that will continue our whole lives!**

Often, our “gut”/our intuition/our soul can let us know what God is saying to us.

Try this practice of listening for God in the silence through your intuition. (This is from Elizabeth Liebert’s book, “The Way of Discernment.”)

Accessing your intuition can be as simple as being quiet, patient, and welcoming. Your intuition may present hints through

images, sounds, colors,

or other sensations registered in your body; in order to see the big picture, these clues need to be considered alongside those you receive from other entry points.

---Welcome whatever comes---

- 1) Remind yourself that God can speak through your intuition. Offer to God this time of paying attention to the voice of your intuition. Ask specifically for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Become quiet, inside, and outside. Deep breaths may assist you in stilling yourself. Take as much time as you need.
- 3) Wait in openness. Does some sensibility, or sensation arrive, delivered to you as if from another? Permit images/sensations/ideas to float freely, returning to the silence after each one.
- 4) Does one sensibility or gut feeling or image seem to have a rightness? A freshness? An energy?
- 5) Take some notes below about what this sensibility or gut feeling might suggest to you.



- 6) Return to your desire to listen for God. Speak with God, in whatever way is comfortable for you, about what emerges from this process.



## Day 8 - Listening, Part 2

Jeremiah was a young boy when God called him to be a prophet. Note that his first reaction was **NO WAY!** He did not think he was qualified at all to do what God was calling him to do.

**Jeremiah thought he was too young and inexperienced.**

However, God uses us all. And God equips us with what we need.

Jeremiah 1:4-8

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy;' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."

There is another story in the Bible about a young boy, Samuel, who was also confused when he heard God's call. He needed the help of his mentor, Eli, to understand and prepare himself for God's call.

We may not always feel ready or prepared for what God asks us to do. However, it is important that we listen to God with an open and willing heart. Yesterday, we sat in quiet paying attention to our intuition. Today, we will sit in quiet again.

I know. I know.

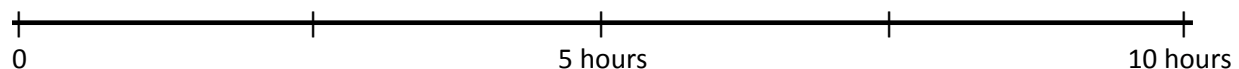
Sit?

In quiet?

Again?

Yes. Much like sports, school, or anything else for that matter, important things take practice. Helpful things take practice.

Do you play sports? Do you play an instrument? How many hours a week do you spend practicing?



What does it mean to open our heart to God? When Samuel finally prepared himself to listen to God, he said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

How about we each say, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Use the graphic on the next page for meditation practice.



- 1) Become quiet, inside, and outside. Deep breaths may assist you in stilling yourself. Take as much time as you need.
- 2) With your finger, trace the words on the graphic.
- 3) As you trace the words, consider the following questions –
  - a. What does it mean for you to serve God?
  - b. What does listening to God look like for you?
- 4) Trace the words several times.
- 5) Take some notes below about what comes to your heart/mind/gut.
- 6) Return to your desire to listen for God. Speak with God, in whatever way is comfortable for you, about what emerges from this process.



Day 9 - **Wait, are you saying it's *good* sometimes to change your mind?**

Here's a strange story about Jesus:

Mark 7:24-30

From there Jesus set out for the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house there where he didn't think he would be found, but he couldn't escape notice. He was barely inside when a woman who had a disturbed daughter heard where he was. She came and knelt at his feet, begging for help. The woman was Greek, Syro-Phoenician by birth. She asked him to cure her daughter.

He said, "Stand in line and take your turn. The children get fed first. **If there's any left over, the dogs get it.**"

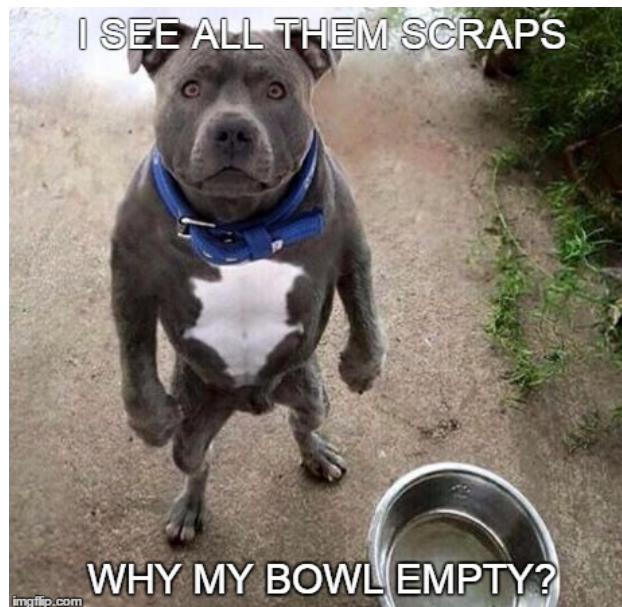
She said, "Of course, Master. But don't dogs under the table get scraps dropped by the children?"

Jesus was impressed. "You're right! On your way! Your daughter is no longer disturbed. The demonic affliction is gone." She went home and found her daughter relaxed on the bed; the torment gone for good.

It's strange not just because of the unpronounceable words and the demons (that's for another lesson!), but because **Jesus seems, well...mean.**

What is your initial reaction to what Jesus said?

A woman asks Him for help and He basically says her people are like dogs! Woa!!



Then something amazing happens. The woman challenges Jesus to open his mind. She challenges him to be better. Then something else amazing happens. He does!

**Even the Son of God can have an open mind.**

We've been taught that changing your mind is weak. In fact, changing our minds is part of learning, growing up, and gaining wisdom.

Think of the things (some) people used to think:

- The sun revolves around the earth
- It was okay to own slaves
- Women couldn't be runners because their uterus would fall out
- You couldn't travel faster than the speed of sound
- Tiny demons live in Brussel sprouts (okay, I'm still open on this one)
- Children weren't fully human until they grew up

What are some things people believe today that you think we should change our minds about?

Below, list the kinds of traits you'd like to have as a person and people in your life you admire:

Character Traits You Want

People You Admire

Now, draw a line between the traits you want and the people you admire who might help you gain that trait. Add more people or traits if they come to you...



## Day 10 - **Weird People**

This is Shane Claiborne



Shane is a strange guy if you ask me. He is from rural Tennessee and has a thick Southern accent. However, he's been living in a rough part of Philadelphia for nearly 20 years. He's a college graduate, international speaker, and best-selling author. However, he lived in an "intentional community" (basically a bunch of people sharing a house) for years until their home burned down in a neighborhood fire.

---CAN YOU IMAGINE?---

"Tell me about your roommates?"

"Well, one of them travels the world speaking to crowds and writes bestselling books. He's in Iraq right now worshipping with people who've been affected by terrorism."

"O wow, what about your other roommates?"

"They work at the grocery store or are in school."



The guy even makes his own clothing to ensure that none of his money goes to sweatshops around the world. Not that you could tell that he makes his own clothes though...

---

Who do you know that is different? Write their names below and describe what makes them so unique. Is it their clothing? Their accent? Their friends? Their way of life?

Of course, you know there's a reason Shane has chosen to live this way. He learned it mostly from working with Mother Teresa in India for several weeks but there's a long history in our Christian tradition of radicals who are... shall we say... weird?



While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called “the Baptizer,” was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”

John dressed in a camelhair tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey.

Matthew 3:1-2, 4

Wait, what?

**Camelhair?**

**Locusts?**

What’s not mentioned here is that we don’t think **he ever cut his hair or trimmed his beard.**

What is this guy’s deal?

Well, many believe John the Baptist had taken a vow long before this. It was called the Nazarite vow and is found in the book of Numbers, the 4<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible.

How long could you see yourself living like that? Wearing camelhair, eating locusts, not shaving (Okay, for many of you that’s not a problem yet.)

Circle the strangest thing you’ve eaten below. Draw a box around the ones you would try.

Deer	Goat	Cat	Dog	Cow Tongue
Brain	Raw Oyster	Guinea Pig	Grass	Tripe (stomach)
Play-Doh	Bugs	Dog treats	McDonald’s	Other _____

## **But why?**

Sometimes we try so hard to fit in. We want to belong to a certain group. If there’s one thing to know about Shane Claiborne and John the Baptist it’s that they are not concerned with fitting in.

Their faith is authentic. It may look strange. But you cannot argue that they aren’t sincere and that they genuinely believe what they say.

Maybe when we see people as weird, strange, or different we can recognize their uniqueness. We can applaud their independence... even if they eat something strange.

And maybe next time you feel like **God is calling you** to do something strange, you’ll recognize that it’s **more important to be faithful than it is to simply fit in.**





## Day 11 - **Are you telling me God made me this way on purpose?**

Yep. We need all kinds of people with all kinds of abilities and all kinds of interests. We spend a lot of time working on our weaknesses, but maybe not as much time leaning into our strengths.

The Apostle Paul said it simply: **“We have gifts that differ...”** (Romans 12:6)

Elsewhere he says, “there are a variety of gifts, **but the same Spirit**” (1 Corinthians 12:4).

He compares different people to different members of a body:

(1 Corinthians 12:14-21)

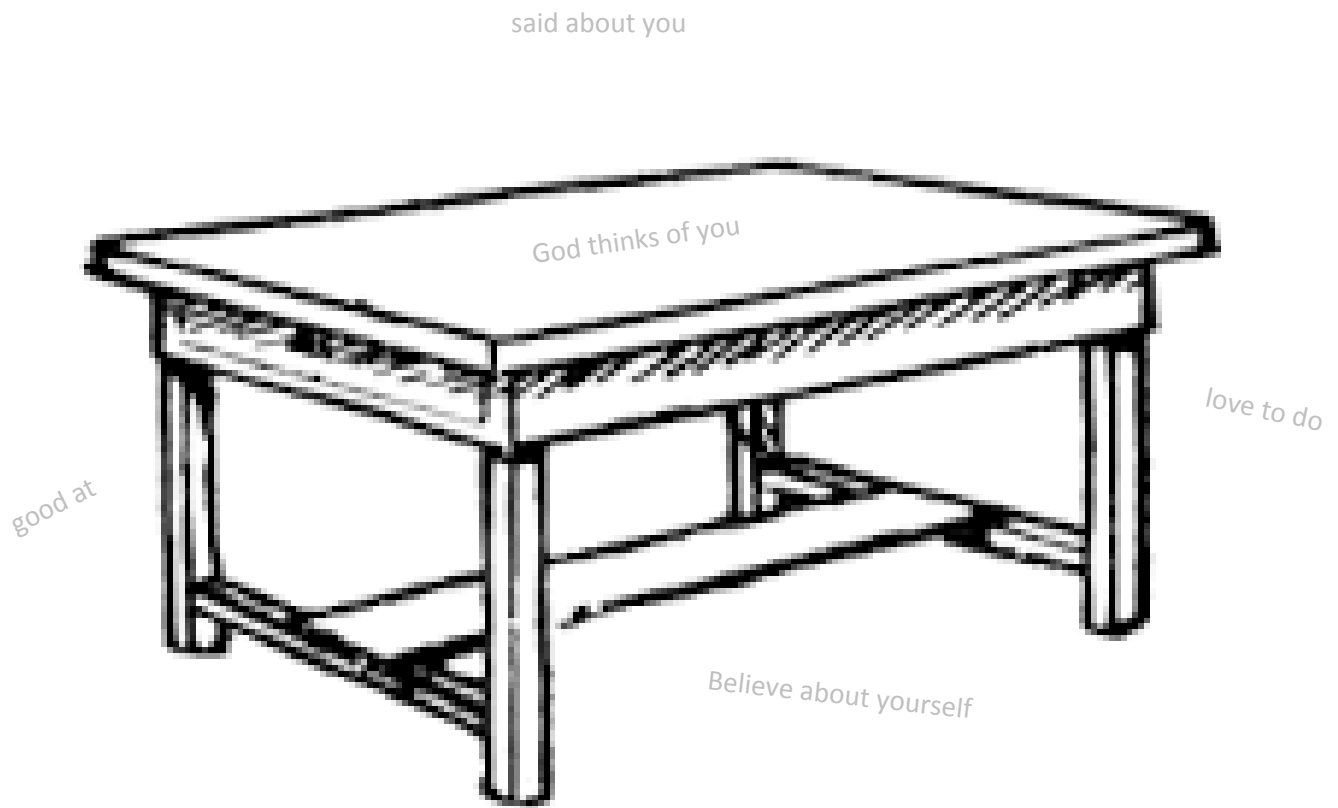
“Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

### **You bring something to the table.**

On the next page is a drawing of a table. Fill it out with the following instructions:

- Above the table write kind things people have said about you. What positive things have other people (friends, family members, coaches, teachers etc.) said about you?
- Below the table, write the good things you believe about yourself. (You’re not bragging—this is an assignment! 😊)
- To one side of the table, write things you’re really good at. No thing is too small or silly.
- On the other side, list things you love to do.
- On the center of the table write what you think God thinks of you.





How do you think these things can contribute to good and happiness in the world?

**You bring a lot to the table.**

Hopefully, you can see now how blessed you are and how blessed we are to know you.



## Day 12 - Prayer for Peace

As we mentioned yesterday, it is hard to “not worry about anything.” However, it is so good to know that God is with us in and through our worry. Through our prayers, you can find that peace of God that people say, “surpasses all understanding.”

**It’s the kind of peace that makes no sense.** You should be stressed and worried but for some reason you’re in control... you’re at peace with it all.

Another writing from Paul. This time, a letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near. **Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and**

**supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to**

**God.** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It is important to pray for peace for our communities, our nation, and the world.

And it is also important to pray for peace for ourselves.

We can better bring peace to others when we are at peace.

St. Francis of Assisi is a famous religious scholar and philosopher, born in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. He was known for many things, but one of my favorite things about him was his special relationship with animals and creation. It is said that he loved to preach to the birds and is often depicted holding a bird. He was a man of great internal peace, who worked for peace in the environment around him.

St. Francis wrote a well-known prayer for peace. One of my favorite versions of it is below, meant for young children. But I appreciate how each square encourages me to stop and consider how I am doing at “being” each part of the prayer. As you read the prayer, pause at each square, and think about how God might help you bring more love, hope, light, etc. both to your own life and to the world.



## Day 13 - Social Distancing circa 30AD

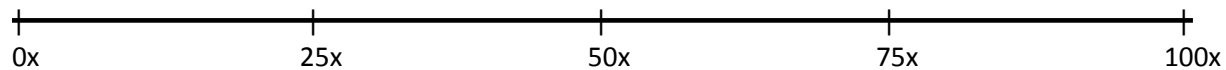
Did you know that the world Jesus lived in also had social distancing rules?

It happened that as He made His way toward Jerusalem, He crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met Him. **They kept their distance** but raised their voices, calling out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

-Luke 17:11-13

But why were they keeping their distance? We'll get to that in a moment...

Since orders to stay socially distance started how often have you been told, reminded, encouraged, shamed, etc to keep plenty of space between you and others? Mark it on the line below.



Feelings of loneliness can cause any number of health problems. Sheltering-in-place can even have consequences for our physical health as those who don't enjoy hiking are stuck even more lying around the couch. Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a Brigham Young University psychologist and author did some research on this and said that, "Loneliness can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

15 cigarettes a day?! That seems like a lot!

So why all the fuss about being socially distant?

Let's start at 30AD...

The people calling out to Jesus all had **leprosy**. Leprosy is a bacterial infection of the nerves and skin. It causes the body to become deformed and secondary infections to occur, which untreated may cause the infected person to stink of decaying flesh. In many cases there is loss of the soft tissue of the nose and ears.

When Jesus walked the earth, leprosy was a dreaded disease. **There was no cure.**

Look up [Leviticus 13:45-46](#) and list the requirements there were for people with leprosy:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 



The people living with leprosy weren't just living with an incurable disease, they were also lonely and forced to live in terrible conditions. Can you hear the desperation in their voices when they cry out to this prophet (Jesus) with a reputation for healing people?

## **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”**

Maybe, just maybe, this servant of God could do something to ease the suffering.

Who are the people in your school or neighborhood, etc. that people have decided are untouchable? Maybe it's the mentally ill who live on our streets. Maybe it's the kids who everyone either makes fun of or ignores at school. Maybe it's someone who got caught up on the wrong side of gossip and drama. Could be anyone!

Take a moment to draw the person or people your thinking about....

Drawing that person or those people is an uncomfortable act. It's not just uncomfortable because you're not an artist (Excuse me if you are!). It's an uncomfortable thing to draw them because you are forced to confront the injustice that you may have participated in.

The kid who gets ignored by everybody... **It's hard to think about that kid without recognizing the pain they feel sometimes.** Maybe you're even starting to empathize with it.

The dirty looking beggar on the streets... **It's hard to think about him or her without recognizing the desperation and feelings of defeat they may carry.** Maybe you're even starting to empathize with it.

How does it feel to consider those feelings?

Whatever happened to those 10 lepers that Jesus met on that infamous day 2000 years ago? They were all healed.

As of late June, this year 5,250,087 people have recovered from the Coronavirus. You might say they've been healed.

All those people who are still feeling isolated though? They're still waiting on us to provide a cure. "But I'm not a doctor," you say? No problem because **the cure is called INCLUSION.**



## Day 14 - Transformation

The apostle Paul traveled around to many different communities teaching the people about Jesus. Once he left a community, he would write letters to them to continue to instruct and encourage them. This is a part of his letter to the Romans.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

One definition of transformation is “a thorough or dramatic change.” **These last few months have certainly been transformative for us all.** How could we *not* be changed by what has happened in our communities, our nation, and our world?

Could this time of transformation also be a time when we focus on what is good and acceptable and perfect to God? How could this weird summer bring us all closer to God?

None of this means we have to be perfect. It simply means that we strive each day to follow God ... to **not conform to the world** but to allow ourselves to **be the best disciples of Jesus that we can be.**

Work your way through the maze on the next page. At the start, think about who you were and what was important to you prior to this shelter in place time. As you move through the maze, consider how you have been transformed during this time.

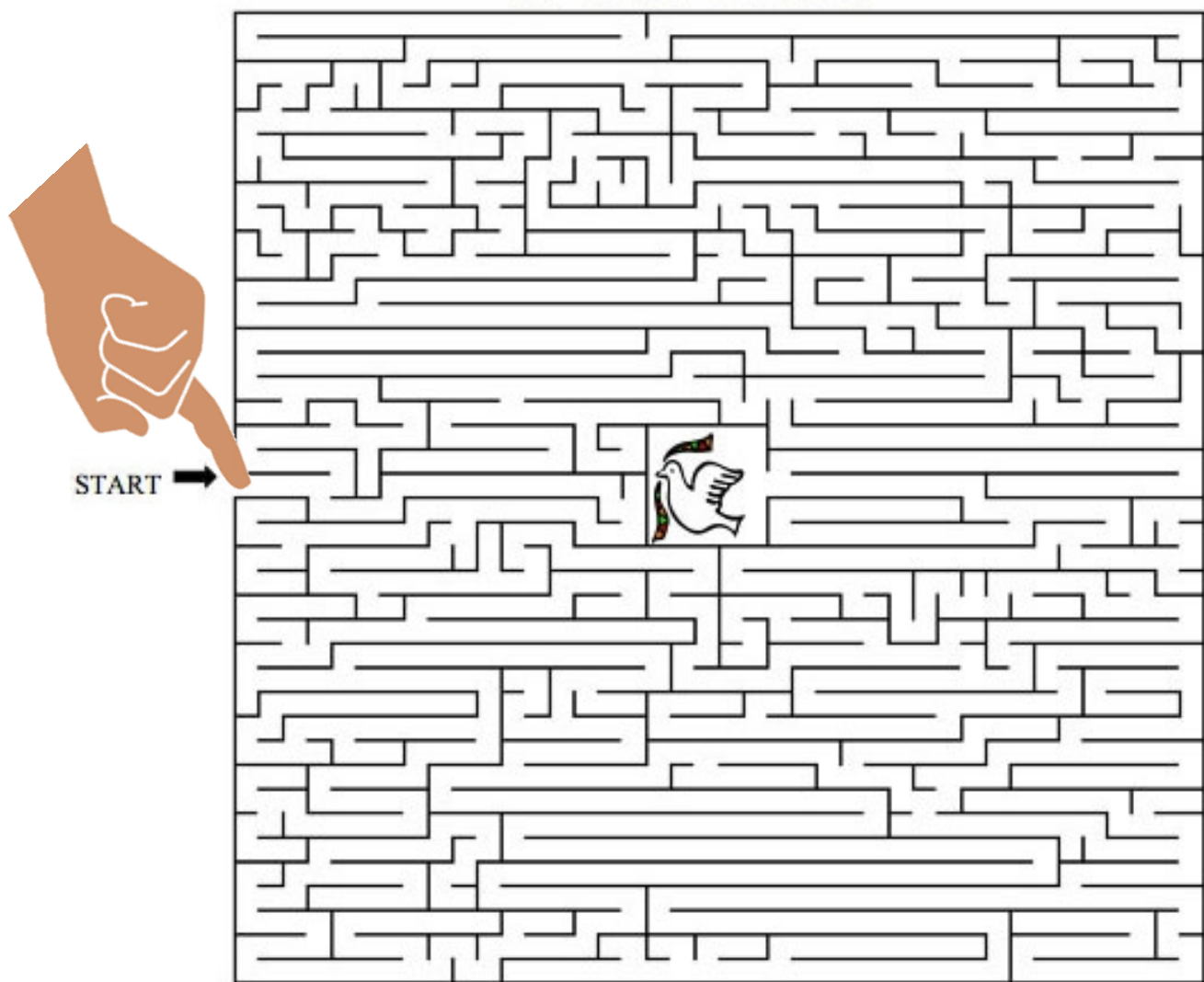
How have your relationships changed?

How have the ways you have spent your time changed?

How has your relationship with God changed?

When you reach the dove at the center, think about who you are now. Do you still have more transforming to do to become the follower of Jesus that you want to be? Hint ... the transformation process never ends! We are always learning and growing.





Are you as forgetful as I am?

Return to the questions on the previous page for the full effect!

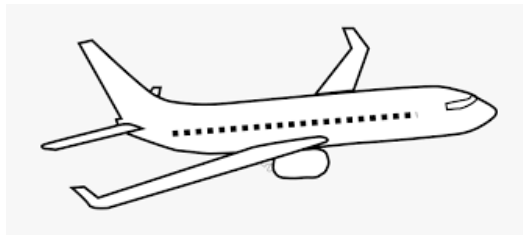


## Day 15 - **How much longer do I have to wait for things to go back to normal?**

Whether it's not being able to go out and see friends  
and do favorite things because of the coronavirus  
or hearing about so much unrest on the news  
or from parents,

when will things go back to normal??

Which pictures symbolize the things you're missing the most? Rank them from 1-7.



What other picture(s) might represent what you're missing?

In the book of Psalms (which just means "songs") in the Bible, it says,





Psalms 27:13-14

I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness

in the exuberant earth.

Stay with God!

Take heart. Don't quit.

I'll say it again:

Stay with God.

The person who wrote it had a lot of faith that it would be okay. They *trusted* they would see "God's goodness." God would show up, somehow. **It doesn't say, things will go back to the way they were.** Things change, and sometimes those changes become a new normal, a new

"way it is."

What pictures illustrate what you *need* from God and others in order to do well waiting, enduring, hanging in there? Circle the ones that help. Cross out the ones that do not.



Try praying about these things...

Will things go back to normal God? What will normal even look like in the future? I know that You will be present with me no matter what tomorrow looks like. I want to see Your goodness for all of Your children, for all the earth!

As we wait... as we endure this season of life, fill my soul with what it needs to be a humble servant of Yours.

Amen.



## Day 16 - **My Weird Family** (part 2)

Hmm, did you skip around to get here? You read that part about Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph, having 2 different dads and said, "Wait, I gotta figure this out." So, what if you did?! It's summer!

These were the texts in question:

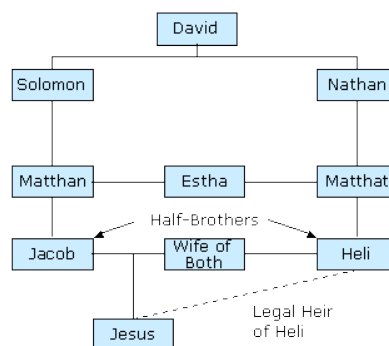
... and **Jacob the father of Joseph**, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.  
-Matthew 1:16

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of **Joseph, the son of Heli...**  
-Luke 3:23

There are a few different opinions people have about it:

1. Matthew was trying to show Jesus royal line and Luke was trying to show His ancestral or blood line
2. Matthew followed Joseph's family tree while Luke followed Mary's family tree. Since women weren't highly regarded then, Joseph would have taken ownership of Mary's family line.
3. Jacob and Heli were actually brothers! Jacob dies before he can father a child. Then Heli takes Jacob's widowed bride as his wife and they give birth to Joseph. This is all done in accordance to Jewish law ([Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#) – includes a reference to spitting in the face!).
4. Who cares?! Jesus is still awesome no matter who the grandfather is!

Do you get the sense that Jesus' family wasn't as well put together as you might think? If you're keeping score at home the family tree might have looked something like this:



It's complicated. It's messy. You know what else it is?

It's real.



Take a moment to draw out your family tree below:

As you write out the names what sorts of things go through your mind? You might even write those words describing the people listed above. How would you describe your parents? Grandparents? Aunts? Uncles? Sisters? Brothers? Great grandparents? And so on.

Do you know their full stories?

Sometimes people say, "You're a lot like your \_\_\_\_\_." Who *are* you a lot like? In what ways are your family's stories influencing yours?

Here is Jesus' family line from Luke 3:23-38

When Jesus entered public life he was about thirty years old, the son (in public perception) of Joseph, who was—

son of Heli,  
son of Matthat,  
son of Levi,  
son of Melki,  
son of Jannai,  
son of Joseph,  
son of Mattathias,  
son of Amos,  
son of Nahum,  
son of Esli,  
son of Naggai,  
son of Maath,  
son of Mattathias,  
son of Semein,  
son of Josech,  
son of Joda,  
son of Joanan,  
son of Rhesa,  
son of Zerubbabel,

son of Shealtiel,  
son of Neri,  
son of Melchi,  
son of Addi,  
son of Cosam,  
son of Elmadam,  
son of Er,  
son of Joshua,  
son of Eliezer,  
son of Jorim,  
son of Matthat,  
son of Levi,  
son of Simeon,  
son of Judah,  
son of Joseph,  
son of Jonam,  
son of Eliakim,  
son of Melea,  
son of Menna,

son of Mattatha,  
son of Nathan,  
son of David,  
son of Jesse,  
son of Obed,  
son of Boaz,  
son of Salmon,  
son of Nahshon,  
son of Amminadab,  
son of Admin,  
son of Arni,  
son of Hezron,  
son of Perez,  
son of Judah,  
son of Jacob,  
son of Isaac,  
son of Abraham,  
son of Terah,  
son of Nahor,

son of Serug,  
son of Reu,  
son of Peleg,  
son of Eber,  
son of Shelah,  
son of Kenan,  
son of Arphaxad,  
son of Shem,  
son of Noah,  
son of Lamech,  
son of Methuselah,  
son of Enoch,  
son of Jared,  
son of Mahalaleel,  
son of Kenan,  
son of Enos,  
son of Seth,  
son of Adam,  
son of God.

Rebuilt the Temple  
and brought people  
back to God

Tricked his brother  
and father into  
giving him a special  
blessing

Thought to be the only good  
person on earth pre-flood

Slept with his  
widowed daughter-  
n-law because he  
thought she was a  
prostitute



How well have you gotten to know your family with all this extra time together? Not just simple things like hanging out together but how well have you gotten to know your parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents' backstories? What they've been through in life? What they believe about certain things?

Take some time in the coming days to reach out and ask. You'll probably find they are more than happy to share.

In the meantime, let's pray for our families:

God, I recognize that Your very own Son has more in common with us than we might have thought. Help me find new inspiration in the teachings and life of Jesus Christ knowing He understands, as do You, much of what I have to go through.

Bless my family. Bless my parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and the rest. Help me to treat them better.

Help me to be a presence of Jesus Christ in their life.

Thank you that you understand weird families like mine.

Amen.



## Day 17 - **Surprise!**

Some surprises are awful. Some are great. What they have in common is we don't see them coming (That's why they're called surprises!). 🤪

What are some not good surprises you've had?

In each case, did you give up,



get frustrated,



take it in stride?



What made the difference? What helps you adjust to a bad surprise?

The people who followed Jesus had an awful surprise when he was arrested and killed. **They must have felt totally defeated.** They had been walking with Him and learning from Him for 3 straight years! They'd left practically everything they had to be with Jesus.

Then, something unbelievable happened...

Luke 24:1-8

At the crack of dawn on Sunday, the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus.

They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then, **out of nowhere** it seemed, two men, light cascading over them, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship. The men said, "Why are you looking for the Living One in a cemetery? He is not here but raised up!"

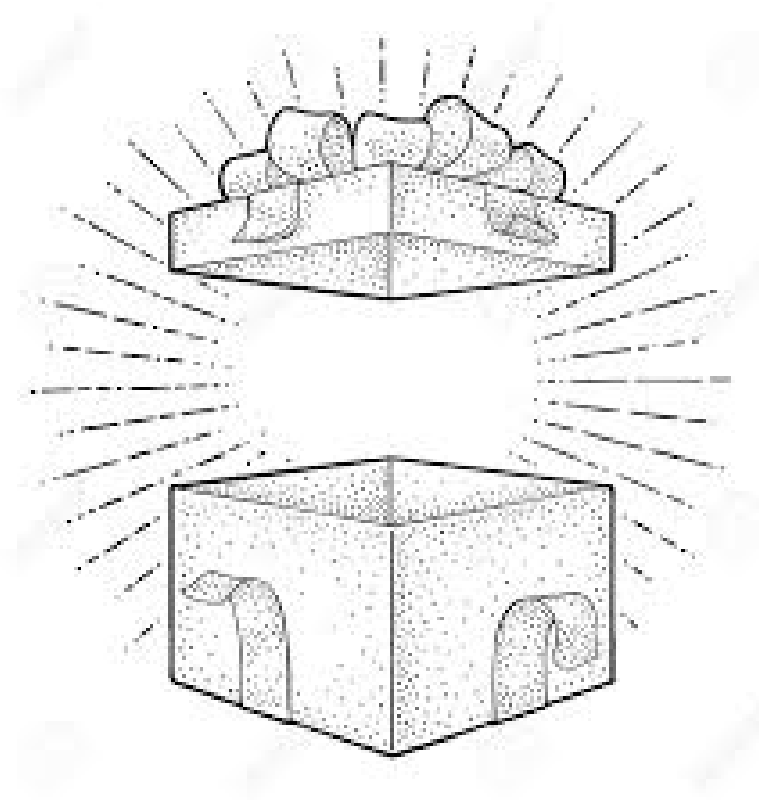
Jesus being raised must have felt like the most amazing surprise imaginable!



Sometimes just when we think we've had enough, life surprises us. God surprises us.

Can you think of times when it seemed there was no way forward and then a good surprise happened, and a way appeared?

Below, write or illustrate what impossibly good surprise would give you hope right now...



## Day 18 - Other Friend Groups

Which one is you?



We're mid-way through the weirdest summer ever and one thing almost all of us are missing is summer camp. Let's take a moment to think about what you'd be doing right now if this summer

**were actually normal!**

Let's enter the world of make believe for a moment. Where would you be right now? What camps were you most looking forward to? Who would you be hanging out with? What kinds of things would you be doing?

One of the things I miss about camp is meeting new people from other parts of the country. For the most part people are cool and nice. It kind of makes you wonder:

Why isn't it that easy to make new friends at school?

We've all seen some level of drama in the hallways in our school. This person liked that person but not anymore. That person is hoping this person will ask them to go to Homecoming. They used to be



friends but now they don't talk as much anymore. Hopefully, you don't have to experience much of this but if you have, know that you are definitely not alone. Unfortunately, it happens to adults to. I certainly understand why we're not always excited to have a friendship forced onto us.

All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest and got arrest warrants to take to the meeting places in Damascus so that if he found anyone there belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.



Acts 9:1-2

Saul does not sound like the kind of guy I would want to be around. Maybe that's why a guy named Ananias might have sounded a little shy when God said to go and make friends with Saul.

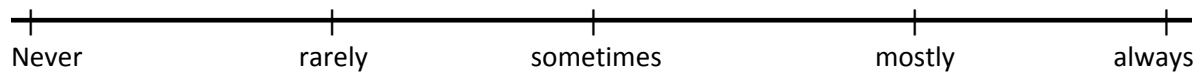
Ananias protested, “Master, you can’t be serious. Everybody’s talking about this man and the terrible things he’s been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he’s shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us.”

Acts 9:13-14

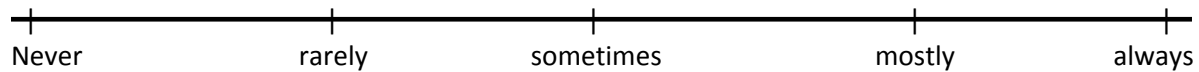
And you thought you had it bad when your parents invited that new family over to dinner and told you to be friends with them. At least those kids didn't have a reputation for "reigns of terror!"

Take a look at the list below and place a  on the line where you think you are now and then place a  where you'd like to be.

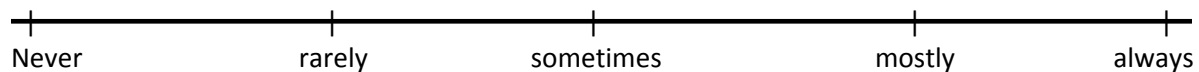
How open-minded are you?



How accepting are you?



How friendly are you?





Maybe you're looking at those lines and thinking, "Gosh, I could do a lot better." Well, we all can do better. While we cannot control what other people think about us, we can control our own actions.

And btw, you know what happened to Saul after Ananias gave in and let him stay at his house?

Saul spent a few days getting acquainted with the Damascus disciples, but then went right to work, wasting no time, preaching in the meeting places that this Jesus was the Son of God.

Acts 9:19

That's right! The very Saul that we've read about today would actually go on to become Paul. And that Paul was the very person who would go on to start countless churches around Asia Minor in the first century and write nearly half of the books of the New Testament!

What might Saul have been thinking when he showed up at Ananias' house?

Here's a prayer to close...

Lord help us to see things like You do. Your Word says we are all one  
in Christ Jesus. I pray that You speak to my heart so that I can  
remember that no one is better than another because of appearance  
or any other earthly attribute. I pray that I respect the diversity of  
humanity and embrace that we are all one,  
Amen.



## Day 19 - **Worry**

A teaching from Jesus ...

Matthew 6:34

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Anyone been **stressed** or **worried** during this shelter in place time? I sure have.

This verse is a great reminder to not become overwhelmed by our worries. However, sometimes even today’s trouble is overwhelming. “One day at a time” can be a helpful mantra, but I find that at times, “one hour at a time” is even more helpful.

The good news is that we do not face our troubles alone. Time after time in the Scriptures, Jesus reminds us of the many ways that God cares for us.

Have you ever made a worry jar? (circle one)    Yes    |    No    |    What is a worry jar?

There just a few things you’ll need to do:

1. Simply find an empty container around the house
2. Whenever you have a worry, write it down on a slip of paper
3. Put that paper into the worry jar

The worry does not go away simply because you have put it in a jar, but the jar can be a reminder that **God holds our worries** for and with us. Putting our worry in the jar can symbolize offering our worry to God ... allowing God to carry the worry for us.

What would be something good to write on a label to remind you of that?

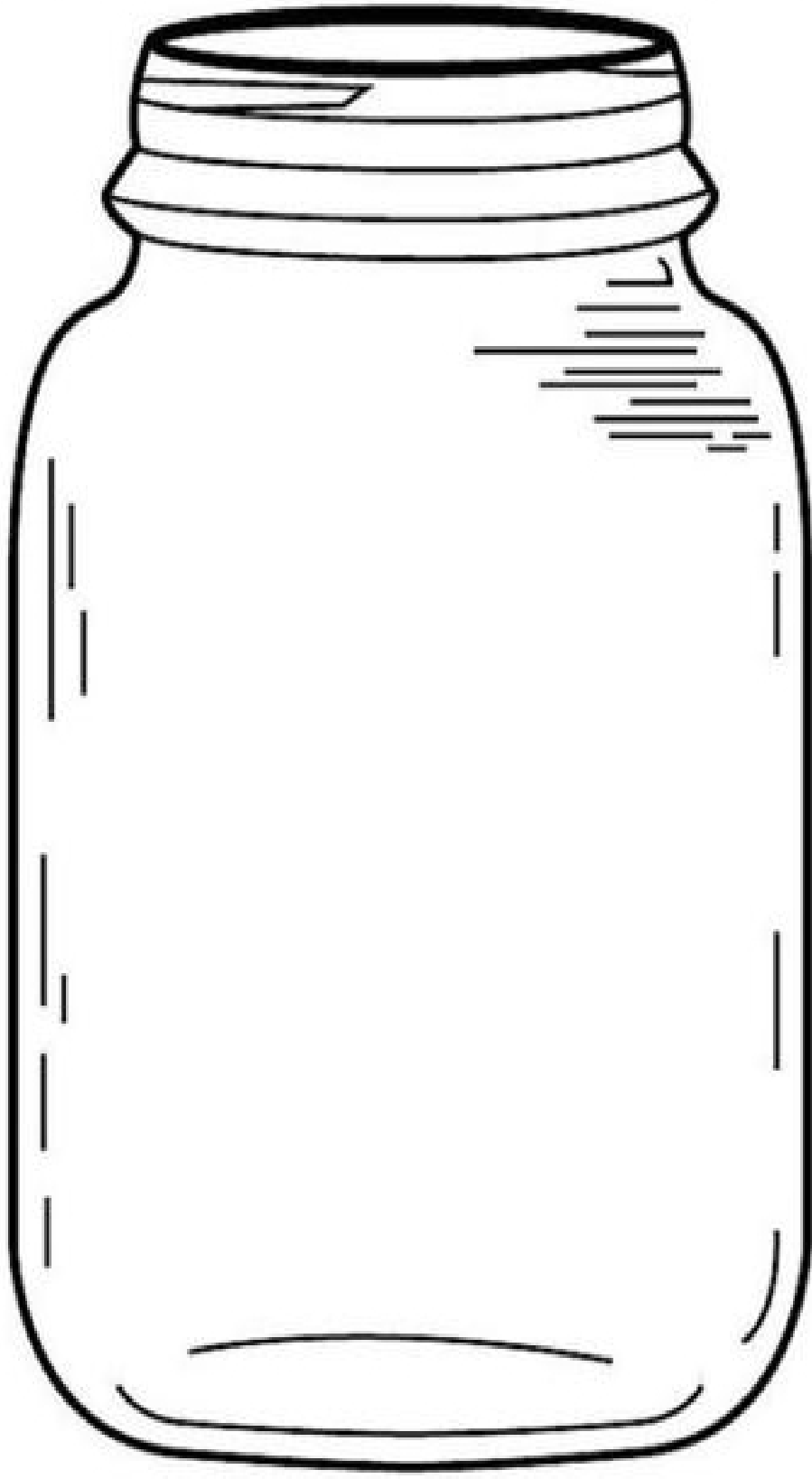
As a start, write down your current worries in the jar on the next page. Then...

Offer a brief prayer to God.

Ask God to help you carry these worries, so the burden is not yours alone.

Once you have put your worries in the jar and offered your prayer, see if you are able to let them go ... at least for a little while.





## Day 20 - **What does God think about the way we look?**

Below are words used to describe the way people look. ☐ the ones that you think are good. ☒ out the ones that are bad. Put a ☐ around ones that are neither good nor bad:

fat	tall	freckled	red-haired	athletic	skinny
white	short	average	feminine	curvy	tan
different	young	black	blond	old	masculine
bald	scruffy	slender	stocky	imposing	brown

Now, look back over your markings. What do you notice about what you've chosen?

How do you think God sees people?

In the book of Genesis in the Bible it says,

Genesis 1:26

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image...So God created humankind in God's image, male and female...'"

Now, that's strange. **God says "our" image**, even though we often talk about God as one, and it says God created male and female in God's image even though the Bible speaks of God as he.

If all people are created in God's image, what's with assigning certain ways of looking as better than other ways?

How do you think the way you look has influenced how **you have been treated**?



How do you think the way others look have influenced the way **they are treated**?

Maybe God cares about the way we look in the sense of how we *look at* (i.e. the way we see) others rather than what we *look like*.

Bonus, here's what Jesus may have looked like based on scientific reconstruction:



Is he “good” looking by our standards?



## Day 21 - **What should I get rid of and what should I keep?**

In my neighborhood, many people have used the time during the pandemic to clean out their houses. Since they're in their homes more, they're getting rid of things they no longer need and making space for what they want and enjoy.

The spiritual life is a little like that. It's about learning what gets in the way and what is worth our time, energy, and focus. One way people define God or faith is...

the things which are most important in our life.

Whatever is most important to you is  
in effect  
your God.

That will make you rethink priorities! It is our "ultimate concern" as one famous Christian named Paul Tillich once put it.

In the Bible, there are stories of when the people are told to "put away foreign gods" and literally bury their idols as a way of reminding them who is truly God as opposed to all the things we treat as God (all-important) ([Genesis 35:2](#), [Joshua 24:23-26](#)).

If you were to treat this pandemic time as a time to do some sorting, what would you get rid of?



What would you put into the pile of "keep, but put in its proper place and stop treating like God?"



What would you put into the "worth giving more attention" pile?



## Day 22 - **Sometimes God Works Despite Us**

I'll never forget the first time I told someone that I felt that God was calling me to work for the Church. He was a good friend, a year older, and someone that I kind of looked up to. His exact words were,

**"You can't do that. You're too much of a troublemaker!"**

The comment was meant somewhat as a joke. But as many people can tell you there's some truth to almost every good piece of humor.

When you think about people God would use to change your school, neighborhood, community, etc. who comes to mind?

What do those people have in common?

You know who wouldn't have had much in common with any of those people you mentioned? You know who, IMHO, may have been the worst person to be a prophet for God?

### **Jonah.**

That's right. Jonah of "Jonah and the big fish" fame. →



Many people have never heard of Jonah but if you did you've probably heard **about the guy who tried to run away from God, fell into the water, and was then swallowed by a "great fish."** The fish vomitted him out onto the land, and he decided (very understandably at this point) to listen and do what God says.

So why doesn't Jonah have much in common with the people we *think* God would normally use?

Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, "God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!"

"So, God, if you won't kill them, kill *me*! I'm better off dead!"



God said, "What do you have to be angry about?"

Jonah 4:1-4

You see God had originally asked Jonah to help the Ninevites. The only problem was Jonah didn't like the Ninevites. You might even say he hated them. But somehow, some way, God used Jonah to bring humility and peace to the Ninevite people.

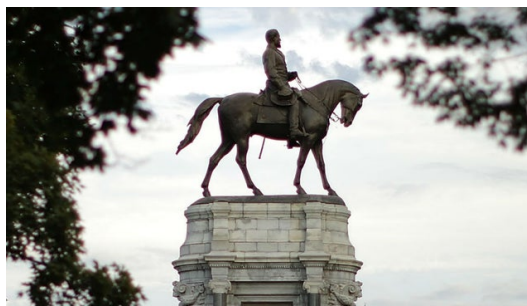
### **Sometimes God works despite us.**

Over the course of this weird summer we've seen a number of protests for racial equality. We've also seen some result in the tearing down of statues to people who were once considered heroes. Nearly everyone seems to be happy with the result of Confederate leaders' statues being taken down. But some have reservations about our Founding Fathers since some of them did, in fact, own slaves. There are even other statues that are being debated today.

Which of these statues do you think should either come down or be replaced? Place an "X" through the ones you think should be either torn down or replaced.



Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy



Robert E. Lee, General of the Confederacy



Thomas Jefferson, 3rd US President



George Washington, 1st US President



Saint Junipero Serra, Catholic Missionary



Sir Francis Drake, English Explorer

Why did you place an "X" through the ones you did?





We are not perfect people whether we're talking about our county, state, country, or humanity in general. Our history tells us as much. Even the supposed best of us are not perfect. Even some of the leaders who have enormously positive impacts on history we find are still not the kind of people we would want to become totally.

**It sounds a lot like Jonah.**

I would love to be one of the people who brings peace to a place like Nineveh. I would also love to be someone who brings freedom to others or even expands Christianity.

I'm not sure about you but I don't always see myself that way. Most of the time I think the people who are actually doing those things are way better than me. You know what I start to think then?

God could never use someone as messed up as me.

However, if God can use people like Jonah, **then God can definitely use people like you or me!** Sometimes, God works despite us. We may mess up and fail along the way, but God still finds ways of expanding justice, kindness, forgiveness, hope, and grace to others.

Today we started out by reflecting on how we see leaders as different, maybe even better than us. I think that's a perfect excuse for not trying. "I'm not good enough so I won't try." It's a great excuse for not being brave, uncomfortable, and faithful.

What kind of excuses do you make when you feel in your heart that God wants you do something for others?

The Good News is we may be flawed but we should be inspired by the fact that for centuries God has used messed up people to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth.

You and I might not be as good as those people we admire but it doesn't matter. You and I might mess up along the way. You and I might give a C- effort instead of an A+ effort. In the end all of that's going to be okay because sometimes...

God works despite us.



## Day 23 - **Are we supposed to be colorblind when it comes to looking at people?**

In our country we have been talking a lot about how African Americans or black people are treated, including by police. There is no doubt, there are negative stereotypes in our culture about people who are not white.

Knowing you are not supposed to think these things, list below different groups or races and the things that get associated with these people.

Say a prayer about the above:

- That you might notice when these stereotypes (even the positive stereotypes) get used
- And you might speak up.
- Ask God to help you reflect on the way you may hold stereotypes
- Commit to working on bettering yourself.

Some of the first few lines of the Song of Solomon in the Bible, read,

Song of Solomon 1:5-6

**"I am black and beautiful...**Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me."

It's an understandable question. Many of us have been raised with the idea we're not supposed to see color. However, people's color or race or appearance has affected the way they have been treated in their lives. **To not see it is to deny part of their experience.**

In the Bible passage above, blackness is associated with sun exposure for people who work outside. These people weren't seen by society as good as those who were wealthy and could afford to stay out of the sun.

This passage shakes up our notion of what's good or desirable and honors people's experience.



Below, write a brief letter to your classmates about how you could do this in your school:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Day 24 - **Created Uniquely by God**

Sometimes, when I am feeling down about myself, I fall into a “I’m not \_\_\_\_\_ enough” pattern. The word that fills in that blank changes depending on the situation.

What are some words that you have used to fill in that blank?

Smart	Pretty/Handsome	Good
Creative	Talented	Athletic
Rich	Cool	Other _____

**But then, I remember that God made me to be exactly who I am.** I *am* wonderful and unique – there is no one else like me on earth, and I don’t *need* to compare myself to anyone else.

Isaiah 64:8

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; **we are all the work of your hand.**

I like to think about God lovingly crafting me to be me.

And I like to think about God continuing to shape me and mold me each and every day.

I am who I am because of God’s unconditional love for me that continues all my life.

Molding things out of clay can be quite fun! I don’t know why we usually stop playing with play dough at a young age. That should be something we do at any age!

Use the recipe below to make your own play dough and have some fun creating things with it. As you craft with your clay, spend some time giving thanks for God’s abundant love for you.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of flour
- ¼ cup of salt
- ¾ cup of water
- 3 tablespoons of lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
- Food coloring (optional)

Making the Play Dough

- 1) Add the water, oil, and lemon juice to a medium non-stick pot and heat on medium on the stove.
- 2) If desired, add some food coloring.
- 3) In a mixing bowl, combine the flour and salt.



- 4) After the water mixture is hot, but not boiling, slowly add the dry ingredients to the pot while mixing to combine.
- 5) Continuously stir until the ingredients combine, dry out and begin to form a ball. If there are parts that seem a bit sticky still, just flatten the dough out and put the sticky side down on the bottom of the pot very briefly. Flip back and forth frequently until it doesn't seem sticky anymore. However, don't cook it too long. It is better to be a bit undercooked as it will firm up as it cools.
- 6) Place on a sheet of wax paper until it cools down a bit. Then knead the dough for a minute or two to bring it all together.

What does your creation look like?

How would you describe your creation? Is it good enough? Better than that? Needs work?

How might the way you look at your creation be different from the way God looks at every creation?



## Day 25 - **The Original Hip Hop Queen**

Black Lives Matter.

It's not hard to say is it? It might even be easier to type.

**Black Lives Matter.**

But you also heard people say,

All Lives Matter?

While I am sure that Jesus believes all lives matter, I'm not so sure Our Lord and Savior would have had trouble saying:

**Black Lives Matter.**

Go grab your Bible and find out why. Read [Luke 4:16-21](#) and fill in the blanks below:

God's Spirit is on me;  
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the \_\_\_\_\_,  
Sent me to announce pardon to \_\_\_\_\_ and  
recovery of sight to the \_\_\_\_\_,  
To set the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ free,  
to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

Is it not interesting that Jesus doesn't choose to start His ministry by telling everyone His sermons are for everybody? I mean doesn't Jesus care about the rich also? O, of course He does!

Read [Mark 10:23-25](#) and fill in the blanks below:

Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, "Do you have any idea how \_\_\_\_\_ it is for people who 'have it all' to enter God's kingdom?" **The disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing**, but Jesus kept on: "You can't imagine how \_\_\_\_\_. I'd say it's easier for \_\_\_\_\_ than for the rich to get into God's kingdom."

What do you think about Jesus' teachings about the poor and oppressed versus the rich and comfortable?

Needless to say, these teachings are not easy to accept if you're rich and comfortable. That may explain why Black Lives Matter is not easy for some people to accept also.



Now of course there are plenty of poor white people in the United States of America. And there are wealthy African Americans. But given the systems of injustice that black people have had to deal with for generations, from slavery to Jim Crow, from “redlining” (look that up) to the FHA, it’s a wonder that we are left having to say what should be the least of all things to say.

Black lives matter.

Why aren’t we saying?

Black lives are celebrated.

Black lives are wonderful.

Black lives are beautiful.

The Bible is full of uncomfortable truths. It’s something that our Sacred Text has in common with Hip Hop artists today. Many of the words shared in the Bible are raw and heartfelt. They can rub you the wrong way. They can make you squirm by their vivid imagery.

Consider this song of Miriam sung by the Israelites 1000s of years ago after receiving their freedom:

I’m singing my heart out to God—what a victory!

**He pitched horse and rider into the sea.**

God is my strength, God is my song,  
and, yes! God is my salvation.

*This* is the kind of God I have  
and I’m telling the world!

*This* is the God of my father—  
I’m spreading the news far and wide!

God is a fighter,  
pure God, through and through.

**Pharaoh’s chariots and army**

**he dumped in the sea,**

**The elite of his officers**

**he drowned in the Red Sea.**

Wild ocean waters poured over them;  
they sank like a rock in the deep blue sea.

-Exodus 15:1-8

Some people read this song and think it’s offensive. In my experience at least, it’s interesting that it has been almost exclusively well to do white people who have felt that way. Those who have faced oppression, injustice, the consequences of evil on a regular basis see it another way.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shared his thoughts on the Song of Miriam once in a sermon:

The meaning of this story is not found in the drowning of Egyptian soldiers, for no one should rejoice at the death or defeat of a human being. Rather, this story symbolizes the death of evil and inhuman oppression and unjust exploitation.



What would it look like to see all the evil things of the world dead and washed up? Complete a picture of it below:



What would your prayer song be for the Black Lives Matter movement? What words would you use in conversation with God about Black Lives Matter?





## Day 26 - Seeking Justice

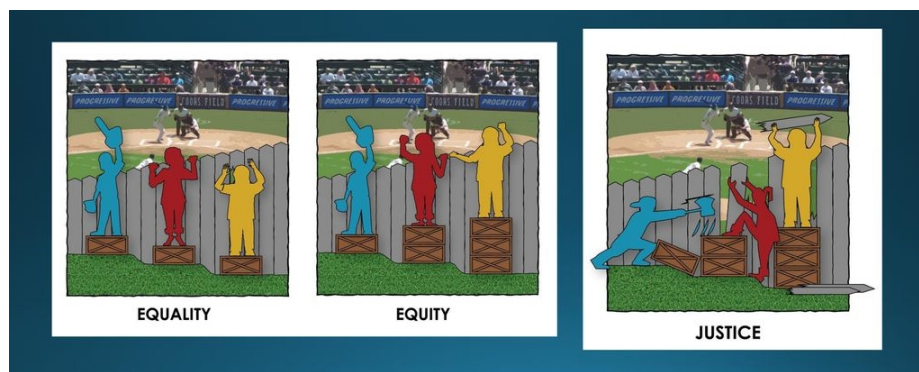
In his famous “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King, Jr. quotes the prophet Amos writing, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” It is interesting to see what else God said through the prophet Amos right before that line.

Amos 5:21-24

**I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.** Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Remember, when Amos says, “I,” he’s speaking on behalf of God. Yes, that’s right. **At this time, apparently God hated and despised the festivals and assemblies.** During Amos’ time, the people had gotten so enamored of their sacrifices and festivals, that they forgot their call to work for justice.

“Justice” is a word that gets used regularly. But what does it mean? I think this graphic describes it well.



When we work for justice, not only do we ensure that everyone can see over the fence, but we work to take down the fence that causes the inequity in the first place. I once heard justice described as

**“Don’t just tell a different version of the same story ... change the story!”**

Many of the protests that have happened this summer have shined a light on some of the injustices present in our country – especially the injustices faced by people of color.

Several years ago, the blog “Sacraparental: social justice & spirituality for parents & kids” posted an article called “Kids for social justice: 6 ways kids can change the world.” Here are the 6 things they suggested. Take a look at this list and write one thing you will do for each.

- 1) Be kind. We will talk about this more tomorrow. Take a sneak peek at the website listed on tomorrow’s devotion for all kinds of kindness ideas.

I will \_\_\_\_\_.



- 2) Be conscious consumers. Do you know where and how the things you buy are made? Do you ever shop locally? Do you buy what mostly what you need, or lots of things you want?

I will \_\_\_\_\_.

- 3) Look after the earth. Garden, pick up trash, recycle, etc. There are so many ways to work for eco-justice.

I will \_\_\_\_\_.

- 4) Give your time. Looking for a place to volunteer? We often have opportunities at the church. A great resource in Marin is the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership - [volunteer.cvn1.org](http://volunteer.cvn1.org)

I will \_\_\_\_\_.

- 5) Give your money. It is important to not spend all our money on ourselves. What issues are you passionate about? Find a non-profit working in that area. Or, do some research about organizations working for racial justice.

I will \_\_\_\_\_.

- 6) Practice hospitality. Offer God's extravagant welcome!

I will \_\_\_\_\_.



## Day 27 - **Grace isn't Fair**

Can I break some unfortunate news to you? **God isn't fair.**

That may not be what you were expecting. You see since we were children everything has been about being fair. Right?

Your brother got ice cream. What about me? Your sister gets a later curfew. What about me? I keep my room clean so why do they get extra screen time? I got better grades so why can't I go out with my friends? It's not fair is it?

Name a few things that happened to you (or someone else) recently that are not fair:

Jesus told a story which by anyone's standards is **offensive, ridiculous, and very annoying**. It's about a landowner who, if he were alive today, would be **criticized, protested, and harassed**.

"God's kingdom is like an estate manager who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. They agreed on a wage of a dollar a day and went to work.

"Later, about nine o'clock, the manager saw some other men hanging around the town square unemployed. He told them to go to work in his vineyard and he would pay them a fair wage. They went.

This was somewhat customary of the time. Hire your workers at the beginning of the day and negotiate a fair wage.

"He did the same thing at noon, and again at three o'clock. At five o'clock he went back and found still others standing around. He said, 'Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?'

"They said, '**Because no one hired us.**'

"No one hired us," they said. Nobody wanted them. So now the landowner has people who've already been working most of the day and they'll be joined by people who'll only work an hour or two because nobody else wanted them.

"He told them to go to work in his vineyard.

"When the day's work was over, the owner of the vineyard instructed his foreman, 'Call the workers in and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first.'

"Those hired at five o'clock came up and were each given a dollar.

Note that. The ones who worked an hour or so got



When those who were hired first saw that they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar.

See what I mean? **Unfair!** How would you feel if you got the same amount of pay? What would you have said if you had worked all day and got the same amount of pay as the people who only worked an hour or two?

Jesus' story continues...

Taking the dollar, they groused angrily to the manager, 'These last workers put in only one easy hour, and **you just made them equal to us**, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.'

"He replied to the one speaking for the rest, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a dollar, didn't we? So, take it and go. I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you. Can't I do what I want with my own money? Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?'

<sup>16</sup> "Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first."

**Equal to us?** Consider for a moment the various people who are "lazier" than you, not as "good" as you, not as valued by others as you. What about the people others seem to think *are* more important than you, more valued than you?

Label and name the workers below. Be sure to include yourself. Consider how valued they are as you label them.



What would be different if we were all actually treated equally? Who would be offended by that? Why?



**So, is God generous? Yes. Is God fair? No.**

To make matters worse Jesus even goes so far to tell us that this is what the Kingdom of God is like! You know, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Did you know that this is what you’ve been praying for all this time? You’ve been praying that regardless of how much:

- People want you
- You’re able to contribute
- You’ve been lucky enough to be chosen at the beginning

## **God is going to love and treat everyone the same.**

Let’s say that you’ve been serving your church since you were born, working hard week in and week out, teaching Sunday school, serving on Session. You pray many times a day, give your money to those in need, are kind to others... you get the point. Let’s say you do it all and then find out that...

**God loves the most terrible sinner just as much as the most spiritual Christian you know.**

I’m not sure about you but that actually makes me feel great because I know I’m not perfect. I let myself down sometimes, my family, my God, I let everyone down sometimes. It’s good knowing that God’s going to love me just as much no matter what.

How does that make you feel?

We insist **justice has to do with equality**, but a lot of the time it’s a word we toss around to keep people and things we don’t like at bay. We say we want equality, but equality sometimes doesn’t feel fair to those of us who have more than others.

A God who is “just,” is inclined to show special generosity to the poor and outcast, the people nobody wants. No wonder the respectable people get anxious.



## Day 28 - **Being Still**

Our bodies tend to be in motion a lot. So much, in fact, that we sometimes have to remind ourselves to be still every now and then. Though God's presence is with us in the busy-ness, sometimes it helps to slow down, to be still, and to be reminded that God is with us.

We have all likely had a lot of down time during this shelter in place time. Our schedules have certainly been much less busy. One thing you might consider doing with more free time – especially over the summer – is spending some intentional quiet time with God. You don't need to say or do anything special. Just spend some time in quiet being aware of God's presence with and around you. The Psalmist offers us this reminder ...

Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

"Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth."  
The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

How long could you go being still and in prayer?

Fill the hour glasses below with sand to show how long you could go in these situations.

At school pre COVID-19



At home pre COVID-19



At home now while family is working



At home now when everyone is home



When we are used to busy-ness, it can be hard to simply stop and be still. Sometimes it feels like our time is slipping away faster and faster to the bottom of that hour glass.

One way to start is with this meditation.

First, find a quiet place where you can be still.  
Sit comfortably and take some deep breaths.

Very slowly, say the “Be still” line from the Psalm to yourself.  
Repeat that line, taking one word or phrase away with each repetition.

When you get to only “Be,” start adding words and phrases again. **Pay careful attention to each word that you say.**

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Be still

Be still and know

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I am God

Now that your done, take a few more deep breaths. How you feel in your body, in your mind, and in your heart?



## Day 29 - Is it okay to pray when I'm upset at God at how things are going?

Yes.

People do it in the Bible all the time. Jesus even did it. Prayer isn't just saying, "Thanks," or "You're awesome, God." It's also saying, "Help!" "This is awful!" "I can't do it anymore."

When Jesus was suffering, we are told he prayed by reciting one of the psalms:

Psalm 22:1-2

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night but find no rest.

Wow, that's harsh!

More to the point, **it's honest.** And that IS the point. Prayer is about honesty. We trust that God knows what's on our heart, so we're not hiding anything from God by not praying honestly. Maybe God knows it's good for us to share how we really feel, even if we feel mad at God for how things are going.

What honest prayers of anger or sadness could you offer?

[Psalm 22](#) doesn't end with anger, however. It ends by remembering how God has blessed the people in the past as a way of holding onto hope for the future.

What prayer could you offer about blessings you've had and what hopes could you include as a result?





## Day 30 - I Had a Bad Day

Let's assume for a moment that you get straight A's. (Of course, you do!) Let's also imagine that when your report card came home one of your classes came with:

C-

"Does not work up to potential"  
"Is not organized with their time"

What would these people's reaction be to that C-?

- Parents -
- Classmates -
- Other Teachers -
- Tutors -
- Grandparents -
- The college of your choice -

We live in a perfectionist society. People talk about putting their best steep forward but, is it just more, or does it feel more like people are putting more of a false self forward? Many of us live with the pressure of feeling like every mistake we make will be noticed.

**Sometimes we just have a bad day.**

Does your spiritual life and religious convictions add to that stress? I've noticed that people oftentimes change the way they talk when they are in church. Of course, they do it out of respect and that's greatly appreciated by the people around them.

But I wonder if our Christian faith makes us more afraid of messing something up.

**Sometimes we just have a bad day... at church!**

Look at it this way. If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine and go after the one? And if he finds it, doesn't he make far more over it than over the ninety-nine who stay put? Your Father in heaven feels the same way. He doesn't want to lose even one of these simple believers.

-Matthew 18:12-14

**Can you imagine being that one lost sheep**, all alone wondering where everybody has gone? That's a pretty bad day for that sheep.

Let's play a funny game. Put yourself in that sheep's shoes... err hooves. What are you thinking while you wonder the wilderness alone?



How do you cope with bad days? What helps?

Did you know that whenever you mess up and feel lost Jesus says God is going to look for you and try to bring you back safely? What does that say about God's opinion of you?

As we all try to put our best selves on when we are at church or youth group it can feel like we don't really fit in. "Those people are so good," we think to ourselves. "They seem so close to God. They're so nice. They pray like they really mean it. That's just not me." Confession: Sometimes, it's not me either.

Sometimes, I have a bad day... at church.

Which is why it brings us so much joy to consider that God loves us and chases after us when we are:  
having our bad days.

Wondering aimlessly.

Messing things up for the other 99.

God understands. God loves. God is still coming for us.

And lastly if none of that helps. Then maybe this will...

Just in case anyone was having a  
bad day



This seems like a good place to end.

