



SESSION THREE

The

JESUS

Question

Lord, catch me off guard today. Surprise me with some moment of beauty or pain. So that at least for the moment I may be startled into seeing that you are here in all your splendor, always and everywhere, barely hidden, beneath, beyond, within this life I breathe. Amen.

• ——— Frederick Buechner ——— •

IF YOU COULD PERFORM ONE OF JESUS' MIRACLES, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

WHY? WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVE FOR THE ONE YOU CHOSE?

HOW CLOSE CAN YOU GET TO PRODUCING THE OUTCOME OF THAT MIRACLE WITHOUT PERFORMING THE MIRACLE?

3. THE JESUS QUESTION

Every time I start thinking seriously about Jesus, I come to the same conclusion: *I don't know him anywhere near as well as I should.*

Jesus is the one who changed everything. Lots of people talk about changing the world, but *Jesus did.*

All of human history revolves around him. It is impossible to measure his impact on the world. And your life will *never really make sense* until you place *Jesus* at the center of it.

Jesus made the lame walk, taught the simple, set captives free, gave sight to the blind, fed the hungry, healed the sick, comforted the afflicted, and afflicted the comfortable. Then, in the ultimate act of love, Jesus laid down his life for us - dying on the cross for our sins. Then he did something that nobody had ever done before, and nobody has done since - he rose from the dead.

The more I get to know Jesus, the more I get to know my true self. And this is what I discover:

I am the *lame* that Jesus makes walk.

I am the *simple* that Jesus patiently teaches.

I am the *captive* that Jesus wants to set free.

I am the *blind* that Jesus wants to give sight to.

I am the *hungry* that Jesus wants to feed.

I am the *sick* that Jesus wants to heal.

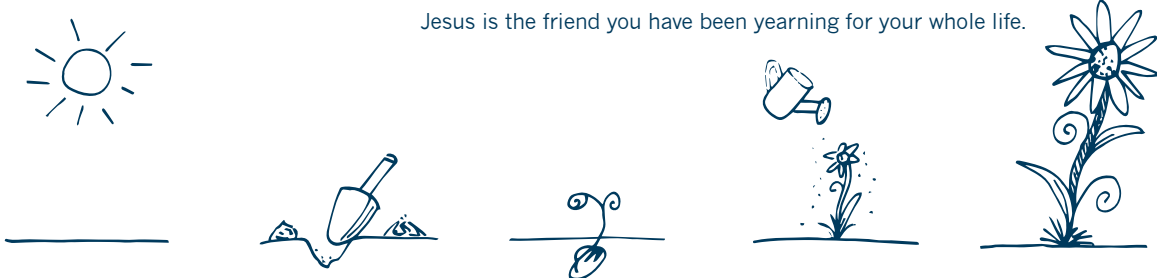
I am the *afflicted* that Jesus wants to comfort, and at other times,

I am the *comfortable* that he wants to afflict.

Jesus is the *healer of my soul . . . and my soul needs healing.*

I think if you are honest with yourself, you will discover that *your soul needs healing too.*

Jesus is the friend you have been yearning for your whole life.



3.1 WHO IS JESUS?

Who is Jesus? The first thing to get really clear about is that Jesus walked the earth. This is indisputable. The culture tries sometimes to present Jesus in the same category as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. This is ludicrous. You are smarter than that. We need to start thinking about Jesus on a deeper level than the popular culture.

How do we know Jesus actually existed?

The most comprehensive presentation of Jesus' life is in the Gospels, and the Scriptures clearly establish Jesus as living at a particular time and place in history. They are not vague about when he lived or where he lived. They go to great lengths to establish his birth in the context of world history.

But the best evidence to establish that Jesus walked the earth is not in Christian writings, but in secular writings and other religious traditions.

Secular historians of his time wrote about Jesus, and Jewish writers agree that Jesus walked the earth at the same time and place that the Gospels establish.

It is also worth noting that the other major world religions all acknowledge Jesus. This is important because all these other religions are rivals of Christianity. The easiest way for these rival religions to disprove Christianity would be to demonstrate that Jesus never actually lived. But they are unable to do that.

Jesus is not a figment of Christian imagination. He lived in a place and time, walking the earth just as you do today.

But let's go deeper.

Who was Jesus?

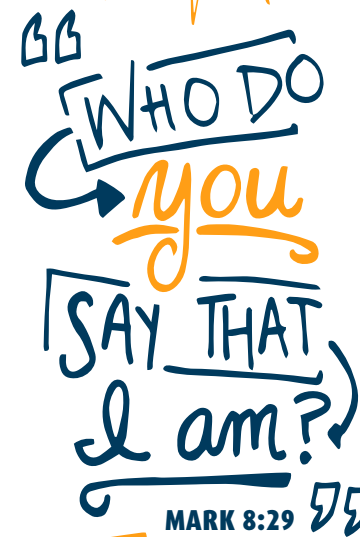
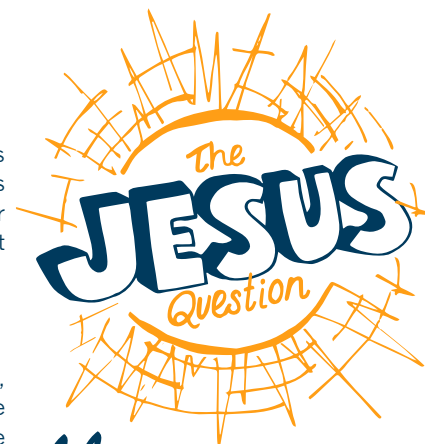
One day as Jesus was walking down the road with his disciples, he asked them two questions.

The first question: "Who do people say that I am?"

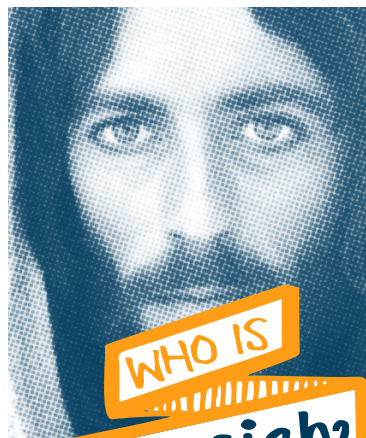
His disciples replied, "Some say you are John the Baptist returned from the dead; others say you are Elijah, or one of the other prophets."

The second question: "Who do you say that I am?"

I call this **The Jesus Question**, and everyone has to answer it for themselves. You cannot avoid the question—not answering the question is an answer.



IF JESUS CAME TO YOUR HOUSE TO VISIT TODAY AND ASKED YOU THIS QUESTION, WHAT WOULD YOUR ANSWER BE?



WHO IS
THE MESSIAH
-?-

THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT, REFERENCES ARE MADE TO THE MESSIAH, THE HOLY ONE OF GOD, WHO WOULD COME AND SAVE GOD'S PEOPLE. AS CHRISTIANS WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH.

Notice Jesus didn't ask the disciples who they thought he was the first day he met them. By the time he asked, they had been at his side for almost three years.

So perhaps before you answer the Jesus question, we should take another look at Jesus, who he is, why he came, what he really taught, and what all of that means to you in the modern world.

The culture wants to reduce Jesus to just a *nice guy*. This is tragic. So, who is Jesus?

There are many ways to answer the question. He is a Galilean. A Jew. A carpenter. An itinerant preacher. A miracle worker. The Son of God. The King of Kings. The Christ. The Savior of the world. The chosen one. The Messiah.

C. S. Lewis, one of the great Christian writers of the twentieth century and the creator of the Narnia series, says we only really have three choices when it comes to Jesus: He is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Messiah he claims to be.

Other major world religions acknowledge Jesus as a great teacher or a great prophet—which seems very accommodating and tolerant—but there are several problems with this position.

First, Jesus never claimed to be a great teacher or a great prophet. He claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. If he isn't the Messiah, he is either a liar or a lunatic—but not a great teacher and prophet. *These things are incongruent.*

Let's get clear. If Jesus is not the Messiah, *he is the biggest liar who ever lived.* You cannot be the biggest liar in history and still be a great teacher and prophet. These things are incongruent.

And more than being a liar, if Jesus is not the Christ, he perpetrated *the biggest fraud in human history.*

There is the option that he was a lunatic, that he was mentally ill. Asylums are full of people with the "Messiah complex," but there is no historic record of anyone of any credibility claiming to be the Messiah before Jesus, and I suspect you cannot name someone who has claimed to be the Savior of the world since. The Messiah complex is a post-Jesus phenomenon.

If Jesus was a lunatic, could the early Christians have kept that a secret? The scale of the conspiracy that would be required to conceal Jesus as a lunatic makes it more than improbable. And if he was just a lunatic, they could have easily proved that and simply locked him up. There would have been no need to crucify him, as he would have been

easily discredited. If they could have proved he was a lunatic, they would have had no reason to feel threatened by him, and no reason to kill him. But he was considered by both the secular and the religious authorities of his time to be much more dangerous than a simple lunatic.

Who is Jesus? He is the Galilean carpenter who became an itinerant preacher, who turned water into wine, made the lame walk and the blind see, walked on water, multiplied a handful of loaves and fishes to feed thousands, got under the skin of secular and religious leaders of the day, was executed on a cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and three days later rose from the dead. Jesus wasn't a great teacher; he was the greatest teacher. He wasn't a great prophet; he was the greatest prophet. But more importantly, Jesus is the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.

Now let's take a look at what all this means to you.

WHAT IS A PROPHET?

A PERSON WHO ANNOUNCES THE WILL OF GOD.

Miracle Worker
THE CHRIST THE MESSIAH
KING OF KINGS Galilean
SON OF GOD THE CHOSEN ONE JEW
ITINERANT PREACHER
SAVIOR of the World
CARPENTER

discussion questions

1. HOW DID THIS SESSION CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE JESUS?

2. HOW DID JESUS CHANGE THE WORLD?

3. THE JESUS QUESTION IS, "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?" (MARK 8:29) IF JESUS CAME TO YOUR HOUSE TO VISIT TODAY AND ASKED YOU THIS QUESTION, WHAT WOULD YOUR ANSWER BE?



SIN MAKES US SELFISH. THE MORE WE SIN, THE MORE WE FOCUS ON OURSELVES— ONLY OURSELVES, THINKING ALWAYS ABOUT OURSELVES. THE MORE WE SIN, THE LESS CAPABLE WE BECOME OF DOING GOOD— BEING GENEROUS, CHARITABLE, AND VIRTUOUS.

JESUS WANTS TO TURN YOUR LIFE UPSIDE DOWN, AND THEN IT WILL BE RIGHT SIDE UP.

3.2 *the* **PROBLEM** *and the* **SOLUTION**

Watch the evening news and you will quickly come to the conclusion that the world is a bit of a mess. I don't know anyone who would say the world is moving in a great direction. Parents are concerned about the world their children will inherit. Grandparents try not to think about it because it makes them too anxious. They have seen enough of the change to recognize just how disturbing the trends are.

How did the world get to be a mess? Do you want the *truth* or some sugarcoated answer?

Lots of people could give you lots of different reasons, answers, and excuses, but most of them would focus on one aspect of the mess. They will talk about suffering and death, the collapse of the family, poverty and economic turmoil, or environmental breakdown. But these are all just symptoms. What's the disease?

If you get the flu, your symptoms may be a sore throat, a hacking cough, a fever, a runny nose, and aches and pains. But the only way to fix the symptoms is to cure the disease.

Suffering and death, the collapse of the family, poverty and economic turmoil, environmental breakdown, and whatever else you want to add to this list are all just symptoms.

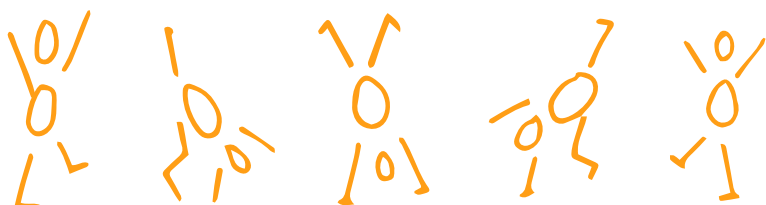
But let's get back to the question: How did the world get to be a mess?

The big answer to the question, the macro answer, is that people are sinful and they turn their backs on God.

Sin is the disease. And the truth is, sin makes us unhappy.

God never intended for us to suffer and die. His original idea was for us to live in paradise forever. God's original plan was for ever-reigning peace between God, man, and the environment, and harmony between all men and women (CCC 374–379, 384, 400).

Suffering and death are a direct result of sin.



In Session 2 we talked about Gideon from the book of Judges. This whole book of the Bible is a series of stories that illustrate the Israelites' turning away from God, and then turning back to God. Each time they embraced sin and turned away from God their lives became miserable. Each time they turned their backs on God they fell into another form of slavery.

Sin always leads to slavery of one kind or another.

But each time the Israelites turned back to God they experienced peace and prosperity.

The same thing happens to us. When we turn away from God our lives become miserable. Sure, there may be pleasure to be had in the moment, but the pleasure is fleeting, it's not sustainable, and after the pleasure of sin has faded there is just the misery it inevitably leaves behind. And every sin makes the world a little bit more of a mess.

Sin and evil are real. And they are not something that is "out there." They are in you and me. We each have the capacity for tremendous virtue and good, but we also have the capacity for sin and evil. These things are in us and we have to come to terms with them if we are going to live life to the fullest the way God wants us to.

So, what is sin?

Sin is usually spoken about as a behavior that is wrong or immoral. And it is, but the only way to truly understand sin is in the context of the relationship between God and humanity.

"God is infinitely good and all his works are good." (CCC 385) It is out of his goodness that God created us in his image and for good (Genesis 1:27–31).

Sin is more than just bad behavior. It is the rejection or destruction of something good. You cannot reject or destroy something that is good without rejecting *goodness itself*. God is goodness, and so, every sin is in some way a rejection of God. This is why the most devastating dimension of sin is separation from God (CCC 385–390). Sin breaks down our relationship with God, puts obstacles between us and Him.

We have a long history of turning away from God, offending God, and rejecting his goodness—this is where Jesus enters the story.

The central claims of Christianity are that God became man in Jesus, that he died on the cross to atone for our sins, and that he rose from the dead to liberate us from death. But Jesus also came to show us **the best way to live**. Nobody can teach you more about the best way to live than Jesus.

**— BE HONEST —
WITH YOURSELF:
SIN MAKES YOU
UNHAPPY.**

"I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE."

—Jesus Christ

THE TRINITY

God, the Father, is the first person of the Trinity. The Father is kind, merciful, and loving, and he gives in abundance. By calling God Father, the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the origin of everything, and that he is goodness and loving care for all his children. (CCC 239)

Jesus, the Son, is the second person of the Trinity. The Son is one person with two natures: divine and human. He is true God and true man. (CCC 464)

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. He is the one whom Jesus promised the Father would send to guide and encourage us. When you think of it, the Holy Spirit is incredibly practical. How often in your life do you need guidance and encouragement?

In the Scriptures God is revealed as the Father, who created us (Genesis 1); his Son, who redeemed us (Matthew 1); and the Holy Spirit, who inspires us (Acts 1). The whole history we find in the Bible is the story of God's ongoing concern for the human family, and for each of us as his children.

Try this. Read the Gospel of Matthew. As you read about what Jesus taught, ask yourself, are these the solutions to the mess the world is in today? I think you will discover that Jesus has the antidote to the world's mess. Jesus is the solution.

What does this mean to you and me?

It is easy to say that the world is a mess. But the thing is, the more I become aware of who I really am, the more I discover that I'm a bit of a mess too. I do things every day that don't help me to become the best-version-of-myself. And most of the time I don't actually want to do these things. Just like Paul wrote, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do"(Romans 7:19).

I am capable of incredible good, but sometimes I turn my back on God and his goodness. Sometimes I do it because I am stubborn and other times because I am lazy. Sometimes I turn my back on God and his goodness because the right path just seems too hard, and other times because I am selfish and just want what I want.

The truth is, I am a sinner, and sinners need a Savior. The world is a mess and I am a mess, but Jesus came to fix the mess. That's good news.



If you could have lunch with Mary, what would you ask her about Jesus?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. IN MANY WAYS THE WORLD IS AN INCREDIBLE PLACE, BUT IN LOTS OF OTHER WAYS IT IS A MESS. IN WHAT WAYS IS THE WORLD A MESS?

2. HOW DID THE WORLD GET TO BE SUCH A MESS?

3. WHAT IS SIN? HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOU?

THE JESUS PROPHECIES

There have been lots of famous people throughout history. Neil Armstrong was famous for being the first man to walk on the moon. Rosa Parks was famous for standing up for justice. Pablo Picasso was famous for his paintings. Mozart and Beethoven were famous for their music. Christopher Columbus was famous for discovering the Americas. Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, and Austen were famous for their writings. But all their fame came during their lives or after they died. And it was largely the result of what they did.

Jesus was famous before he was born, and he was famous because of who he was—the long-awaited Messiah. Lots of people get written about while they are alive or after they die, but Jesus was written about hundreds of years before he was born.

ISAIAH 11 PROPHECIED that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. **MATTHEW 1:1** shows that this prophecy was FULFILLED.

GENESIS 49 PROPHECIED that the Messiah would be born of the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. **MATTHEW 1:** FULFILLED.

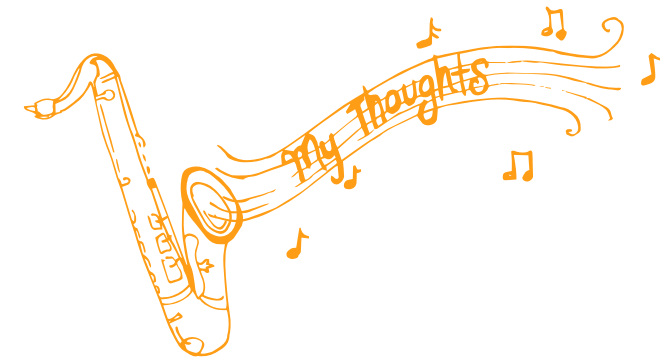
MICAH 5 PROPHECIED that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. **MATTHEW 2:** FULFILLED.

ISAIAH 7 PROPHECIED that the Messiah would be born of a virgin mother. **LUKE 1:** FULFILLED.

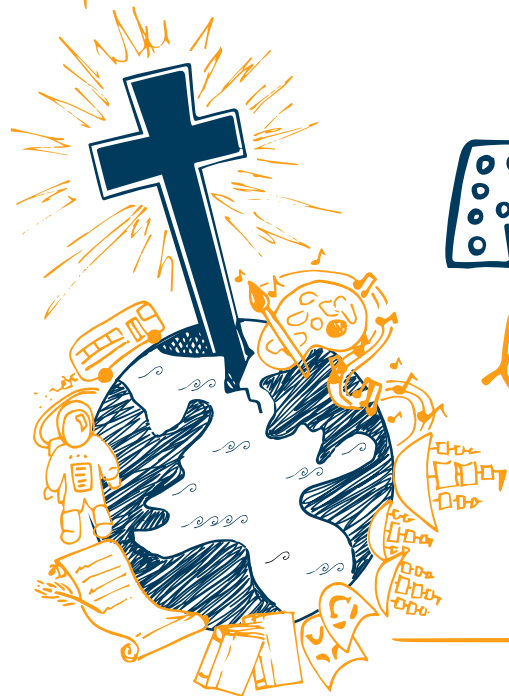
PSALM 72 PROPHECIED that kings would come and adore the Messiah. **MATTHEW 2:** FULFILLED.

PSALM 41 PROPHECIED that the Messiah would be betrayed. **MATTHEW 26:** FULFILLED.

ZECHARIAH 11 PROPHECIED that the Messiah would be sold for thirty pieces of silver. **MATTHEW 26:** FULFILLED.



Jesus was
FAMOUS
before He was
BORN!



IF YOU DECIDED TO COMMIT YOUR WHOLE LIFE TO DOING GOOD, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

AGAPE IS SELFLESS, SACRIFICIAL, UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. THIS IS THE LOVE WE ALL YEARN FOR AND USUALLY GO LOOKING FOR IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES. JESUS LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR OTHERS—FOR US. THAT IS A MONUMENTAL LOVE, A GENEROUS LOVE THAT PLACES THE GOOD OF THE OTHER PERSON ABOVE ANY SELFISH DESIRE.



3.3 JESUS WAS A *Radical*

If you really want to work out who Jesus is and discover what that means for you and your life, you need to delve deeply into his life and teachings.

Sometimes when you get familiar with something, you stop seeing it for what it really is. Jesus and his teachings have been a victim of this familiarity. Every Sunday we go to church and we hear a reading from the Gospel. Over time this can create the illusion that we know the Gospel, when in truth, most of us have barely scratched the surface of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Once we really get into his life and teachings we discover quickly that *Jesus was a radical*. If you haven't encountered Jesus the radical lately, I'd encourage you to *take another look*. His life was radical. His teachings were radical. His love is radical. His invitation is radical.

His teachings were radical two thousand years ago, and they are just as radical now. Radical as they may be, they contain the answer to the question we began to explore in Session 1: What is the best way to live?

Even if you could prove to me indisputably that Jesus never existed, there is no God, and there is no life after death, no Heaven to look forward to, I would still believe that the teachings of Christianity (and those of Catholicism in particular) are the best way to live. I am absolutely convinced that there is no surer path to happiness in this life than embracing the teachings of Jesus Christ as set forth by the Catholic Church.

The radical nature of Jesus' life, teachings, and love is a constant source of inspiration. Let's explore some examples.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:43-44)

This was radical teaching two thousand years ago. What was the teaching before this? An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:34, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21).

Jesus came along and with one sentence on some dusty road or in a crowded synagogue wiped away the justification of revenge, and the moral, ethical, and spiritual development of humanity took a right turn.

This teaching is still radical two thousand years later. When was the last time you went out of your way to love someone who despises you, opposes you, or makes your life difficult?

And we are all persecuted in different ways by different people. Bullying is persecution. Excluding people is persecution. Ridicule, sarcasm, and negative humor are all persecution. When we are persecuted, our first reaction is probably not to pray for the person who is persecuting us. Our natural reaction is most likely some form of revenge. But Jesus wants to raise us above our natural reactions, and teach us to respond with grace.

In preparing the way for Jesus, John the Baptist said, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." (Luke 3:11)

Think about that when you look in your wardrobe to get dressed tomorrow. Then consider that there are seven billion people on the planet today, one billion don't have enough clothes and more than two billion of them are hungry just for bread. On our watch!

Speaking of radical, you probably have lots of people talking to you about chastity and encouraging you not to have sex before marriage. In our hypersexual culture these messages might seem radical, but Jesus' teaching is much more radical.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

Guys, think about it—how often do you look at a girl lustfully? Ladies, how often do you look at a guy lustfully? Jesus said that to look at someone lustfully is to commit adultery in our hearts. That's radical.

Jesus calls us to a freedom that gives us the self-control to direct every aspect of our being—including where we turn our gaze and what we ponder when we look at something or someone.

These are just a few of the many examples of Jesus' radical teachings. But what was most radical was what he taught us about *love*. He taught us this not only with words, but also with his life.

The world portrays love as a selfish thing, there for our own pleasure and satisfaction. Jesus presents *agape*. Agape is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love. This is the love we all yearn for and usually go looking for in all the wrong places. He laid down his life for others—for us. That is a monumental love, a generous love that places the good of the other person above any selfish desire.



John the Baptist was an itinerant preacher who lived around the time of Jesus. His main message is found at the beginning of the third chapter of Matthew's Gospel: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:3) Some people thought John the Baptist may have been the Messiah, but he made it clear that he was not, explaining that he had come to prepare the way for the Messiah. He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 3:11) John baptized Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17). He also upset many of the leaders of his time by speaking out against their injustice and hypocrisy. John the Baptist was beheaded under orders from Herod, who had him killed to impress a woman. Have you ever done something to impress a girl (or a guy)?

John's central message of repentance is always needed. To repent means to turn back to God. Have you turned away from God in some area of your life? Is it time for you to turn back to God?

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." John 14: 5-7

KNOW IT: What three things did Jesus say he is?

THINK ABOUT IT: Would you be a-better-version-of-yourself if you followed Jesus' WAY, accepted his TRUTH, and embraced his LIFE?

LIVE IT: Allow Jesus to direct what you do sometime today!

But Jesus doesn't just love that way; he calls us to love in the same way. (I told you he was radical.)

On Sunday at Mass, after the Gospel has been read, I ask myself, "If I lived this one Gospel reading 100 percent, how much would my life change?" The answer is the same every week: radically.

There is a gap between my life and the life God invites me to live. There is a gap between the person I am and the person God created me to be. I have a long way to go. But I have started and I hope you will join me in the journey.

Most people think they are pretty good Christians. I even know non-Christians who think they are pretty good Christians. But compared to what? Compared to Jesus? No, most people don't use that as their measuring stick. Compared to the Gospel? Most people don't use that as their measuring stick either. Most compare themselves to what they see on television or to their peers. In most cases today this can be setting the bar very low indeed.

If you really want to explore the question of the best way to live, I recommend you get yourself a Bible and just start by reading the Gospel of Matthew. Read it slowly. Think about what you're reading. This way you will save yourself a lot of heartache and discover the path that leads to lasting happiness in this life and eternal happiness with God in the next life.

Along the way you will also discover the real Jesus, and you might discover he is very, very different to what you had previously thought.

ask yourself...

IF I LIVED THIS ONE Gospel READING 100%, HOW MUCH WOULD MY LIFE CHANGE?

RADICALLY.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO TAKE THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS SERIOUSLY, ALLOWING THOSE LESSONS TO DIRECT THE WAY THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES?

2. HOW DO THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHALLENGE YOU TO RADICALLY CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

3. WHAT IS AGAPE LOVE? HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY MOVIES, MUSIC, AND THE MEDIA PORTRAY LOVE?



Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

² he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul. He leads me in paths
of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest
my head with oil, my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in
the house of the Lord for ever.



**"DO NOT BE AFRAID."
—JESUS CHRIST**

3.4 SECOND ☆ CHANCES

We spoke earlier about God's dream for you to become the-best-version-of-yourself. We also spoke about how sometimes we want to do the right thing, but we find ourselves doing the complete opposite.

You may be too young right now, but there will come a time in your life when you will try to overcome a bad habit but cannot. You will try and try again, but over and over you will fail. And then you will discover that some things cannot be done merely by willpower and your own strength and abilities. On this day you will discover your need for **grace**.

What is grace? Grace is the help God gives us to respond to his call, and to do what is good and right.

Grace gets us beyond the Paul dilemma: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

Ask an alcoholic who has tried to stop drinking and he will tell you that he tried and tried on his own, and failed. Finally, he surrendered to God, and *grace* allowed him to quit drinking and stay sober.

We all come up against bad habits we cannot shake at different times. These are the great intersections of our lives, the moments when we choose to surrender to God's grace or hold on stubbornly to our old self-destructive ways.

The truth is, you cannot become the-best-version-of-yourself on your own. You need grace. The fullness of the invitation is to become the-best-version-of-yourself in Jesus.

Without grace nothing is possible.

With all the talk of sin in the previous section, you may not be feeling so good about yourself. That's good. Seriously, that's really good. It means that you are in touch with your conscience. This is a sign of spiritual life.

Fortunately as Christians we believe in the forgiveness of sin. This is where grace and sin intersect.

We all need a fresh start from time to time.

One of the greatest sources of grace is the sacrament of **Reconciliation**. I am not going to give you a long lecture about it. I am just going to encourage you to go to Reconciliation . . . and to go regularly.

I try to go once a month. I need the grace. I need to take an honest look at myself. I need to be held accountable; it brings the best out of me. I need the spiritual coaching and guidance that I get in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

It's good for me and I love the peace that fills my heart when the priest says the words of absolution:

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The peace that comes from having our sins forgiven is a peace the world cannot give us. Do you have that peace? If you don't, maybe it's time you made a good confession.

VIRTUE IN FOCUS


Joy [jɔɪ]
A state of happiness that is independent of situations or circumstances

- What brings you joy?
- Who is the most joyful person you know?
- What can you do to increase your capacity for joy and to bring more joy to others?



GRACE IS THE HELP GOD GIVES US TO RESPOND TO HIS CALL AND TO DO WHAT IS GOOD AND RIGHT.



 How do you think Mary felt when people mistreated Jesus?

D·I·S·C·U·S·S·I·O·N
QUESTIONS

1. GRACE IS THE HELP GOD GIVES US TO RESPOND TO HIS CALL AND TO DO WHAT IS GOOD AND RIGHT. IN WHAT PART OF YOUR LIFE DO YOU NEED GOD'S GRACE MOST TODAY?

2. HOW DO YOU IMAGINE YOU WOULD BE DIFFERENT IF YOU WENT TO RECONCILIATION ONCE A MONTH?

3. WE ALL NEED TO BE FORGIVEN BY GOD AND OTHERS, AND WE ALL HAVE PEOPLE WE NEED TO FORGIVE. IN THE OUR FATHER WE PRAY, "FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US." WHOM IS GOD CALLING YOU TO FORGIVE TODAY?



3.5 DECISION point

JESUS IS THE HEALER OF MY SOUL



THE GOSPEL OF Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is one of the four Gospels and the first book of the New Testament. Scholars believe it was written between AD 70 and 110, and that it was written by a Jewish author, for a Jewish Christian audience. The way Matthew tells the story of Jesus draws on many symbols from Jewish tradition to emphasize that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

The Gospel of Matthew is my favorite. Maybe it is because my name is Matthew. Maybe it's because so many times I decided I would read the New Testament from start to finish and didn't get much past Matthew, so it is the Gospel I am most familiar with. But I think the reason is because the images, parables, and practicality of Matthew's Gospel resonate with me deeply.

In the ninth chapter we come across the story of the call of Matthew. It simply says:

"As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him." (Matthew 9:9)

Matthew woke up and went to work as a tax collector that day just like he did on any other day. He didn't know his whole life was about to change. That's how God works. Our God is a God of surprises.

Jesus' invitation to Matthew is one he makes to us all. There is no great fanfare; he simply says, "Follow me."

Will you?

Will you follow Jesus?

Maybe you're not ready to make that decision. That's OK. But if that is the case, you have a responsibility to learn more about who Jesus is, so that you can decide to follow him or not. If you are really not sure if you want to follow Jesus, read the Gospel of Matthew, and get to know him more.

But don't just avoid the question. God doesn't like that. We read in the book of Revelation, "You are neither hot nor cold... So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16)

Like Matthew the tax collector, today might feel like a regular day for you. But it isn't. Deciding to follow Jesus—or not to follow Jesus—is one of the biggest **decision points** you will come to in your life.

Invite Jesus into your heart and into your life, decide today to follow him, and many years from now, you will look back and know that today was a turning point in your life.

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. HOW IS THIS SESSION CALLING YOU TO CHANGE?

2. HOW DO THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHALLENGE YOU TO RADICALLY CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

3. WHAT IS AGAPE LOVE? HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY MOVIES, MUSIC, AND THE MEDIA PORTRAY LOVE?

ONE SOLITARY LIFE

BY JAMES ALLAN FRANCIS

He was born in an obscure village
The child of a peasant woman
He grew up in another obscure village
Where he worked in a carpenter shop
Until he was thirty when public opinion turned against him

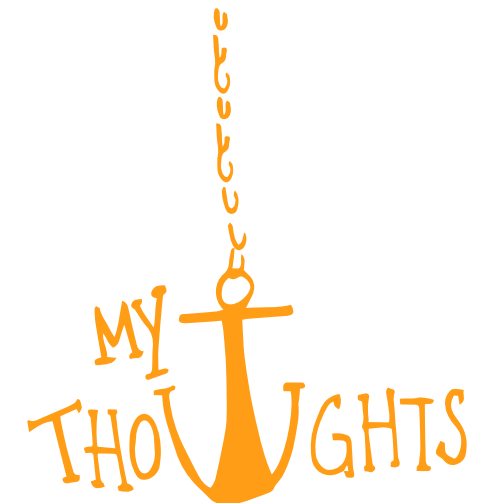
He never wrote a book
He never held an office
He never went to college
He never visited a big city
He never traveled more than two hundred miles
From the place where he was born
He did none of the things
Usually associated with greatness
He had no credentials but himself

He was only thirty three

His friends ran away
One of them denied him
He was turned over to his enemies
And went through the mockery of a trial
He was nailed to a cross between two thieves
While dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing
The only property he had on earth

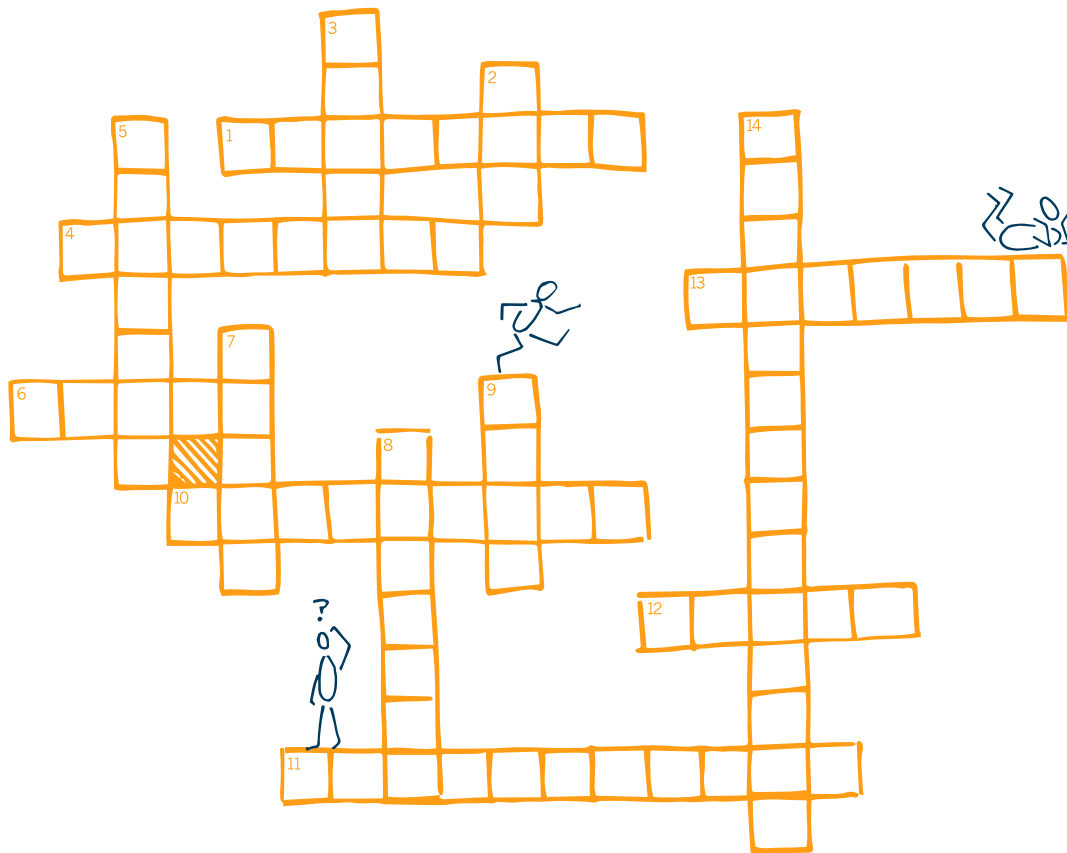
When he was dead
He was laid in a borrowed grave
Through the pity of a friend

Nineteen centuries have come and gone
And today Jesus is the central figure of the human race
And the leader of mankind's progress
All the armies that have ever marched
All the navies that have ever sailed
All the parliaments that have ever sat
All the kings that ever reigned put together
Have not affected the life of mankind on earth
As powerfully as that one solitary life



THE JESUS QUESTION

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

1. Purity and self-control in thought, conduct, and intention in the area of sexuality
4. Sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse
6. God wants to flood our hearts with
10. A state of pain or distress
11. Being treated unfairly because of your beliefs
12. The help God gives us to respond to his call, and to do what is good and right
13. The first four books of the New Testament that share the life and teachings of Jesus Christ

DOWN

2. To offend God by rejecting what is good, right, and true
3. Selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love
5. The new and counter cultural teachings of Jesus were
7. The long-awaited Messiah
8. Devoid of connection to things religious or spiritual
9. Profoundly immoral
14. The Sacrament God gives us for the ongoing forgiveness of our sins



SESSION FOUR

The PRAYER Process

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardships as the pathway to peace, taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that you will make all things right, if I surrender to your will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen.

•————— *The Serenity Prayer* —————•