



A 40-DAY JOURNEY THROUGH
THE FOUR GOSPELS

THE JESUS

40

Change your life in 40 days
as you live and love like Jesus.

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THE JESUS

40

One teaching of Jesus each day, drawn from
the four gospels, with one small way to live it
before the sun goes down.

FIRST EDITION

Freely you have received; freely give.

MATTHEW 10:8

This book is free, and it always will be.

Copy it, print it, and give it away to anyone who will read it.

All scripture quotations are drawn from the four gospels:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

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*Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will
know whether the teaching is from God or
whether I am speaking on my own.*

JOHN 7:17

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Before You Begin

You just did something most people only think about. You said yes to 40 days with the most influential person who ever lived. Not opinions about him. Not arguments about him. Him, in his own words, from the four gospels.

There is a reason it is 40 days and not thirty or fifty. All through scripture, 40 marks a season of testing, preparation, and transformation, the stretch of time that comes right before everything changes.

Rain fell for 40 days and the world began again. A slave people wandered 40 years and walked out a nation. Moses climbed the mountain for 40 days and came down carrying the law. Jesus himself went into the wilderness for 40 days before he spoke a single public word, and after he rose from the dead he walked the earth 40 more days before he ascended.

Forty is the threshold. It is the ground you cross to reach higher ground. That is what these next 40 days are for you. Not a study. A crossing. A season set apart to be tested, prepared, and changed, so the person who finishes is not the same person who began.

Here is how it works. Every day for 40 days you will read one short chapter. Each one gives you a teaching of Jesus, what it meant when he said it, what it looks like in your life now, and one small challenge you can actually do that day.

One verse explains the whole journey.

Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.

JOHN 7:17

Jesus is telling us something simple and rare. You do not come to know him by studying him from a distance. You come to know him by doing what he said. The proof is not in the argument. The proof is in the living.

That is why this is built the way it is. Not 40 days of information. Forty days of practice. Each day hands you one teaching and one small way to live it out that same day.

Notice what he does not ask for. He does not ask you to win a debate or to feel certain before you begin. He invites you to run an experiment. Live what I taught, and you will find out for yourself what it is.

A few tips from people who have walked this road:

- ◆ Read in the morning if you can, so the day's challenge has room to happen.
- ◆ Do the challenge the same day. Small and done beats perfect and postponed.
- ◆ Keep a notebook. Some days ask you to write one sentence. Those sentences become the record of what changed.
- ◆ If you miss a day, no guilt. Pick up where you left off. The goal is direction, not perfection.

Everything here is free and always will be. Jesus said, freely you have received, freely give. That is the deal.

Day 1 is waiting on the next page. Something is about to shift. Few decisions shape a life like choosing to actually live what he taught. You are standing at the edge of your 40. Step in.

PART I

The Invitation

DAYS 1 – 5



*Meet him at the source. The world he walked into, the
announcement that started everything, and the two words
that began a movement.*

Meet Jesus for yourself

Most people know Jesus secondhand. A childhood Sunday school. A grandmother's faith. A movie, a meme, an argument online. Fragments, filtered through other people.

For the next 40 days, you go to the source. The four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are the earliest and fullest record of what he said and did. Everything in this journey comes from them.

Here is the verse this entire challenge is built on. Jesus said it to people who had just started believing in him:

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

JOHN 8:31-32

Read it slowly, because the order matters.

He did not say, agree with my word. He did not say, admire it, debate it, or defend it. He said continue in it. Live inside it the way you live inside a house. Keep walking it when it is easy and when it is not.

And then comes the promise, in sequence: continue, then know, then free. The knowing comes after the walking, not before. Truth, in his teaching, is not something you settle from the couch. It is something you discover on the road.

Freedom is the destination. Freedom from what? Over the next 40 days you will hear his answer: from resentment, from anxiety, from the exhausting work of keeping score, from the opinions of the crowd, from the grip of money, from fear of death itself.

That is a big claim. You should not take it on anyone's word, including mine. You should test it. That is exactly what he invites you to do, and it is exactly what this challenge is.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write one honest sentence about where you stand with Jesus right now. Skeptic, curious, believer who drifted, lifelong follower, wounded by religion, all of these are fine. Date it and keep it. On Day 40 you will write the second sentence, and you will want to compare.



Tomorrow: the world he walked into, and why his first announcement hit like a thunderclap.

The announcement that started everything

To feel the force of what Jesus said, you need to see the world he said it in.

First century Judea was occupied territory. Roman soldiers patrolled the streets. Ordinary families paid crushing taxes to an empire they hated. The religious establishment had made a quiet arrangement with Rome: we keep the people calm, you let us keep our position. Farmers were losing land to debt. The poor were told their poverty was God's judgment. The powerful assumed their comfort was God's favor.

Into that world walked a carpenter from Nazareth, a village so small and unimportant that people joked about it. And his opening message was one sentence:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.

MARK 1:15

Two words in that sentence carried more voltage than they seem to.

Kingdom of God was not a soft spiritual phrase. To people living under Caesar, it meant God's rule, here, now. Another king. Another set of values. The empire and the religious elite both heard it as a threat to their power, and they were right.

Repent is the Greek word *metanoia*. It does not mean feel bad about yourself. It means a complete change of mind and direction. A 180 degree turn of the whole self. Jesus was not recruiting people into guilt. He was calling them to reorient everything around a different set of

priorities: God's priorities, which, as you will see, run almost exactly opposite to the world's.

That is still the invitation. Not to feel worse. To turn.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down one area of your life you would reorient if you truly believed God's priorities turn the world's upside down. One area. Put the paper somewhere you will see it for the rest of this challenge.



Tomorrow: his mission statement, delivered in his hometown, and who it was for.

His mission statement

Early in his ministry, Jesus walked into the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, written some 700 years earlier. He found a specific passage, read it aloud, sat down, and told the room the words were coming true in front of them.

This is what he read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.

LUKE 4:18

That is his mission statement, chosen by him, announced in public, at the start of everything.

Notice who it is built around. The poor. The captive. The blind. The oppressed. He did not open with doctrine or ritual. He opened with people, and specifically the people polite society had written off.

That tells you the shape of everything that follows. Watch him across the four gospels and the pattern never breaks: he moves toward the overlooked. Lepers that no one would touch, he touched. Widows nobody noticed, he noticed. Children the disciples tried to shoo away, he gathered up. A blind beggar shouting over a crowd that told him to be quiet, Jesus stopped for him.

Most institutions in every era orient themselves toward the impressive and the established. Jesus oriented himself toward the forgotten. Not as charity from a distance, but as the whole direction of his life.

If you want to walk with him for 40 days, this is where the road goes. Toward people.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Think of one person in your world who is overlooked, struggling, or forgotten. You do not have to fix anything today. Just notice them, learn or remember their name, and hold them in mind. Noticing is where he always started, and this person will come up again before the 40 days are done.



Tomorrow: the dinner guests that scandalized everyone.

The company he kept

In Jesus' culture, sharing a meal was a public statement. You did not eat with just anyone. Your table said who you accepted and who you endorsed.

Jesus ate with the wrong people constantly, and on purpose.

Tax collectors were locals who collected money for Rome and often skimmed extra for themselves. Their neighbors saw them as traitors. Sinners was the catch-all label for everyone who visibly failed to keep religious law. When Jesus called a tax collector named Levi to follow him, Levi threw a dinner, and the guest list was full of exactly these people. The religious leaders were appalled and demanded an explanation. Jesus gave them one:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.

MARK 2:17

Sit with how strange this is. Every religious movement in history has worked the same way: clean yourself up, then you can come in. Jesus reversed the order. He moved toward people first, as they were, and let the change grow out of the relationship. He did not just tolerate outcasts. He sought them out, chose their tables, and put one of them in his inner circle.

And notice the honesty his answer requires of us. A doctor is only useful to people who admit something is wrong. The ones who could not receive anything from Jesus were never the messy ones. They were the ones certain they were fine.

Every social world has its version of tax collectors and sinners: the coworker with the past, the relative everyone avoids, the neighbor nobody greets. The people it costs you something socially to sit with. Watch where Jesus sits.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Think of one person in your orbit who gets excluded, judged, or quietly avoided. Take one step toward them this week instead of away. A text. A coffee. A genuine, how are you actually doing?



Tomorrow: the two-word invitation that started a movement.

Follow me

Jesus never asked anyone to join a religion. He never handed out a membership form or a doctrinal checklist. His invitation was two words.

Follow me and I will make you fish for people.

MARK 1:17

He said it to Simon and Andrew, working fishermen, in the middle of their workday. No background check. No explanation of what it would cost. They dropped their nets and went.

Notice what he did not require first. He did not ask them to believe a list of statements or clean up their lives in advance. He asked them to walk with him and see. Their understanding of who he was grew as they went, not before they started.

In that world, a rabbi's disciples did not just study his words. They followed him physically. They watched how he handled conflict, how he treated the poor, how he prayed, how he responded when people attacked him. The goal was not to know what the rabbi knew. It was to become what the rabbi was.

That is what Jesus still offers: not a belief system to mentally file away, but a life to apprentice.

And here is what set him apart from every other rabbi and every other teacher in history. Other teachers said, I will show you the way. Jesus said, I am the way. He claimed that watching him was watching what God is like. That is either the most important thing ever said or it is nothing. Wise, humble teachers do not talk like that. He did, constantly, and then backed it with a life that has never been matched.

You do not have to resolve that question today. The first disciples did not either. They just started walking, and the walking is how they found out. Forty days is a very honest way to start.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down the one thing that most holds you back from following Jesus more closely. Doubt, a past hurt from religion, a teaching that feels too hard, a habit you do not want to give up. Be specific. You will likely find these 40 days speak directly to it.



Tomorrow we walk up the mountainside for the most famous sermon ever preached.

PART II

The Mountain

DAYS 6 – 15



*Ten days inside the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous
teaching ever given, where he raises the bar and lifts the
burden.*

Blessed are the ones nobody expects

The Sermon on the Mount is the longest and fullest record of Jesus' teaching we have. He went up a hillside, sat down, which is how a rabbi signaled formal teaching, and delivered a message that turned his world's value system on its head.

He opened with a series of blessings. The first three:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

MATTHEW 5:3-5

In his day, most people assumed wealth, strength, and success were the visible signs of God's favor. These sentences blow that apart.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Not the confident and self-assured. The ones who know they are running on empty and cannot fill themselves.

Blessed are those who mourn. Not the people who have it all together. The grieving, the heartbroken, the ones at the end of their rope.

Blessed are the meek. Not the aggressive and the connected. The ones who have strength and refuse to weaponize it.

Every culture, including ours, celebrates the opposite list: confidence, winning, image, leverage. Jesus stands in front of the crowd and blesses the broken, the grieving, and the gentle. Why? Because those are the people with nothing left to prove and nothing left to protect. There is no

performance standing between them and God, so there is room for God to move in.

If you are at the end of your rope today, this sermon was aimed at you first. You are not disqualified. In his kingdom, you are at the front of the line.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Which of these three describes you right now: running on empty, carrying grief, or holding power gently? Sit quietly with that one for five minutes today and tell God the plain truth about it. No polish. Honesty is the doorway here.



Tomorrow: the second half of the blessings, and the difference between keeping peace and making it.

Hungry for what is right

Yesterday, the first three blessings. Today, the rest of the list, and together they sketch a kind of person the world rarely produces.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

MATTHEW 5:6-9

Take them one at a time.

Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Not a casual interest in being a decent person. Hunger. A craving that will not let you rest. Jesus says people who want goodness that badly will be satisfied.

The merciful. People who release others from what they are owed. What they give out circles back to them.

The pure in heart. This does not mean flawless. The word means undivided. One thing. Not split between God and image, God and money, God and the crowd. Undivided people see God clearly because they are not constantly glancing sideways at something else.

The peacemakers. Notice he did not say peacekeepers. Peacekeepers avoid conflict to keep the surface calm while everything rots underneath. Peacemakers walk into the mess and do the slow, brave work of actually repairing what is broken. Jesus says these people look so much like God that they get called his children.

He finishes by blessing those who are persecuted for doing right, and then tells them to rejoice, because doing right has always cost something and always been worth it. He never promises his people an easy life. He promises a meaningful one.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Pick the blessing from today's list that represents your biggest growth edge. Write it somewhere you will see it all week, and take one small step it suggests. If it is mercy, release one small debt today. If it is peacemaking, name the conflict you have been avoiding.



Tomorrow: what he says you already are.

You are the light of the world

Right after the blessings, Jesus looks at the crowd, ordinary people, fishermen, farmers, mothers, laborers, and makes a claim about them that should stop you mid-sentence.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:14-16

He does not say try to become light someday. He says you are light. Present tense. And he says the same about salt: you are the salt of the earth, the thing that preserves what is good and brings out the flavor of life.

Light has one job. It shines. It does not announce itself or argue with the darkness. It just makes things visible, and everything around it changes.

What Jesus describes here is not loud public religion. It is the quiet, steady effect of a life actually lived his way. When you forgive instead of retaliate, when you tell the truth when a lie would be cheaper, when you serve without being asked, people notice, even when they cannot name what they are seeing. That is light doing its work.

The world has never had a shortage of people broadcasting their values. What it is starving for is people who quietly live them. And notice the destination of the credit: so that they may see your good works and

glorify your Father. The light points past itself. That is how you know it is the real thing.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name one place where you have been dimming your light: a relationship where you hide what you believe, a situation where you go along to avoid friction. Do one visible, humble act of good there today. Not a speech. An act.



Tomorrow: the moment he raised the bar on everyone, starting with anger.

He raised the bar

Some people assume Jesus came to relax the old moral law. He said the opposite, plainly:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:17, 19

Whoever does them and teaches them. That sentence is the DNA of this whole challenge. Not admire them. Not debate them. Do them, and then hand them on.

Then he immediately shows what fulfilling the law looks like, and it is not looser. It is deeper. Six times in this sermon he says, you have heard it said, but I say to you, taking a command everyone knew and pressing past the behavior into the heart. He starts with murder:

If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment.

MATTHEW 5:22

The old standard said do not kill, and a person could keep it while quietly despising everyone around them. Jesus says the anger and the contempt are the root of the killing. Marriages rarely die from one dramatic betrayal; they die from a thousand small acts of contempt. Wars do not start when the first weapon is raised; they start years earlier in how people learn to talk about each other. What you let grow in your heart eventually moves your hands.

So he gives a command that is stunning in its urgency: if you are in the middle of worship and remember that someone has something against you, leave the altar, go, and be reconciled first. Then come back. God would rather have you repairing a relationship than performing a ritual. And settle things quickly, he adds, before small conflicts harden into permanent ones.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name one relationship where contempt has crept in, that low-grade dismissal where you stopped taking someone seriously. Take one concrete step of repair today: a message, an apology, an olive branch. Do not wait to feel like it.



Tomorrow: his most drastic advice, and why you might need to delete an app.

Be ruthless with what ruins you

Today's teaching sounds violent on first read. It is meant to. Jesus is talking about lust, and more broadly about anything that keeps dragging you into the same pit, and he prescribes surgery:

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

MATTHEW 5:29

Nobody in his audience thought he meant literal amputation, and the earliest followers did not practice it. He is using deliberate exaggeration to make a point people keep missing: treat the source of your besetting sin with zero sentimentality.

Most of us manage our temptations. We keep them close and try to be strong. Jesus says stop negotiating with the thing that is destroying you. Cut off its access. If it comes through your phone, delete the app. If it comes through a feed, unfollow. If it lives in your house, it goes in the trash tonight. If it is a place, drive a different route. If it is a person who reliably pulls you into your worst self, create distance. Losing the eye is his picture for how drastic you should be willing to be, because half-measures against a real weakness lose every time.

In the same breath he also simplifies your speech:

Let your word be Yes, Yes or No, No.

MATTHEW 5:37

Be the kind of person whose plain word is enough. No oaths, no spin, no careful technicalities. People who are ruthless with their weaknesses

and simple with their word become something rare: trustworthy all the way through.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name your one recurring stumbling source honestly. Then remove its access today, not this weekend, today. Delete it, block it, throw it out, or hand a friend the password. If it feels drastic, you are doing it right.



Tomorrow: the strangest advice ever given to people under someone else's boot.

The second mile

Under Roman occupation, a soldier could legally force a civilian to carry his pack for one mile. Imagine the humiliation: dropped tools, lost time, neighbors watching. One mile, and not a step more, was the law.

Jesus told his listeners what to do about it:

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

MATTHEW 5:41

And around that command, a whole cluster like it: if someone strikes your cheek, turn the other. If someone sues you for your shirt, hand over your coat as well. Give to the one who begs from you.

This is not weakness, and it is not becoming a doormat. Look at what actually happens in the second mile. For the first mile, the soldier is in charge. At mile two, everything flips. You are no longer a victim following orders; you are a free person making a staggering choice. You have taken the script of domination and retaliation and torn it up. Evil knows how to answer resistance and how to answer groveling. It has no answer for unexpected, unearned good.

Here is the question that turns this teaching loose in ordinary life. If Jesus asks this much grace toward an occupying soldier, toward a tormentor, then what does he ask toward the people in our own homes? The spouse who is short with us, the kid who needs us at the worst time, the coworker who dumps work on our desk. If the second mile is for enemies, how much more for the people we love when we simply do not feel like it.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Sometime today, someone will inconvenience you or take you for granted. When it happens, go one degree beyond what is required: respond with unexpected kindness, do the task and add something extra, carry it the second mile. Do it once today, on purpose.



Tomorrow: the summit of the whole sermon. Love your enemies.

Love your enemies

Every great moral teacher in history taught some version of love your neighbor. Jesus went where none of them dared:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

MATTHEW 5:44-45

Then he adds the sentence that removes every excuse: if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Anybody can do that.

Loving your tribe is the human default. Every culture manages it. What marks the children of God, Jesus says, is loving the people who have given you every reason not to.

Look at the ground he stands this on. God sends sun and rain on everyone, the grateful and the ungrateful, the kind and the cruel. He does not meter out the sunrise based on merit. To love your enemy is simply to join the family business.

Be clear about what this does not mean. It does not mean pretending the harm was fine. It does not mean trusting someone who has proven untrustworthy, or staying in reach of abuse. Love here is not a warm feeling you manufacture. It is a decision about what you want for someone: refusing to let hatred rent space in your heart, and genuinely wanting their good, even from a distance.

He closes the passage with, be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. The word means complete, whole, mature. Love that includes enemies is love grown all the way up.

In an age that runs on outrage, where contempt for the other side is the easiest habit in the world, this may be his single most countercultural command.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down the name of one person you resent, or who has genuinely wronged you. Today, pray one sentence for their good. Not for them to change. For their good. Then repeat that one sentence daily for the rest of the 40 days and watch what it does to your own heart.



Tomorrow: the good you do when no one is watching.

Do your good in secret

Three practices anchored religious life in Jesus' day: giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. He did not question the practices. He went after the motive underneath them.

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

MATTHEW 6:1, 3-4

He describes people who announce their donations and pray on the street corners to be admired, and his verdict is dry: they have received their reward. They wanted to be seen. They were seen. Transaction complete.

The word he uses for them is the Greek word for actor. Someone playing a role for an audience. And his warning is subtle, because he is not mainly talking about frauds. He is talking about how even genuine goodness gets hijacked the moment we start doing it partly for the credit. The act stays the same; the audience changes; and something in it quietly dies.

Wait, you might say, two days ago he said let your light shine before others. Which is it? The difference is the destination of the glory. Light shines so people see the good and praise God. Performance shines so people see the good and praise you. Same act, opposite direction.

We live in the golden age of performed virtue, where every good deed can be posted, captioned, and measured in reactions. Jesus offers a countercultural thrill: the secret good deed. Known to no one but God. Uncontaminated by ego. He insists those are the ones that echo longest.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Do one genuinely good thing for someone today under total secrecy. No post, no mention to a friend, no hint to the person if possible. Take it to your grave. Notice how different it feels.



Tomorrow: he teaches his friends to pray, in about thirty seconds.

The prayer that reorders everything

The disciples watched Jesus pray and noticed that whatever he was doing was different. So they asked him to teach them. He gave them a prayer you can say in thirty seconds, and it quietly reorders an entire life:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

MATTHEW 6:9-13

Walk through it slowly.

Our Father. Not my. From the first word you are praying as part of a family, and to a Father, the most intimate address for God anyone had dared to use.

Your kingdom come, your will be done. Before a single request for yourself, you align with something bigger than yourself. Most prayer tries to enlist God in our plans. This prayer enlists us in his.

Give us today our daily bread. Today's provision, not a decade's stockpile. A built-in posture of daily trust.

Forgive us as we also have forgiven. Read that clause carefully and it should make you gulp. You are asking God to use on you the same measure you use on others. Jesus underlines this immediately after the prayer: forgiven people forgive.

Rescue us from the evil one. An honest admission that the world holds real darkness and you need help walking through it.

And he adds one more thing about prayer itself: ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. The verbs are continuous. Keep asking. This is not a vending machine. It is a relationship with a Father who is glad you came.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Pray this prayer once today, slowly, one line at a time, meaning each line before you move on. Where a line snags you, stop and stay there. That snag is the conversation.



Tomorrow: his answer to the worry that eats your nights.

The end of worry

There is a passage in this sermon that has steadied more anxious hearts than perhaps any words ever spoken. Jesus looks at a crowd of people with real money problems, real uncertainty, and says:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

MATTHEW 6:25-26

He is not being naive, and he is not telling you to skip the grocery list. He is going after the specific worry that takes over: the looping, 3 a.m. kind that believes everything depends on you controlling every variable.

His argument is from evidence. Look up. The birds are fed. The wildflowers are dressed better than kings, and they never worked a day. Creation runs on a generosity it did not manufacture. And you, he says, matter more to God than all of it. Elsewhere he presses the point: not one sparrow falls without your Father noticing, and even the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid.

Then he names the exchange at the heart of it:

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

MATTHEW 6:33-34

Worry is, underneath everything, a belief that you are alone and the outcome rides entirely on you. Jesus says the premise is false. Do today's work, seek first what matters most, and let tomorrow arrive before you fight it.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down your top three worries. For each one, ask: is there an action I can take today? If yes, take it. If no, write one sentence handing it to the Father, out loud if you can. You cannot control tomorrow by suffering it in advance.



*Tomorrow we leave the mountainside for his favorite way of teaching: stories.
Starting with four kinds of dirt.*

PART III

The Stories

DAYS 16 – 25



The parables. Lost sons and running fathers, good Samaritans and buried treasure, and a kingdom hidden in plain sight.

Four kinds of soil. Which one are you?

Jesus taught mostly in parables: short stories that smuggle truth past your defenses. His first and most foundational one explains why the same message lands so differently in different people.

A farmer scatters seed. Some falls on the hard path, and birds eat it. Some falls on rocky ground, springs up fast, and dies in the first hot sun because it has no roots. Some falls among thorns, which grow up and choke it. And some falls on good soil, where it produces a harvest of thirty, sixty, a hundred times what was sown.

This is one of the rare parables Jesus explained himself, and his explanation is the point: the seed is the word of God, and the four soils are four conditions of the human heart.

Picture it today. The same message reaches four people. The first scrolls past; it never even registers. The second is genuinely moved, fired up for a week, and quits the first time someone rolls their eyes at them. The third means it sincerely, but the mortgage, the promotion, the feeds, and the worry slowly strangle it, and nothing ever comes of it. The fourth hears it, holds on, rearranges life around it, and years later there is a harvest: a changed marriage, a generous hand, a steady soul, and other lives touched through theirs.

Same seed. Different soil.

The most honest question this story asks is not which soil you would like to be. It is which one you are right now. Most of us have been all four at different seasons. Hard, shallow, crowded, and sometimes, by grace, good.

And here is the mercy in it: soil is not destiny. Soil can be worked. Rocks can be pulled. Thorns can be cleared. That is much of what these 40 days are for.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name your current soil, honestly. Then do one piece of soil work this week: clear one thorn that is choking your growth, one commitment, subscription, or habit that crowds out everything that matters. Name it and cut it.



Tomorrow: the most famous story he ever told, part one. A boy takes the money and runs.

The Prodigal Son, part one: the leaving

Some call it the greatest short story ever told. It begins with a shocking demand.

A younger son tells his father: give me my share of the estate now. In that culture, this meant something unmistakable: I wish you were dead. You are worth more to me as money than as a father. By law and custom, the father could have refused and cut him off. Instead, he divides the property and lets him go.

The son leaves for a distant country and burns through everything. When a famine hits, he ends up feeding pigs, animals his people considered unclean, and he is so hungry he envies their food. The boy who demanded everything now has less than nothing.

Then comes the hinge of the whole story, six words: when he came to himself. No angel appears. No lightning strikes. He simply wakes up to reality, sees clearly where his choices have taken him, and decides to stop walking in that direction. He rehearses a speech with no excuses in it: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.

Notice what real repentance looks like here, because Jesus is showing us. It is not groveling, and it is not self-hatred. It is clear eyes, ownership without excuses, and a body that gets up and moves toward home. The feeling and the footsteps together.

Maybe there is a far country in your life right now. Not necessarily dramatic. A relationship on autopilot. A habit you defend but secretly

hate. A distance from God you keep meaning to close. The pig pen is wherever you finally admit: this is not who I want to be.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name your far country, the one area where you have drifted from who you mean to be. Write the son's words over it: I will get up and go. Then take the first small step within 24 hours. One phone call, one deleted number, one prayer, one drive home.



Tomorrow: what the father does when he sees the boy on the road. It will undo you.

The Prodigal Son, part two: the running father

The son walks home rehearsing his speech. He is hoping for a servant's job. What happens instead is the most stunning picture of God in all of Jesus' teaching.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

LUKE 15:20

While he was still far off, his father saw him. You only see someone far off if you are watching the road. The father has been scanning the horizon the whole time.

And then he runs. Wealthy patriarchs in that world did not run; it was beneath their dignity. This father hikes up his robes and sprints, because dignity means nothing next to a returning child.

The son starts his speech, and the father talks over him. He never gets to the part about being a hired hand. The father is already shouting for the best robe, a ring for his finger, sandals for his feet, every one of them a symbol of full sonship restored, and a feast: this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

This is Jesus' answer to the question, what is God actually like when someone turns around? Not a judge with crossed arms waiting for the full apology. A father off the porch and running, who interrupts your confession with an embrace.

There is a second son in the story: the older brother, who stayed and worked and is now furious about the party. His complaint gives him away: all these years I have slaved for you. He thought he was earning wages, not living as a son. The father's answer is gentle: you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. Grace offends people who are keeping score.

Many of us are more comfortable with guilt than with grace. Guilt feels earned. Grace has to be received with empty hands, and that is its own kind of surrender.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down the thing you believe disqualifies you, the reason you keep God at arm's length. Then write over it, in large letters: HE RAN. Read it out loud. Today, practice receiving what you cannot earn.



Tomorrow: a man bleeding on the roadside, and the last person on earth who should have stopped.

The Good Samaritan

A religious lawyer, wanting to test Jesus, asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus turns it back on him, and the man answers correctly: love God, love your neighbor. Do that and you will live, Jesus says. But the lawyer wants a boundary. And who, exactly, is my neighbor?

Jesus answers with a story. A man traveling the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho is attacked by robbers, stripped, beaten, and left half dead. A priest comes down the road, sees him, and passes by on the other side. A Levite, a temple official, does the same. Both had reasons; touching a dying man risked ritual impurity, and there were rules. The system gave them an exit, and they took it.

Then a Samaritan comes along. To Jesus' audience this word landed like a slap. Jews and Samaritans despised each other across centuries of ethnic and religious hostility. The Samaritan is the last character anyone expected to be the hero. He sees the man, is moved with pity, bandages his wounds, puts him on his own animal, brings him to an inn, pays the bill, and promises to cover whatever else it costs.

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said, The one who showed him mercy. Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.

LUKE 10:36-37

Notice the move Jesus makes. The lawyer asked, who qualifies as my neighbor, a question about limits. Jesus answers a different question: will you be a neighbor, a question about you. He replaces the boundary with a posture.

A modern version writes itself. Your car dies on the shoulder. The person with the church bumper sticker sweeps past, late for a service. The nonprofit executive is on an important call. The one who pulls over is the person whose politics you cannot stand. Mercy has a way of ignoring the categories we protect.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Cross one street today. Do something concretely helpful for a person outside your circle, ideally someone from a group you tend to avoid or write off. Not a feeling. Bandages, oil, coins. Real help.



Tomorrow you hit the halfway mark, and we talk about what a shepherd does at night.

Halfway: the God who searches

The religious leaders were grumbling that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. He answered with three stories in a row about lost things. Here is the first:

Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.

LUKE 15:4-5

A lost sheep does not find its way home. It wanders until it is stuck, and then it sits down and cries out. That is all it can do.

So the shepherd goes. Notice everything in that sentence. The search is active; God is not waiting at the gate with requirements, he is out in the dark looking. The search is personal; the ninety-nine do not make the one negligible. And when he finds it, he does not scold it home on its own legs. He puts it on his shoulders and carries it, rejoicing. Jesus doubles the image with a woman who lights a lamp and sweeps her whole house for one lost coin, then throws a party with her neighbors when she finds it. There is more joy in heaven, he says, over one person who turns around than over ninety-nine who never left.

If you have ever felt too far gone, too stuck, too late: this is his portrait of what God is doing about you. Searching. Not waiting. Searching.

And here is your halfway marker. Twenty days ago you started an experiment based on his promise that anyone who resolves to do God's will comes to know whether this teaching is from God. So check the data. Anything shifting? A grudge loosening its grip. A calmer morning.

Patience that surprised you. An unexpected pull toward someone you used to avoid. Small counts. Small is how kingdoms grow, as you will see tomorrow.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down two changes you have noticed in yourself since Day 1, however small. If you honestly find none, write what you are still hoping for. Then tell one person about the experiment you are running. If someone has come to mind during these 20 days, invite them to start their own at thejesus40.com. Freely you received; freely give.



Tomorrow: mustard seeds, bread dough, and why small is not what it looks like.

Small is not what it looks like

Jesus' followers could see no possible way that their little band, fishermen, tax collectors, nobodies from Galilee, was going to change anything. He told them two tiny parables.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

MATTHEW 13:31-32

And again: the kingdom is like yeast a woman kneads into a huge batch of flour until it works through all of it. A speck of leaven, invisible inside the dough, and in time the whole loaf rises.

This is how God works, Jesus says. Not usually through overwhelming force or dramatic displays. Through small things, planted in ordinary ground, growing slowly into something that shelters others.

By that measure, look again at your week. The apology you offered first: mustard seed. The truth told when a lie was cheaper: mustard seed. Patience with your child at the end of your patience: mustard seed. Ten quiet minutes of prayer before the noise starts: mustard seed. None of it looks like much on the day you plant it. He insists this is exactly the material his kingdom is made of, and that what it becomes, and who ends up nesting in its branches, is not visible from the beginning.

He was also, quietly, talking about himself: one teacher in one occupied backwater province, executed young, no book written, no army raised. The smallest of seeds. Look what grew.

We are addicted to visible results on demand. This teaching is a direct assault on that impatience. Plant. Water. Trust. The tree is coming, and you will not see it in a day.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name one small, good practice you have been tempted to quit because it does not seem to be working. Do it today, and commit to it for the next 30 days without once evaluating the results.



Tomorrow: a man finds something in a field and joyfully sells everything he owns.

Worth everything

Two of Jesus' shortest parables, back to back, one point:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

MATTHEW 13:44-46

Read the treasure story again and find the word that changes everything: joy. In his joy he goes and sells all that he has.

Nobody at that auction felt sorry for him. He was not gritting his teeth through a sacrifice. He had seen what was in the field, done the math, and realized that everything he owned was worth less than this one thing. Selling it all was not the cost of the deal. It was the bargain of his life.

This is Jesus' picture of what he is offering. Not a burden reluctantly shouldered, but a discovery so valuable that rearranging your whole life around it becomes the obvious move. Imagine learning the dusty painting in your attic is a lost masterpiece worth more than everything else you own combined. You would not agonize about selling furniture.

Here is the uncomfortable diagnostic hiding inside the joy: what we release reveals what we have actually seen. If following Jesus feels only like loss, like a long list of things given up, it may be because we have not yet seen the treasure clearly. The man who saw it could not sell his stuff fast enough.

Both stories also agree on one more thing: the kingdom costs everything. Not everything minus your calendar, or everything except that one corner of your life. Everything. And both stories insist you will be glad.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Identify one thing you are holding that competes with the treasure: a block of time, a comfort, an image you maintain. This week, trade one concrete piece of it for the field. For example, move twenty daily minutes from your feed to his words and prayer, and see which one pays.



Tomorrow: three servants, three bags of money, and the one who buried his.

What are you doing with what you were given?

A man goes on a long journey and entrusts his wealth to three servants: five talents to one, two to another, one to a third, each according to ability. A talent was a staggering sum, years of wages. The first two servants put the money to work and double it. The third digs a hole and buries his.

When the master returns, the first two hear the words everyone wants to hear at the end of everything: well done, good and faithful servant. Notice that the two-talent servant hears exactly the same praise as the five-talent one. The scale was never the point. The faithfulness was.

Then the third servant explains himself: I was afraid, so I hid your talent in the ground. Here, take back what is yours. He did not steal it. He did not waste it. He preserved it perfectly and returned it untouched. And the master's verdict is severe: you wicked and lazy servant. The one thing you were not allowed to do with it was nothing.

Fear posing as prudence. That is the third servant's disease, and it is epidemic. The book never written because it might fail. The apology never offered because it might be rejected. The skill never volunteered, the invitation never extended, the faith never mentioned, the gift buried in the yard where it is safe. Jesus' warning is that this safety is an illusion; the buried life does not stay preserved, it just stays buried.

You have been entrusted with something particular: abilities, experiences, relationships, resources, a story. Nobody else got your exact portfolio. The question of this parable is plain: are you investing it or protecting it?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name the talent you have been burying. Then take one visible risk with it this week: offer the help, share the work, volunteer the skill, make the call, say the true thing. Small risk, real risk.



*Tomorrow: two men walk into the temple to pray, and only one walks home
right with God.*

Two prayers, one honest

Jesus told this story, Luke notes, to people who trusted in their own righteousness and regarded others with contempt. It is short enough to sting.

Two men go up to the temple to pray. The first, a Pharisee, a respected religious man, stands by himself and prays: God, I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.

Every word of it is true. He really does fast. He really does tithe. He really is not a thief. And the prayer is worthless, because it is not actually addressed to God. It is a performance review he is reading to himself, with God as the audience and the tax collector as the measuring stick. Comparison has snuck in and curdled his goodness into contempt.

The second man, a tax collector, one of the collaborators everyone despised, stands far off. He will not even lift his eyes. He beats his breast and prays seven words: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

LUKE 18:14

That verdict shocked everyone listening. The scorekeeper lost. The empty-handed man went home right with God.

This is not a license to stop pursuing goodness; the whole sermon on the mount says otherwise. It is a warning about what happens when your goodness becomes your resume, and other people become your

yardstick. The door to God, it turns out, is exactly your height when you are on your knees.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Pray the tax collector's prayer today, slowly: God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Then add one specific, honest sentence you have been avoiding saying to God. No polish. He can be trusted with the unedited version.



Tomorrow: a father, two sons, and the difference between saying yes and going.

The yes that never goes

Jesus asked the religious leaders a question in the form of a tiny story.

A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, son, go and work in the vineyard today. The son said, I will not. But later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second son and said the same thing. That one answered, I go, sir. And he never went.

Which of the two, Jesus asked, did the will of his father? Even his opponents had to answer: the first.

Then he turned the story loose on them: the tax collectors and prostitutes, the people who told God no with their whole lives and then turned around, are entering the kingdom ahead of you, the professionals of yes who never move.

This parable is the hinge of the entire Jesus 40, so let it read you for a moment. Where are you the second son? Where have you been saying yes, to God, to your spouse, to your kids, to your own conscience, in words, in intentions, in likes and shares and someday plans, without your feet ever leaving the porch?

Jesus pressed this point over and over, because it was evidently the failure mode he feared most in religious people:

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?

LUKE 6:46

And he warned that at the end, some who said all the right words will hear him say, I never knew you, while quiet people who simply did the will of his Father walk in ahead of them. In his kingdom, a late-

blooming no that turns into action outranks a polished yes that never does.

The good news hiding in the story: the first son's ugly start did not disqualify him. Yesterday's no can still become today's went.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Find one standing yes in your life that has never turned into action, one thing you keep telling God, or someone you love, that you will do. Do it today, before the sun goes down. Not the plan. The thing.



Tomorrow we begin eight days on his plainest commands, starting with the one everyone finds hardest.

PART IV

The Commands

DAYS 26 – 33



*His plainest instructions. Forgive without counting, serve
without rank, give without return, and love without
exception.*

Seventy-seven times

Peter comes to Jesus with what he clearly thinks is a generous offer: Lord, if someone keeps sinning against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times? Seven was the number of completeness. Peter is proposing total forgiveness, and probably expecting a medal.

Jesus said to him, Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

MATTHEW 18:22

Then he tells a story to show why. A servant owes his king ten thousand talents, a sum so absurd it is basically the national debt; Jesus is being deliberately comic. The man cannot pay, begs for time, and the king does something no one asked for: he cancels the entire debt. That same servant walks out, finds a colleague who owes him a hundred days' wages, grabs him by the throat, and has him thrown into prison. When the king hears, his question lands like a verdict: should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?

The math is the message. What you have been forgiven is the ocean. What you are holding against them is a bucket. People who have actually stood in the ocean stop billing others for buckets.

Now, be careful what this does not mean, because misunderstanding here wounds people. Forgiveness is not saying it did not matter. It is not trusting someone who remains unsafe, and it is not necessarily reconciliation, which takes two. Forgiveness is a decision you make inside your own heart to release the debt, to take the ledger you have been carrying and close it, so that what they did stops poisoning you. Refusing to forgive is drinking poison and waiting for the other person to get sick.

Seventy-seven times means: stop counting. Live released, and releasing.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write the name. Write, specifically, what they owe you: the apology, the years, the childhood, the money, the marriage. Then write one word across it: RELEASED. Pray one sentence of blessing over them. Some debts release in layers; repeat as needed. Start today.



Tomorrow: his upside-down definition of greatness.

How to be great

The disciples argued about which of them was the greatest. More than once. Jesus finally sat them down and permanently redefined the word:

You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

MATTHEW 20:25-28

Every civilization has organized status the same way: the greater you are, the more people serve you. The pyramid points up. Jesus flips the entire pyramid. In his kingdom, greatness is measured by how many people you serve, not how many serve you.

And this is not just idealism; it happens to be how flourishing actually works. Leaders who serve their teams build things that last. Parents who pour themselves out raise secure children. Communities where people carry one another outlive communities built on competing for position. The servant model wins in the long run. It is just brutally hard on the ego in the short run, because every instinct we have is wired for recognition.

Notice the credential he offers: just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. He never asked anyone to go lower than he went. He touched the untouchable, fed the crowds, welcomed the children,

and, on his last night, as you will see, picked up a towel and did the household's dirtiest job.

Elsewhere he described his own heart with two words no other conqueror of history would choose: gentle and humble. Greatness, it turns out, can carry a basin.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Serve someone today in a way that costs you something and earns you nothing visible: no credit, no thanks expected. For full effect, choose the person you would least naturally serve.



Tomorrow: giving that cannot come back to you.

Give where it cannot come back

The social world Jesus lived in ran on reciprocity, and honestly, so does ours. You invite people who will invite you back. You give where it will be noticed, appreciated, returned. None of that is evil. It is just an exchange, and Jesus wants you to see it clearly, and then step past it:

When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.

LUKE 14:13-14

Because they cannot repay you. He puts the dead end right in the invitation. That is the feature, not the flaw.

He says it even more sharply elsewhere: love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. There it is again, the family resemblance. God's generosity flows to people who will never send a thank-you note. To give with no possible return is to act like your Father.

Un-repayable giving also performs a quiet surgery on the giver. It answers a question you cannot otherwise answer: was my generosity about them, or about what it got me? When repayment is impossible, only the love is left. That is why this kind of giving changes the giver even more than the receiver.

So look at your generosity honestly. How much of it flows toward people who can advance you, thank you publicly, or owe you one? And how much flows quietly downhill, to people who can do absolutely nothing for you back?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Make one completely non-transactional gift today: money, time, food, real attention, to someone who cannot repay you and may never even know it was you. Yesterday's rule applies: keep it secret. Between you and the Father who sees.



Tomorrow: he is asked to rank every command in the Bible, and he answers with two.

The center of everything

An expert in the law asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment, hoping to trap him in the rankings. His answer has been the center of gravity for the moral universe ever since:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

MATTHEW 22:37-40

Look closely at three things.

All your heart, soul, and mind. Not the heart alone, warm feelings, and not the mind alone, correct opinions. Everything you are, aimed in one direction. Love of God, in his teaching, is a total orientation, and it shows up as a life, not a mood.

As yourself. You already know how to do this. You feed yourself, defend yourself, forgive yourself, give yourself the benefit of every doubt. He is not asking you to learn a new skill. He is asking you to widen an existing one until other people fit inside it.

And they hang together. He was asked for one commandment and refused to give fewer than two, because in his teaching they cannot be separated. You cannot love God while treating his children with contempt; the claim simply fails. Everything else, every rule, every prophet, every hard teaching of these 40 days, hangs from these two nails.

He also gave the working formula for the second command, simple enough to run a hundred times a day: in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. Before you speak, decide, reply, or post: is this what I would want done to me?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Live the two commands in the same day, deliberately. This morning, give God ten undistracted minutes, prayer, gratitude, a walk with no phone. This afternoon, apply the golden rule once where it actually pinches: respond to someone the way you would want to be responded to, especially if they do not deserve it.



Tomorrow: the log in your eye.

The log in your eye

It may be the most quoted line Jesus ever said, and the most misused: judge not. He said it, and he meant it, but look at the whole teaching:

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

MATTHEW 7:1-3, 5

Notice he never says specks do not matter, or that you can never help someone with one. He says: sequence. Log first. Then, seeing clearly, you may gently help with the speck. The target of this teaching is not moral discernment. It is the self-exempting critic: the person who audits everyone's marriage while theirs burns, who rages at everyone's ethics while quietly cutting corners.

And he adds a law of physics to it: the measure you give will be the measure you get. Contempt boomerangs. So does grace. You are, every day, choosing which one comes back to you.

Watch him live this. A crowd once dragged a woman caught in adultery in front of him, stones in hand, and demanded a verdict. He said: let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. One by one, oldest first, they walked away. Left alone with her, he asked, has no one condemned you? No one, sir. Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin again.

Hold that whole scene, because he holds two things we keep splitting apart: no stone, and no pretending. Mercy without approval of the harm. Truth without contempt. That is what seeing clearly looks like.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Catch yourself mid-judgment once today, and you will have the chance. Before finishing the thought, name your own log in that same category. Then flip the energy: one silent prayer for them, one correction for you.



Tomorrow: the master no one admits to serving.

You cannot serve two masters

Jesus talked about money constantly, more than almost any other single subject, because he could see what it does to a heart. His teaching on it comes down to a diagnosis and a choice.

The diagnosis:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

MATTHEW 6:19-21

That last line is not a command; it is an observation, and it works like gravity. Your heart follows your treasure, automatically. Show him your bank statement and your calendar and he can tell you what you actually worship, whatever you say you believe.

The choice:

No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and wealth.

MATTHEW 6:24

Notice he does not say money is evil. Money is a fine servant and a terrible god. As a tool, it feeds families, builds schools, blesses strangers. As a master, it is never satisfied, always anxious, and it whispers the same lie at every income level: a little more and you will be safe. He told a story about a rich man whose land produced so much that he tore down his barns to build bigger ones, told his soul to relax

for years to come, and died that night. Watch out, Jesus said, for life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

When they tried to trap him with a tax question, he asked whose image was on the coin. Caesar's, they said. Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. The coin bears Caesar's image, so let it go where it belongs. But you bear God's image. You know where you belong.

The test of who is master is simple: when your money is threatened, what happens to your peace?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Run the audit. Open your bank statement and your calendar and write one honest sentence: based on the evidence, my treasure is _____. Then make one reallocation this week: a standing gift set up, a planned purchase turned into generosity, an hour redirected.



Tomorrow: the cost he never hid.

Take up your cross

Jesus attracted enormous crowds, and at the peak of his popularity he did the opposite of what every movement builder does. He turned to the crowd and raised the price:

If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

MATTHEW 16:24-26

His listeners knew exactly what a cross was. It was not a metaphor or a piece of jewelry. It was the empire's instrument of execution. He is saying: following me will cost you your self-rule, your comfort as king, maybe everything. He never buried that in the fine print. Small is the gate, he said, and narrow the road that leads to life.

But look at the logic underneath, because it is not a call to misery. It is an equation. Those who grasp their life, curate it, protect it, hoard it, lose it anyway; every grasped life ends the same way. Those who spend their life on something greater than themselves find it, full and overflowing, and death cannot take what has already been given away. Then he asks the question that has ended a thousand delusions: what will it profit you to gain the whole world, the money, the applause, the whole feed of it, and forfeit your soul?

Remember the man who sold everything for the field, in his joy. Same transaction, seen from two sides. Day 22 showed the treasure. Today shows the price tag. Both are true, and the treasure is worth it.

Deny yourself does not mean despise yourself. It means dethrone yourself. Someone is going to sit on the throne of your life. He is asking for the seat.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name the one thing you have been gripping hardest, a comfort, a plan, an approval you cannot lose. Write it down, then physically open your hands over it and pray: not my will, but yours. You will hear those words again on Day 37, from him, at midnight, in a garden.



Tomorrow: the King tells you exactly where to find him.

Where he said he would be

Near the end of his teaching, Jesus described the final judgment of all nations, and he built the entire scene around one shocking idea: the King has been hiding in plain sight all along.

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

MATTHEW 25:35-36

The righteous in the story are confused. Lord, when did we ever see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger? They were not keeping score; they had simply fed people who were hungry because the people were hungry. And the King answers:

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.

MATTHEW 25:40

Jesus locates himself, personally, in the hungry, the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned. Serve them and you have served him. Ignore them and you have ignored him. Nobody in the scene is asked what they believed about theology. The measure is mercy made concrete.

The quiet terror of the passage is on the other side: the ones who failed committed no great crime. They just never saw. He told another story like it: a rich man feasted daily while a poor man named Lazarus lay at his gate, hungry and covered in sores, and the rich man simply never

noticed him until it was too late. Notice that the poor man is the only character in any parable Jesus gave a name. The world had it backwards about who mattered.

Comfort makes suffering invisible. That was true then; our comforts are just better upholstered. Everyone reading this has a Lazarus somewhere near their gate.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Pick one, and put it on your calendar today: feed someone, this week, a meal, groceries, a gift card with a note. Or visit someone, sick, elderly, isolated, or write the letter to the person in prison or crisis. Do not donate at a distance this time. Get close enough to see a face.



Tomorrow we enter his final week. It begins with a king on a donkey.

PART V

The Final Week

DAYS 34 - 40



*A king on a donkey, a basin and a towel, a garden at
midnight, a cross, and the freedom waiting on the other
side.*

The king on a donkey

The last week of Jesus' life opens with what looks like a victory parade, and every detail of it is a deliberate statement that almost everyone missed.

When Roman generals entered a city in triumph, they rode warhorses, surrounded by soldiers and the spoils of conquest. Power announcing itself. Jesus entered Jerusalem, at Passover, with the city swollen with pilgrims, riding a borrowed donkey, exactly as the prophet Zechariah had written five centuries earlier: your king comes to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.

He was making a claim, unmistakable to anyone who knew the scroll: I am the promised king. And a correction, unmissable to anyone watching: I am not the kind of king you are expecting.

The crowds spread cloaks and palm branches on the road and shouted Hosanna, which means save us now. They wanted a liberator to drive out Rome and restore national glory. He had come to liberate them from something that had ruled humanity far longer than Rome: sin, fear, hatred, death. And his weapon would not be an army. It would be a cross.

Here is the hard part of this day. When he turned out to be the wrong kind of king, the crowd turned. Many of the same voices shouting Hosanna on Sunday were shouting something very different by Friday. People wanted a messiah who would defeat their enemies and validate their side. He refused, and refuses still, to be the mascot of anyone's agenda.

Which presses a question on all of us who like him: do I want Jesus to change my heart, or to endorse my positions? Do I want to follow him,

or to recruit him? The donkey answers before we do. He comes humble, on his own terms, as the king he actually is.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Write down one area, politics, a grudge, a plan, an identity, where you have wanted Jesus on your side more than you have wanted to be on his. Then write under it: he is the king, not the mascot. Let him lead that area this week.



Tomorrow: the day he flipped the tables.

The day he flipped the tables

If your picture of Jesus is only gentle, today will stretch it. Days after the donkey, he walked into the temple courts and did the most physically confrontational thing in his entire public life.

The outer court was the one place designed for everyone, including foreigners and outsiders, to come near God. Merchants and money changers had turned it into a market. Pilgrims who had traveled for weeks were forced to exchange their money at exploitative rates and buy approved sacrificial animals at inflated prices. Religion had become a tollbooth, and the poor were paying it.

Jesus overturned the money changers' tables and drove the sellers out:

My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.

MATTHEW 21:13

Understand his anger, because it tells you what he loves. He was not against commerce; he was against commerce squatting on sacred ground. He was not having a bad day; the gospels say he saw it the evening before and came back in the morning, which means this was deliberate. His fury was aimed at one thing: barriers built between ordinary people and God, in God's own name, for profit.

And mark the courage. He did this in the capital, during the crowded feast, in the power center of the very people who wanted him dead, in the week he knew they would succeed. Meekness, it turns out, was never weakness. It was strength that chose its moment.

The tables ask us a question too. Where have things that should be sacred, in your life, your work, your community, quietly become

transactions? And is there a barrier you have the power to lower for someone else?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Do one act of holy courage today: question the unfair practice, say the hard true thing kindly, make the amends that reopens a door, or remove one obstacle standing between someone and grace. Pick the one that made your stomach tighten just now.



Tomorrow: his last night, a basin of water, and one new command.

The basin, the towel, and one new command

On the last night of his life, hours before his arrest, Jesus gathered his closest friends for a final meal. Knowing, John writes, that the Father had given all things into his hands, he did something with all that authority that no one in the room could process. He got up from the table, tied a towel around himself, poured water into a basin, and began washing his disciples' feet.

Foot washing was the job of the lowest servant in the household. Nobody's rabbi did it. And sit with this detail until it staggers you properly: Judas was still in the room. Jesus knew exactly what Judas would do before midnight, and he knelt and washed his feet anyway. He did not only teach love your enemies. He bathed the feet of his betrayer.

Then he stood up and gave them his final command, the one he chose for the last night:

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you
have love for one another.*

JOHN 13:34-35

By this everyone will know. Not by your arguments, your correctness, or your credentials. The identifying badge of his people, chosen by him, is love of the kind he had just demonstrated on his knees with a towel.

That same night he tied it all together: if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And he made a promise for every day after he was gone, that they would not be walking this road on their own power:

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

JOHN 14:26

A helper, a teacher, a reminder, from the inside. Those who love him and keep his word, he added, will find that the Father and the Son make their home with them. Not a visit. A home.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Wash a foot. Find the low task nobody wants, the dishes, the mess, the tedious errand, the thankless job, and do it for someone today. If you can bear it, do it for someone who has hurt you. That is the family trademark.



Tomorrow: midnight in a garden, and the hardest prayer ever prayed.

Not my will, but yours

After the meal, Jesus led his friends to a garden called Gethsemane to pray. What happened there is the most human moment in the entire record.

He took Peter, James, and John, and told them plainly: I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and stay awake with me. Then he went a little farther and threw himself on the ground. Luke, a physician, adds a detail: his sweat became like great drops of blood, something that can actually happen to a human body under extreme anguish. He knew precisely what was coming; he had predicted it three times.

And he prayed:

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.

MATTHEW 26:39

Read both halves. The first is total honesty: if there is any other way, I want out. Faith did not make him pretend. The second is total trust: not what I want but what you want. This is not defeat and not resignation. It is a man who has looked directly at the worst and chosen, freely, to trust his Father through it rather than around it. Every hard prayer you will ever pray fits inside this one.

He came back and found his friends asleep. Three times. Could you not stay awake with me one hour? Keep watching and praying, he told them, for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. He knows. He said it while sweating blood.

Then the torches came. A mob with swords and clubs, led by Judas. Peter drew a blade and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Put

your sword back, Jesus said, for all who take the sword will die by the sword. And then, in the last recorded act of his hands before they were bound: he touched the man's ear and healed him. His final miracle, spent on a member of the mob that came to arrest him.

That is who he was when it cost the most.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Name the hardest thing in your life right now, specifically. Pray both halves of his prayer over it: your honest desire, then, not what I want but what you want. Tonight, trade ten minutes of scrolling for ten minutes of watching and praying.



Tomorrow: the cross, and the words he chose while dying.

Father, forgive them

Everything Jesus taught for three years was now put to the ultimate test, in his own body. Betrayed by a friend, abandoned by the rest, convicted in a rigged trial on false testimony, beaten, mocked, spat on, and nailed to a Roman cross to die in public. If ever a human being had the right to hatred, it was this one, then.

Listen to what actually came out of him. As they drove the nails, Luke records his prayer:

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

LUKE 23:34

Not after the pain faded. During. Unrequested, unearned, mid-torture, he did the thing he had taught on the hillside: he loved his enemies and prayed for his persecutors. This is why his teaching carries a weight no philosophy ever has. He paid full price for every word of it.

Beside him hung a criminal who, with nothing left to offer and no time to reform, simply asked: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. The answer came without conditions: truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. The last person he welcomed before dying was a convicted thief with empty hands. The door really is that open.

He also cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, praying the words of an ancient psalm from the depths. He did not float above the suffering. He went all the way into it, including the feeling of abandonment, which means there is no darkness you can enter where he has not been.

Then, early on the third day, women came to the tomb to anoint a body, and were met with a sentence that split history:

He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.

MARK 16:6

The empire killed him, religion condemned him, a grave sealed him, and none of it held. Death did not get the final word. That is the claim at the center of everything: what God raises cannot be destroyed, and the life he offers runs deeper than the grave.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Two things. First: name the place in your life that feels dead, a relationship, a hope, a part of you, and ask him for resurrection there, plainly. Second: offer one costly forgiveness today, even if only within your own heart, as an echo of his. Father, forgive them is now a family prayer.



Two days left. Tomorrow: how to find out, for yourself, whether any of this is true.

Run the experiment

Thirty-nine days ago you started something most people never do: you went to the source. Today, Jesus tells you how to verify it.

In the middle of a heated argument about his credentials, where his teaching came from, and by what authority, Jesus refused to settle it with a debate. He offered a test anyone could run:

Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.

JOHN 7:17

That is an experiment, and the laboratory is your life. He does not ask for blind belief, and he does not ask you to feel certain first. He says: do the will, and you will know. The proof is not at the end of an argument. It is on the other side of obedience.

Try forgiving the person who does not deserve it. Try the second mile, the secret gift, the honest yes, the blessing prayed over an enemy, the towel and the basin. Then watch what happens in you, and around you. For two thousand years, across every culture and century, the people who have actually run this experiment keep reporting the same result: it holds. Not a life without storms. A life that stands in them.

Which is exactly the picture he chose to end his greatest sermon. Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, he said, is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds beat on that house, and it did not fall. Everyone who hears and does not act is like a man who built on sand, and when the same storm came, it fell, and great was its fall.

Both men heard. The storm came to both. The only difference in the story, the only one, is doing. Forty days of hearing means nothing by itself. You already knew that, which is why every one of these days ended the way it did.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

You know the one. Somewhere in these 39 days was the challenge you skipped, the one that named you. Go back to it and do it within 24 hours. That one is your rock, waiting to be built on.



Tomorrow: the last day, and the truth that sets you free.

Free indeed

Forty days ago, you read a promise and started walking:

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

JOHN 8:31-32

Continue. Know. Free. You have now lived inside that sentence for forty days. So before anything else, go get the paper from Day 1, the sentence about where you stood with him. Read it. Then write today's sentence next to it. That distance, however small, is the experiment reporting its first results.

When Jesus first said those words, the crowd bristled: we have never been slaves to anyone. His answer cut to the bone, and it explains what these forty days have really been about:

Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

JOHN 8:34, 36

He was never talking about Rome. The chains he came to break are the ones we forge ourselves: resentment that runs our thoughts, anxiety that runs our nights, greed that is never satisfied, contempt that curdles our relationships, the exhausting performance of being seen. You have spent forty days loosening every one of those chains, one small act at a time. That loosening has a name. Free indeed.

And here is the beautiful surprise at the end of the road. After forty days of hard commands, second miles, opened hands, and closed ledgers, listen to how he describes the load: come to me, all you who are

weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. How can all of that be light? Because of what it takes off you. Scorekeeping is heavy. Anxiety is heavy. Image management, resentment, and self-justification are crushing. His way costs everything and weighs almost nothing. The ones who endure to the end find that out.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

The final one has three parts.

Keep one. Choose one practice from these forty days and keep it for life. Just one, kept, will outgrow forty admired.

Run it again. This challenge has no finish line; it is a circuit. Whenever you drift, and you will, come back to Day 1 and walk it again. It reads differently every time, because you are different every time.

Give it away. You received this freely; give it freely. Ask someone this week: have you done the Jesus 40? Then send them to thejesus40.com and walk it with them. Teaching them to live everything he commanded, he said, is how the whole thing spreads, and he attached a promise to it that has steadied his people for two thousand years: I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Not if you perform well. Always.

It has been an honor to walk these forty days with you. The invitation that started on a lakeshore two thousand years ago is still open, and now you know exactly what it means:

Follow me.





Have you done the Jesus 40?

Freely you have received; freely give.

MATTHEW 10:8

THEJESUS40.COM