

Northlake Church Family,

Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus walked on this earth and created a movement that would be felt throughout all eternity. Jesus wasn't just a prolific teacher, religious leader, or a good moral person. He was God in the flesh, the Son of God, the coming Messiah, the Savior of the world. He was on a mission to redeem the lost and build the Kingdom of God, which makes His call to follow Him even more staggering.

Jesus called unto Himself disciples who would participate in God's redemptive mission on this earth. The marks of a disciple of Jesus are very clear and simple. A disciple of Jesus is one who has decided to follow Jesus, is being changed by Jesus and is on mission with Jesus. Yep, that simple! Jesus never complicated the requirements to be His disciple. Though the call is simple, it doesn't mean that it is without hardship, trials and a cost. When rubber meets the road, many will decide that the call to follow Jesus may be too difficult, therefore they become complacent, settling into a mediocre life that never truly makes an impact for eternity. They drift away from living a life of significance, on mission with Jesus, to a life of apathy resulting in a life lived in vain.

***Northlake Church loves Jesus and brings gospel hope to every man, woman and child on the North Shore.*** This prevailing statement is what I pray will define Northlake. It is biblical, bold and requires us to have a strong belief that God can do all things. Here at Northlake we have no desire to play church, we want to be the church - the people of God who love where we live and are on a kingdom mission in our community.

I pray bold prayers over our church. May God stir something new in your walk with Christ so that your confession might be like that of C.T. Studd, ***"I pray that when I die all of Hell will rejoice that I am out of the fight."*** With a perspective like that, we can leave a Christ-honoring legacy that will last for eternity.

As we begin this new year we will spend time as a church family discovering who we are, what God is calling us to do for Him and what it will require from us. I am petitioning to each of us, that over the next 21 days we pursue Jesus like never before. Will you consider dropping your bucket into the well of Christ for the next 21 days with the expectation that He can do more than we could ever ask or imagine?

To help you, we have provided this three-week devotional. Throughout this devotional, we will look at the life of Jesus, His early disciples and how their example interacts with our life right here on the North Shore. Be diligent with this devotional. You will get out of it what you put into it. The guarantee is that being disciplined and committed to the process will grow you in your walk with Christ. When we have desire to be transformed and we couple that with discipline, God will work mightily. In the words of AW Tozer, ***"Desire without discipline will always breed disappointment."***

Make the decision today to prioritize an unhurried, uninterrupted time with Jesus the next 21 days. Take it all in! Let God do a great work in your life and through your life. Northlake, God has a great adventure in store for all those who are willing to walk in risky obedience. Let's together take that walk!

With Much Love,

Pastor Denny

## **Day 1: The Ancient Days**

***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” - John 1:1-4***

The uniqueness of Jesus' birth is that He did not originate at His birth. The Gospel of John clearly portrays Jesus as the eternal Word and the Word that was with God and was God. Jesus has always been. He will always be. Jesus was not created, rather He was incarnated. God Himself stepped into time, wrapped in flesh as the Son of God, Jesus. What a mystery with profound implications.

This mystery was never completely hidden. In fact, people were awaiting the arrival of this Messiah. Hundreds of years before Jesus would ever be laid in a manger, the Old Testament prophets prophesied that the eternal Savior of the world would come and dwell among us. The one from ancient of days would step into the present.

***“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” –Micah 5:2***

Before Jesus ever learned to take His first steps on the dusty grounds of this earth, He was walking on the mission that began in eternity. Before Jesus ever drew into His lungs oxygen for life, God's ultimate mission to give life to a broken world was set in stone since the beginning. Jesus would come and be the life-giver. The prophet Isaiah speaks to this mission:

***“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5***

People were longing and anticipating the day the Messiah would come. They were in desperate need of a Savior. At the right time, God sent His Son Jesus to come and bring hope, salvation and life.

Consider this church: First, God's redemptive plan was laid in place before the foundations of the world were established. Second, even today people are in great desperation for life, hope and salvation. The world longs for an answer to their brokenness and despair. Lastly, know that God's plan of redemption includes your neighbor, co-worker, friends and family. We don't need to go to foreign soils, every day we have an opportunity to step into the mission of the ONE from the ancient of days to bring hope and life transformation to every man, woman and child on the North Shore.

God is committed to the redemption of the world. He demonstrated this commitment by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the great redeemer.

**Will you commit to join His mission and step into participating in God's redemptive plan?**

## Day 2: The Forerunner

***“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” John 1:6-8***

During the time of Jesus, the people of Israel lived in great oppression. The Romans had all but taken over the entire known world and had occupied the land of Israel by the time Jesus stepped into history. The Jewish people, stripped of their land and living under a powerful regime, had very little hope on the horizon. Though the people had optimism that the Messiah and King that was prophesied to come would truly come, it did little to help them cope with their everyday plight. Under oppression and dejection, they saw a better future – a King who would reign for their good.

The practice of sending an envoy ahead of a dignitary was customary in the ancient days. We still see some resemblance of that today, though in different ways. When our president pays a state visit to a foreign nation, there are all sorts of preparations. Scores of envoys and hundreds of FBI, CIA and Secret Service agents are sent ahead to prepare for the president’s arrival. This practice is as old as the establishment of the monarchy.

As the people of Israel waited and anticipated the coming of their King to bring liberation, God had made preparations to send a forerunner, an envoy, to prepare the people. Hundreds of years prior to the coming of Christ, God told Israel that He would send a forerunner to prepare the way:

***“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” Isaiah 40:3***

***“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 3:1***

Scripture tells us that this prophecy of a forerunner was fulfilled through the prophet John the Baptist. In the gospels we learn of the birth of John the Baptist (*Luke 1*), his peculiar life (*Matthew 3*) and his message (*Matthew 3, Mark 1, and Luke 3*). John the Baptist, the forerunner, called people to repentance and baptism of water. He warned them that the Kingdom was near, the awaited King was on His way. He pointed their hearts to the One, Jesus, who would bring redemption and salvation.

As you imagine yourself getting up in the morning to head to work, to visit the local coffee shop or make your way to school, ask this question: **how have I prepared the way for the message of Jesus to penetrate the hearts of every man, woman, and child on the North Shore?**

Our forerunner is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is actively involved in softening and preparing the soil of the heart to see the beauty of the gospel. **How can you prepare the way and be a forerunner?** It is through the active practice of prayer . Pray that the Holy Spirit will begin now working in the hearts of those around you. Pray that the ground will be fertile for planting the seeds of the good news of Jesus.

There is so much God wants to use HIS church to accomplish and much preparation is required. However, the greatest preparation you can make is on bended knee, praying that God will change the lives of many. Pray that God opens up doors of ministry and pray that God will transform our church in the process.

### Day 3: The Favored One

*“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’” Luke 1:26-28*

There is no one who would have been more shocked regarding the news that the Messiah was soon to come than Mary. Can you imagine young Mary at the age of approximately 13 being told that she was going to be the one to give birth to the Son of God? Though the angel Gabriel told her she was the “favored one,” that was one favor she was probably not expecting or wanting. The Gospel of Luke gives us the story:

*“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.’ And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God... nothing is impossible with God.’” Luke 1:26-35, 37*

The young virgin Mary from the town of Nazareth was going to usher in the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Why Mary? After all, she was just a normal teenager from the town of Nazareth, and people believed “nothing good can come out of Nazareth.” (*John 1:46*) It was from this humble beginning that God chose to bring forth the humble, suffering servant Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, Mary is called the “favored one.” I am not sure Mary saw this situation as favorable. Mary was engaged to Joseph and a virgin. Yet, now she is going to be pregnant with a lot of explaining to do. Can you imagine that? At the same time, it is something unique to be called God’s “favored one.”

So many of us want God’s favor and even pray to be considered a “favored one.” Before you get too far down the road in that prayer, consider for a moment the cost Mary endured to be God’s favored one. For Mary, God’s favor looked like a complete interruption. The wedding preparations would have to be placed on hold. God’s favor looked like an inconvenience in Mary’s life. Not sure you have heard, but growing a human being in your womb for some 9 months is very inconvenient. Lastly, God’s favor in Mary’s life caused her to be a person of ill-repute. I am sure she was shunned by the community and the topic of every conversation.

We must be careful when we pray for God’s favor, because His favor always comes at a cost. **As we continue to pray as a church for God’s unique purposes are you asking God to bless and have favor over our efforts?** If so, be prepared to pay the cost. There will be interruptions, there will be inconvenience. The question you will have to wrestle with:

**Are you willing to pay the cost that is demanded for God to use you greatly?**

Many seek the favor of God, but few can carry the cost to live in God’s favor.

## Day 4: The Good News

*“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Luke 2:8-11*

Can you imagine the scene? Shepherds huddled up in the dark, cool night around a camp fire watching over their sheep when suddenly breaking the silence came the voice of an angel saying, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news...” and what good news it was! The irony to the story is that the great news of the birth of Jesus - the Messiah, the King - was delivered to lowly shepherds and not the esteemed religious or political figures of the time.

Shepherds were outside the circle of the religious respectability. Their occupation kept them from being able to engage in observing the religious rituals and requirements of the Jewish faith. They were the least likely to receive the birth announcement. Meanwhile, close by in the city of Bethlehem, the city of David, young Mary had given birth to Jesus inside of a cave surrounded by livestock. Scripture tells us the facts of Jesus’ birth:

*“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7*

Nothing about either of these scenes resembles an appropriate setting for the birth of royalty, the entering into the world of the Son of God. However, everything about it is quite appropriate. The life of Christ was characterized by humility and servanthood. Mary and Joseph in the stable and outcast shepherds being the first to hear of Jesus’ birth seem exactly right when you consider the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus spoke from His own mouth:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4:18-19, cf. Isaiah 61:1-3*

Jesus came to declare the good news that He was the one to set the captives free, bringing healing and liberation of the oppressed. Ultimately Jesus will do all this and more, when He reigns as King on this earth. But in this moment, Jesus was reaching deep into the crevices of humanity, to all people, offering the good news of spiritual life, eternal life, based upon His completed sacrifice on the cross. This is the good news: freedom from sin, freedom from death and walking in the newness of life in the treasures of the gospel.

Make no mistake, Northlake Church is committed to delivering the good news of Jesus to every man, woman and child on the North Shore. The greatest message for the people of our community is that in Christ there is freedom and life. **The question you must contemplate is do I really cherish the good news of Jesus? Do I treasure the gospel? Do I fully understand what God has done on my behalf through His Son, Jesus Christ?** John Calvin speaks of it in this respect:

*“We maintain, that of what description so ever any man’s works may be, his is regarded as righteous before God simply on the footing of gratuitous mercy, because God, without any respect to works, freely adopts him in Christ, by imputing the righteousness of Christ to him, as if it were his own.”*

Today, let the promise of the gospel wash over you. The good news the shepherds heard that lonely night in the field is the same message that has captured your heart and the same message we will proclaim in our to those in our community that are in desperate need of great news.

## Day 5: The Gifts

*“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” Matthew 2:10-11*

Have you ever been in that position where you need to buy a birthday gift for someone and you think, “What gift do you give to someone who has everything?” Have you ever wondered if the wise men truly understood who they were visiting? Do you think they had any idea that the gifts they were bringing were at one time created by the voice of this young boy, Jesus?

Scripture tells us that wise men (Magi) came from the far east, following a star to the place of Jesus’ birth. The new star these men saw in the sky signaled to them that a new king had been born. The whole world at this time was waiting expectantly for a new king that would bring great deliverance. Being aware of the Jewish hope of a Messiah, they must have associated the new star with that hope, therefore, leading them to Jerusalem. The story of the wise men visiting Jesus is told well in the book of Matthew:

*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;” Matthew 2:1-3*

*“And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.’ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.” Matthew 2:8-12*

Once the wise men get to the house of Jesus they bow and present Him with gifts. We are told they gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts were the only gifts that would have been appropriate to give to royalty during the time of Jesus. These gifts were costly and precious. The wise men gave Jesus the best they had, because they knew they were gifting a king.

The question: **What gifts are you bringing to the King?** Your gifts are not going to be gold, frankincense or myrrh. The only appropriate response when you are in the presence of a king is to give all you have. **Are you willing to give all you have next to step into the King’s mission?** I pray earnestly that Northlake will not be loiterers but laborers for the kingdom, giving everything we have. I pray we never live in regret and we don’t waste a single moment. Paul spurs us on in scripture:

*“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...” Colossians 3:23*

As a church, let’s do our best and bring excellence. Step into the task, the mission and offer everything you have to the people of our community and to your king, Jesus Christ.

## Day 6: The Father's Business

***“He said to them, ‘How is it that you searched for Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’ But they did not understand the word which He spoke to them.” Luke 2:49-50***

In the gospels, we only have a record of Jesus visiting the temple twice in His early age, prior to the time of His earthly ministry. The first recorded visit to the temple was also recorded in Luke 2:

***“When the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.” Luke 2:22***

According to the Law of Moses the mother would appear at the temple for purification, offer up a sacrifice and present the child to the temple 41 days after giving birth (*Leviticus 12*). At this point in the narrative of Jesus' life, scripture does not tell us much. We know that due to the slaughter of innocent children by Herod in attempts to kill Jesus (*Matthew 2:16-18*), Joseph took Mary and Jesus and fled to Egypt (*Matthew 2:13-15*). Once the coast was clear and Herod died, Joseph had a dream telling him it was safe to return to Nazareth (*Matthew 2:19-23*). It's at this point we pick up the story with Jesus visiting the temple:

***“When He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When the days of the feast were complete, as they returned, the Child Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know of it. But supposing Him to be in their company, they went a day’s journey. Then they searched for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for Him. After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were amazed. And His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You dealt with us like this? Look, Your father and I have anxiously searched for You.’ He said to them, ‘How is it that you searched for Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?’ But they did not understand the word which He spoke to them.” Luke 2:42-50***

This is such an interesting passage, seeing Jesus being left behind in the temple. This wasn't mere parenting neglect by Joseph and Mary leaving Jesus back at the temple. In those days, especially during times of pilgrimages to Jerusalem for a feast, people would travel in large groups. Children would hang out with the children and adults would keep the traveling party moving. Once they made a pit stop and family units started to gather back together, they realized Jesus was nowhere to be found. Could you imagine the panic as they retraced their steps all the way back to Jerusalem?

Finally, they find Jesus in the temple sitting among the religious scholars, amazing all those who were listening. Mary and Joseph were even amazed and possibly frustrated that they were even having to look for Him. Jesus' response was very simple: “Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?”

Jesus was all about the Father's business. The Father had sent Jesus on His mission to seek and save the lost - to bring salvation to the broken. Even as Jesus prayed in the garden prior to His arrest and subsequent death on the cross, we see Jesus praying, “yet not My will, but Your will be done.” (*Luke 22:42*)

Church, we want to be committed to the Father's business of bringing life transformation through the gospel to every man, woman and child on the North Shore. Being on mission with Jesus means submitting to “His” will, not our own. There is always a temptation to do our own thing or to have our own agenda. What would it look like for you to be sold out to the Father's business, no matter the cost?

## Day 7: The Strength To Stand

*“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.” Luke 4:1-2*

There is narrative of Jesus’ life in the gospels that goes silent. From the time we see Jesus in the temple at the age of 12, until we read of Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, we have a time period of Jesus’ life in which we have no account. We can assume that Jesus was growing in stature and working side by side with His father Joseph learning the trade of carpentry. Then when Jesus was about 30 years old the gospels pick up the story once again. At this point Jesus begins to make His preparations for the launching of His public, earthly ministry.

After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the forerunner, He immediately returns to the Jordan and being led by the Spirit He goes into the wilderness for forty days to fast and pray. It is in the moments of physical weakness Jesus is faced with the test and temptation of Satan.

*“For forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, He was hungry. The devil said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone.”’ And the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.”’ And he took Him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.” Luke 4:2-13*

This story is very peculiar, but offers each of us many lessons. Satan is always looking to take advantage of our apparent weaknesses. In this case, it was Jesus’ physical weakness and His hunger. Satan even tries to use pride and boasting to get Jesus to fail by tempting Jesus to prove He was the Son of God. But Jesus never buckled. Instead, Jesus held firm to the truths of God and esteemed God’s greatness, rather than His own.

Satan will always be ready and willing to test our strength. He looks for our weakness and he always perverts the truth to convince us to crumble in standing strong. There is no doubt that even this past week, Satan has challenged you, tested you, tempted you. The last thing Satan wants is to see you fulfill God’s call on your life. **The question you have to consider is, “do I have the strength to stand?”**

Be encouraged that you have everything you need to withstand the testing of Satan and stay the course. Scripture actually gives us the promise:

*“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” I Corinthians 10:13*

My prayer for you is that you will have the strength to stand firm in the face of challenges. Be full of the Holy Spirit, armed with the sword of truth and hold onto the promise of God’s faithfulness.

## Day 8: The Call

***“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men’. And Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.” Mark 1:17-18***

As you venture through this week and stay disciplined to this devotional guide, we are going to take a highlighted look at Jesus’ earthly ministry with His disciples. For the past week, we have spent our time looking at the early life of Christ and His preparation for the mission that God the Father gave Him - to seek and save the lost. As we turn our attention to His earthly ministry and the time He spent with His disciples, there will be many lessons we will learn about being a disciple of Jesus.

Our first stop, is the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. When Jesus called His first disciples to follow Him, He had already begun His earthly ministry. Jesus had already accomplished His first miracle of turning water into wine (*John 2:1-11*), His first cleansing of the temple (*John 2:13-25*), explained the nature of the new birth to Nicodemus (*John 3:1-21*), spoken to the Samaritan woman at the well (*John 4*) and was already performing healings (*John 4 and 5*). At this point we find Jesus back in Galilee at the pinnacle moment where He calls Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave everything and become fishers of men:

***“Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed Him. And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed Him.” Mark 1:16-20***

Could you imagine going about your everyday life and a famous leader walks up to you and calls you to leave everything and follow Him? This was a pretty dramatic scene when you think of it in that regard. Peter, Andrew, James and John willingly dropped their nets and followed Jesus. They left everything on the sands of the Sea of Galilee and their lives were forever changed. This decisive moment began the movement of everyday people doing extraordinary things for Jesus Christ.

### **You have to wonder, what would my response be to such a call?**

Well the reality is, Jesus makes the same call today. As Christ-followers, Jesus is always calling us to be a disciple and follow Him. Being a disciple of Jesus begins when we make that decision to follow Jesus. There are no prerequisites. The call is inclusive and for anyone willing to drop their nets.

Though there is great simplicity in the call to follow Jesus, there is always a cost. The commitment to follow Jesus is a decision that has to be refreshed everyday. When we wake up, we have the decision to either live in the mundane of life or live a life of meaning and significance for Christ. We can decide to live for the everyday or live for the eternal.

**As you walk with Jesus this week, consider if you are willing to follow Him by dropping the nets of your own agenda, desires and goals and picking up the cross of Christ to follow Him fully.** The prayer is that each of us who call Northlake home will re-affirm our commitment to follow Jesus.

## Day 9: The Power of His Words

*“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men’. And Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.” Mark 1:17-18*

All throughout the gospels, we see the authority and power of Jesus being demonstrated in His actions and by His words. From the very beginning of time, when Jesus spoke creation into being and throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus used the power of His words. With His words He brought calm to the sea, healing to the broken, and life to the lifeless. Jesus’ words carried weight and it was His words that instructed His disciples.

Early in His earthly ministry He demonstrated the power of His words and it brought astonishment to all those observing:

*“And He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at His teaching, for His word possessed authority. And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, ‘What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!’ And reports about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.” Luke 4:31-37*

Jesus spoke with great authority. His words were distinct from the other religious leaders of the time. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark, the observation is made saying, *“And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22).*

It was as if Jesus’ words resonated in the hearts of the listener. The truth that Jesus spoke with authority was self-validating. When the words of Jesus are put into practice they lead to peace, harmony, victory and love.

Jesus’ words gave hope. Jesus would say, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:3-5)* Jesus’ teachings were counter-cultural, giving instruction to a new way to live life - a life that would swim upstream against the currents of culture. Jesus’ words are transformative when embraced and lived out.

As Jesus called His disciples and journeyed life with them, He would have no doubt brought life transformation in the lives of His followers. **One aspect of being a disciple of Jesus is to allow our lives to be changed by Jesus.** Not only does a disciple follow Jesus, but we are being changed by Jesus. Even today Jesus brings transformation to our lives through the power of words.

Scripture tells us of the transforming power of God’s word:

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12*

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” II Timothy 3:16-17*

God’s word is instrumental to our spiritual vitality and bringing the renewal of life that is set before us as a disciple of Jesus. God’s word is profitable, it teaches, reproves, trains and gives comfort through its promises. God’s word aligns our

lives with His purposes. Ultimately God's word is one of the graces given to us for us to experience the fullness of life in Christ. **As a disciple of Jesus, are you allowing God's word to confront you and change you? Are you allowing the words of God to disrupt your complacency and inject new thoughts and behaviors?**

Jesus not only wants us to follow Him, He wants to change us. May we feast on the word of God as our sustenance for life. Martin Luther once said, "The soul can do without everything except the word of God, without which none at all of its wants are provided for."

## **Day 10: Mission**

***"And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'" Luke 5:31-32***

When you think about Jesus as a leader of a movement, it is pretty astounding. Crowds of people would gather to hear His teachings, be witness to His miracles and many were willing to drop everything they had to follow Him. You never see Jesus use force or exercise His authority over others to cause them to follow. No, there was something different in Jesus that would galvanize people to follow Him. Napoleon once said, "I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him." Jesus never used brute force to get others to follow Him. Rather, what we observe is the message, miracles, and the life of Jesus were so compelling that it apprehended the curious and made them into followers.

But what mission was Jesus inviting people to engage in? In Luke 5, we read the account of Jesus' exchange with some of the religious leaders of the time. The setting of the conversation is pretty remarkable in itself:

***"After this He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And He said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything, he rose and followed Him. And Levi made Him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at His disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'" Luke 5:27-32***

Get the scene! Jesus is walking through town and He approaches Levi, who we also know as Matthew. The Greek language actually gives us a better understanding of Jesus' approach to Levi. What we learn is that Jesus didn't just stumble upon Levi, in fact Jesus took the initiative and searched Levi out. The very act of Jesus approaching a tax collector would be a cultural faux pas and considered a major indiscretion for a Jewish person. The reason being was that tax collectors were Jewish men who were contracted by the Roman government to collect taxes on their own people. The

normal practice would be that the Jewish tax collector would not only take the taxes that were to be rendered to Rome, but additionally they built in heavy margin so that they could fill their own pockets. Tax collectors were thought of with great disdain. These were Jewish men unfairly taking money from their own countrymen. They were considered traitors in the eyes of the Jewish people, therefore you kept your relational distance. But Jesus approaches Levi, calls him and Levi drops everything to follow.

Before Levi is to follow Jesus, he throws a giant house party and invites all of his friends to meet Jesus. I can only imagine that Levi's circle of friends was filled with the outcasts of society. In fact, the passage tells us that they were "tax collectors and others." The religious leaders who were observing the festivities described the crowd as "tax collectors and sinners." This is a very messy situation. But what we observe from Jesus is that He is not afraid to walk into messy situations. A good lesson for us is that when we follow Jesus it is going to get messy.

The onlooking religious leaders who were observing Jesus eating and drinking with the sinners did not appreciate the beautiful mess; rather, they condemned it. Eventually, these religious leaders make their way to Jesus' disciples and ask, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" A few interesting observations: first, why didn't the religious leaders approach Jesus? Why did they approach His disciples? Second, it is obvious that Jesus' disciples were not fully engaged in the festivities, maybe they kept their distance and were waiting for Jesus outside the doorway because they knew that fraternizing with sinners was not acceptable in the eyes of many. Either way, we see Jesus excusing Himself from the party, and approaching the religious leaders and answering their question, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." With these simple words Jesus describes for us the very nature of His mission and the mission of His followers. Jesus was on mission to seek and save the lost, to bring redemption and salvation to those who are in desperate need. The mission of Jesus is so compelling that it almost demands a response to follow.

When you look at the events leading up to Jesus' encounter with Levi, we observe Jesus reaching out and ministering to the marginalized in society. Whether it was tax collectors, the Samaritan woman at the well (*John 4*), the leper (*Luke 5*), or the paralytic (*Luke 5*), Jesus was bringing hope to hopeless people. Ultimately the mission that Jesus was on would lead Him to the cross to bring the offer of hope and salvation to all people.

All around us every day on our campus, in our neighborhood, at our work place there are spiritually marginalized people who are in desperate need of the great physician, Jesus Christ. As a disciple of Jesus, we follow Jesus on mission. Many times, that means like Jesus, we walk into the messiness of other people's lives, not to be their savior but to introduce them to the Savior.

**Like Levi, are you willing to drop everything and follow Jesus on mission? Are you willing to step out of your comfort zone and into the mess?** If we are to follow Jesus, we keep the mission in front of us and engage with those in desperate need of the simplicity of the good news of Jesus.

## **Day 11: Servanthood**

***"This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him.'" John 3:2***

Jesus was referred to by His followers as "Rabbi", or teacher. Though we know that there are many more dimensions and titles to the person of Christ, His early followers saw Him as their Rabbi. In the first century we find a remarkable

relationship between a Rabbi and the student or follower. Rabbis were teachers who had been given the authoritative role to interpret God's word for the living of a righteous life – defining what behavior would or would not please God. A Rabbi would select students and invest their lives into their disciples also known as their “talmidim.” The idea was that disciples would follow so closely behind their Rabbi that they would live “in the dust of the Rabbi.”

If a Rabbi chose you to be a disciple, you would willingly submit to the authority of the Rabbi in all aspects of life. Unlike our many modern-day discipleship programs and processes there was no training guides or agendas. Rather it was a continual daily relational living experience. In the dynamics of this intimate learning community, all of a disciple's life was observable by the Rabbi. There was always an expectation by the disciple that the Rabbi would question and challenge the student's thoughts and actions for the purpose of developing discernment in all areas of life. Essentially the purpose and goal of being a disciple would result in the emulation of the Rabbi.

This often included imitating the Rabbi's diet, his mannerisms, preferences and behaviors. Could you imagine the tutorship of Jesus' disciples trying to live in the footsteps of Jesus? A tough task, but not a mystery.

The gospel accounts are not only a look at what Jesus accomplished during His earthly ministry, but also the lessons Jesus taught His disciples along the way. Jesus demonstrated to His disciples a different way of life that would result in furthering the mission of God and the advancement of the Kingdom. Even today, we read through the gospels, and as disciples we see characteristics that God requires of us. For example, servanthood. Jesus taught His disciples that to be a servant is the greatest aspiration.

In the gospel of Mark, we see Jesus foretelling His impending death on the cross and immediately afterward we observe James and John making the audacious request to sit by Jesus' right and left hand. Basically, they desired to be exalted with Jesus. Which, by the way, this would have been the second instance that Jesus had to teach them on this issue (*Mark 9:33-37*). Look how Jesus, the Rabbi, responds:

***“And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ And they said to Him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your glory.’ Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’ And they said to Him, ‘We are able.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at My right hand or at My left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to Him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.’” Mark 10:36-45***

Jesus the Rabbi gave one of the great lessons to His students that would serve them well in the future. While many try to claw their way to the top of the ladder, Jesus taught His disciples to go low and be a servant. The greater aspiration for followers of Jesus is to see ourselves as servants to all. Even Jesus reminded His disciples in this life lesson, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” Jesus needed His early disciples to understand this lesson and live by it. Soon, Jesus would be departing the earth, leaving His disciples to be the leaders of the movement of Christ that would transform the world. If Peter, James, John, and the others did not understand servanthood before being thrust into leadership, all chaos could take place and the heart of the gospel could be lost.

As we strive to follow Jesus, we must die to self and live for others by being a servant. Every day we have the opportunity to go low and lift others up. This was the practice of Jesus. A simple question: **How can you be a blessing to someone else?**

## **Day 12: Compassion**

***“Jesus wept.” John 11:35***

The shortest verse in the Bible, *“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)* However, these two words have volumes of meaning.

If you were to follow the timeline of events in the ministry of Jesus, you would see the highlight reel of what the disciples witnessed. The number of people being healed would have been countless. His disciples would have watched as Jesus fed the 5,000, walked on water, calmed the seas, and of course, Jesus’ teachings were throwing the religious world upside down. In each of these events there were lessons that the disciples desperately needed to learn. But how do you teach compassion? Compassion is a quality that is not terribly easy to import into our lives, unless it hits home and becomes personal.

In the gospel of John, we see Jesus being overwhelmed with compassion. Jesus receives the news of His friend Lazarus’ illness. By the time Jesus shows up on the scene, His good friend has passed away.

***“Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?’” John 11:30-37***

Jesus, surrounded by mourners feels, their pain. Jesus sees the sorrow on the face of Mary and scripture says He was moved and He wept. Can you imagine what was going through the minds of the disciples as they observed the scene? The ever-stoic Jesus, a pillar of strength and power, now being touched to the point of tears. Jesus demonstrated compassion to His disciples; He stepped into the suffering of others.

Compassion could be best described as having pity and concern for the suffering and of the misfortunes of others. As a follower of Jesus, learning the art of compassion is critical to our effectiveness in the mission of bringing life transformation through the gospel to the broken world around us. Compassion is hard to attain because at times we see very little of it in our world today. Examples of compassion are hard to come by. Instead of compassion, we see coldness, cruelty, harshness and indifference in the world around us. Henri Nouwen profoundly speaks of compassion in this way:

***“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.” – Henri Nouwen, Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life.***

Do you recognize the brokenness and suffering of the lives of people around you? As Henri Nouwen reminds us, fully immerse yourself into the condition of being human. Let God enlarge your heart to the brokenness and needs of people you see every day. All around us is a broken world that desperately needs a touch of compassion from those who have the courage to live in the sorrow with the sorrowful and bring the hope of the ONE who is no stranger of sorrow, Jesus Christ.

### **Day 13: Humility**

***“Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.” John 13:5***

The final year of Jesus’ earthly ministry was busy and full. Jesus performed great miracles and His teachings penetrated the heart of the listeners. No doubt during this final year His disciples must have felt like they were drinking out of a fire hydrant. Jesus was in a full press transmitting the lessons the disciples greatly needed to learn before His departure. As the disciples walked closely every day behind their Rabbi, there was still a heavy lesson that they must learn during their final week, days and hours with Jesus if they were ever going to step into greatness for the Kingdom. The Gospel of John describes Jesus demonstrating this leadership lesson:

***“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ Jesus answered him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.’ Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered Him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’” John 13:1-9***

It’s an astounding moment to see the most powerful man in the room kneel down and take the ranks of humility to wash the feet of His disciples. Taking the water Jesus washed the dirt, grime and dust off the feet of the men who had followed him for the past three years. Jesus knew exactly what was ahead of Him in the hours to follow and certainly there was much emotion in the heart of Jesus toward these flawed, yet faithful men. Soon enough Jesus would put on display the greatest act of humility that this world has ever witnessed. Paul aptly describes the humility of Jesus in the book of Philippians:

***“And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:8-11***

Humility is the quality that allows us to put others before ourselves. It is the characteristic that helps us go the extra mile to meet the needs of others. Humility is not arrogant, pretentious or self-important. It is not selfish, defensive or self-seeking. Humility is actually the refinement of our character that allows us to serve others the way Christ did. Jesus’ accomplished works on the cross personified humility to the greatest degree. The King of kings spent His entire life

-serving others and then innocently died for the payment of people’s sin. It was this very humility found in Christ that changed the world.

In the final moments Jesus had with His disciples He exemplified for them what greatness really looks like. Greatness is not found in self-exaltation, but rather in the bowing low in humility for the good of others. Notice however, that in the act of humble obedience that led Jesus to the cross, it ultimately brought greatness and exaltation. Paul reminds us that in the humility of Christ, God “exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth.”

The disciples were shortly going to be called upon to do something great for the Kingdom of God. Jesus knew that if they were to ever have a profound impact in this world, humility would have to pave the way. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an early 19th century philosopher once said, “a great man is willing to be little.” Suppose the same could be true, that to ever be a great man, you must be willing to be a little man.

God has a grand vision that He will ultimately accomplish in this world. He invites us to be part of this vision and desires for us to do great things for His name sake. However, if you ever aspire to greatness for the kingdom it will require of you a posture and heart of humility. Humility is not celebrated in the world, but it is the very thing that will change the world.

**Today, how can you live in humility?**

#### **Day 14: Passion**

***“When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished,” and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”  
John 19:30***

Jesus is eternal. He has always been and will always be. Before time even began Jesus was with His Heavenly Father. Choosing to do the Father’s will, He stepped out of His rightful place in Heaven and walked into time by way of a virgin mother named Mary. As Jesus walked upon this earth He had a singular vision, to please the Father and bring a way of salvation to a broken world which would culminate on the cross. A life marked with humility and servanthood fully coming to a conclusion in His ultimate submission to God the Father’s will. Jesus understood what He was sent on mission to do, but even in that knowledge there was a struggle. In the final moments of Jesus’ life, we recognize that He struggled with His ultimate act of bringing salvation to the world. As He prayed in the garden He even requested for the cup to pass. Jesus pleads to the point of sweat becoming blood:

***“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” Luke 22:42***

Death by crucifixion was considered the most horrible form of death. The history of the crucifixion could be traced all the way back to the Egyptians (*Genesis 40:19*) and the Persians (*Esther 7:10*). It was a punishment that was only meant for slaves and criminals. In fact, Roman citizens were exempt from such cruel punishment. To be crucified was to be under God’s curse (*Deuteronomy 21:23*). The process of crucifixion was horrible in itself. There was scourging and whipping with nails and pieces of glass and ultimately nails were driven through the hands and feet. Death typically came from asphyxiation or pure exhaustion. Jesus knowing all of this, willfully gave himself to it. Do not misunderstand what ultimately brought death to Jesus. It was not the whipping, scourging, hanging on the cross or even the pierced side. No, the acts of men could never apprehend Jesus unless He was willing. Scripture tells us what really took the last breath of Jesus:

***“The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father” John 10:17-18***

Jesus may have hung on a cross, but ultimately His life was taken because He willingly laid it down...for us...for you.

The final week of Jesus’ life is commemorated by our observance of the “Passion Week.” Passion Week, also known as Holy Week, is the time from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday. Passion week is so named because of the passion with which Jesus willingly went to the cross in order to pay for the sins of His people. Jesus truly revealed His passion for us in the suffering He went through on the cross on our behalf.

Passion has been described before as, “The price you are willing to pay to accomplish the mission.” Think of the price Jesus was willing to endure to accomplish God’s mission. Now, imagine the lesson Jesus was importing into the life of His disciples and into our lives. Jesus is wondering, **do you have the passion to truly accomplish my mission? What is your price tag? What are you willing to endure to accomplish the mission God has placed in front of you?**

For the disciples who spent 3 years following Jesus, the crucifixion did not complete their mission, it was merely the introduction to their mission. For us to step into God’s mission that He has for us, we have to settle the issue of passion. **How much passion do you have for the mission of Christ? What’s your price tag?**

## **Day 15: Calling**

***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8***

What a wake-up call it must have been for the disciples. One day they were all gathered together breaking bread. Jesus was washing the disciples’ feet and in what must have felt like a blink of an eye, Jesus was gone. Scripture tells us of the dramatic events of Jesus’ last few days that ultimately culminated with His crucifixion. Now what are the disciples to do? They must have experienced extreme loss and felt completely lost. Their leader was gone and it was a dark time for the disciples.

Scripture tells us that Jesus rose again three days after His crucifixion. As the women made their way to the tomb of Jesus that Sunday morning, they were confronted with the truth that Jesus had risen (*Mark 16:1-8*). In a moment, sorrow turned to optimism, tears turned to dancing. Quickly, the women turn and go tell the disciples and upon hearing the news, Peter and John hurry to the tomb for verification, since it seemed nonsense to them (*Luke 24:9-11*). What did they find? An empty tomb!

Jesus spent forty days walking the earth after His resurrection, appearing to many. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, He appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus, Peter, and eventually to all His closest followers. In these final moments Jesus not only brought comfort to His disciples but commissions them to step into God’s vision. Jesus’ commissioning of His disciples before He ascended back up to the Father is the same commissioning He is speaking to you now:

***“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20***

Make no mistake, we do not have to go on a mission trip to be on mission. As a disciple of Jesus, you are still on mission every day, everywhere. God wants you on mission right now in your community and sphere of influence.

All the people of our community have a different set of trials, circumstances and needs. However, the greatest need of people is the same, the need of a Savior. Our desperation may be hidden by nice cars, big houses and cash in the bank. But all around you are people who are more desperate than they even realize. They desperately need a Savior and desperately need a purpose to live. Enter Jesus!

Over the next week, we are going to journey with this rag tag group of disciples that spent time with Jesus. We will observe how they responded to the call of Jesus to step into the vision of God and learn what is necessary for us to be on mission with Jesus. God offers us an opportunity to live in risky obedience for Him right now, right here. **Are you ready to continue your adventure? Are you ready to love where you live for the sake of Christ?**

## **Day 16: Community**

***“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:41***

The book of Acts gives us a chronology of events that shaped the early church and the lives of the early followers of Christ. When we skim through the book of Acts it is obvious to us that the early followers of Jesus were difference makers. The early disciples' sacrifices and commitment forged the way of the movement of Christianity over the past several centuries. Early on in the book of Acts we see Peter boldly sharing the truth of God and the good news of Jesus (*Acts 2:14-39*). The result of this bold proclamation was about 3,000 people decided to follow Jesus. This event, which took place on the day of Pentecost, is what we as Christians mark as the beginning of the New Testament church. It was the beginning of the gospel movement that would sweep through the Roman Empire.

The disciples had very little to go on. All they knew is that Jesus told them to change the world, to be His disciples and go into all the world making disciples. Jesus never complicated His directives and still doesn't complicate them. It is clear, as Christ-followers, we are called to go make disciples. However, what is important to remember is that the power of the movement for Christ and the effectiveness of His disciples started in the upper room. In Acts 1 we observe the disciples gathered together waiting for the go ahead, waiting for the power of God:

***“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.” Acts 1:14***

Even in this short passage we recognize a few distinguishing characteristics of the early church. ***Prayer was the power behind the mission***, and togetherness or unity became the strength in numbers. In Acts 2 we recognize that the early followers had all things in common, gave themselves to prayer, to the needs of others and lived in community - the strength in numbers. The church collectively committed not to be distracted from the mission and was willing to commit and sacrifice all for Christ and one another. The idea of individualism in the early church was absolutely foreign; everything was accomplished through “togetherness.”

In 2006, Time Magazine unveiled its person of the year. Do you remember who it was? You! That's right You! They came to this decision of making “us” the person of the year citing the intellectual, creative property of individuals, when collected together, can create influence and cultural change. Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia are all examples of

individuals contributing to the greater community of people that could bring change and influence. Unfortunately, this was not new news. This is exactly how, when properly functioning, God's people have impacted the world – together.

Here is your danger. You want to follow Jesus, you want to live out His mission and you want to make an impact in your community, in your work place or on your campus. However, you fall into the temptation of believing that you don't need anyone else, you don't need community, you don't need the church. Operating under this belief only makes you susceptible to the many dangers of living in isolation and as an individual.

God's design for us in community is the church. Our effectiveness in God's mission is in numbers, in being on mission together with other Christ-followers. Some may truly think, "I don't need the church, I don't need to be in community." When we do this, we not only fall out of rhythm with God's pattern and method, but we do it to our own detriment. To be on mission back home, your first step is to find a home. Ensure that you are connected to God's family, His church. The church is God's design and Jesus loves His church, His bride. To reach our community with Christ, it will require us to live in community with those who love Christ. If you are not connected to a church family, you better get connected. If you are connected to a church family, it's time to double down and get on mission with others.

## **Day 17: Risky Obedience**

***"We must obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29***

Every living being has what scientists call, DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid). DNA can simply be described as a molecule that carries our genetic instructions used for our growth and development. Your DNA is your genetic code that makes you, you. All living creatures have DNA. Not only is this true in the physical world, but also in a spiritual sense. Every community of believers, every church, and the early church have a DNA of sorts that makes up the characteristics of who they are.

When we look at the early followers of Jesus, there is no doubt that one of the characteristics was that part of their DNA was risky obedience to Jesus. One story that illustrates such risky obedience is found early in the book of Acts when the church was experiencing incredible growth and advancement. However, along with the rapid growth came persecution against the people of Jesus. In the midst of all the excitement of church growth, winds of adversity came their way:

***"But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.' And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach." Acts 5:17-21***

***"But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 'We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.' Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, 'Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.'" Acts 5:22-25***

***"And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to***

***bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"* Acts 5:27-29**

Part of the DNA of the early followers of Jesus was this characteristic of having risky obedience. They were obedient to Jesus regardless of what cost they may have to endure. When you look through Scripture, you see many examples of God's people living with risky obedience. Abraham left everything he had and moved to foreign soil to become the father of all nations. Moses walked in faith to bring God's people out of bondage and into liberation. David, with faith and risky obedience, gathered some stones for a slingshot to take down the great giant Goliath. The Bible is riddled with stories of faith and risky obedience. It is clear to summarize that a disciple of Jesus lives their life not by sight, but by faith, following Him in obedience. This is the DNA of the people who follow Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us: *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."* (Hebrews 11:1) There are times where stepping out in faith and walking in obedience doesn't go according to what we have planned. Peter stepped out to walk on water and began to sink. But at least Peter got out of the boat and experienced what no one else experienced, even if it was for a moment. Following God in risky obedience requires a total trust in Him. We will never accomplish great things for Christ absent of faith. We must learn the art of trusting God and walking in risky obedience.

**Let me ask you this, what is God calling you to do? What task has He laid before you that requires faith? What conversations is He asking you to have in which you will truly need to trust Him?** When confronted with a call from God that seems impossible, He is giving us opportunities to do something extraordinary while deepening our spiritual walk by learning to trust Him even more.

## **Day 18: Contribution**

***"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."* Acts 6:3**

As you read through the book of Acts, what is very clear is that the early church lived in community but it wasn't just for community sake. To be part of the increasing community of Christ-followers, it had a radical minimum that all must be a contributor. Contributing to the mission of Jesus and His people was the standard expectation. We see a small little story in the book of Acts that demonstrates how this early church functioned and how people were called on to contribute:

***"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."* Acts 6:1-7**

The disciples were struggling to live out the mission and mandates set forth by Jesus because the needs of the people were so great. Their solution was not to "outsource" the daily feeding distribution to a third party, but rather own the problem by mobilizing others to contribute to the task. The followers of Jesus responded and stepped into being contributors to

meet the needs of the widows, which allowed the disciples to continue to lead in their areas of gifting and calling. The result according to the passage, ***“and the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”***

When we are on mission with Jesus and existing in community within the church, we do not exist as consumers but as contributors. Too often in our churches today we see people sitting in comfort and consuming rather than living outside of themselves by contributing. A distinctive mark of a disciple of Jesus is that they are serving on mission and serving through their gifts. The apostle Paul explains to us that we all have spiritual gifts that are to be exercised to advance the mission of Jesus and exercising in community with others:

***“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” I Corinthians 12:4-6***

In other writings in the New Testament, Paul explains to us that the church is like the physical body. Not everyone is an arm, an ear, a finger, etc., but the church needs all its parts. We are each gifted by God and have the opportunity to play a vital role in the life of the community of Christ-followers. Furthermore, God has already set aside for you tasks to do for the kingdom. In the book of Ephesians, we are reminded, ***“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)***

To be on mission with Jesus, don’t just get connected to community, but be a contributor in the community by investing in the vision of Jesus through serving with your gifting. Take time to figure out how God has gifted you, then find your place to invest. God has already set before you work to do and has equipped you to do the task.

### **Day 19: No Such Thing As Ordinary**

***“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. Acts 11:21”***

God is in the business of taking ordinary people and using them to do extraordinary things for Him. This is just what God does! It should never surprise us when God calls us to do something extraordinary, even though we may think we are nothing but ordinary. The story of the early church is the narrative of God using just ordinary people. This is better illustrated in the account of the church of Antioch.

As the church began to grow in the first century they experienced great persecution. In particular, the new believers that resided in Jerusalem experienced tremendous trials. The followers of Christ were jailed, mistreated, and even lost their livelihoods. These sufferings pushed many of the believers out of their homeland of Jerusalem and they relocated. Many relocated to the area of Antioch where they faithfully continued advancing the gospel and had an immeasurable impact for the Kingdom. The story of the church of Antioch is accounted for in Acts 11:

***“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit***

*and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.” Acts 11:19-26*

There are a few observations that make the church of Antioch so interesting. First, these believers were scattered due to persecution, yet they continued to live on mission. Not only did they not deter from the mission of Jesus, but they actually allowed their circumstances to advance the gospel further into the Roman Empire. Many times, God uses our circumstances to direct the impact of our ministry. **What circumstances are in your life that God wants to use for His glory?**

The second observation is that many of those who were scattered continued to be on mission. However, they spent their energy doing ministry to those who were like them - other Jews. But the men and women of the church of Antioch actually went beyond dividing walls and shared the gospel to the Hellenists, the Gentiles. This is the first account in the New Testament where we see both believing Jews and Gentiles worshipping together.

The last observation, and possibly the most compelling, is that the church was experiencing incredible growth despite having no pastor. They were just everyday people living on mission doing what Christ called them to do. In fact, Scripture tells us that the news of all that God was doing reached the apostles and leaders of the church of Jerusalem. It was at this point that the apostles sent Barnabas to go verify the news they were hearing.

Eventually, the apostle Paul joined Barnabas in Antioch to continue the work God was doing. But the impact of the church of Antioch did not stop with their own community. In fact, it was the commitment of these ordinary people to the cause of Christ that eventually took the gospel to the entire Roman Empire. How? Because the church of Antioch became the sending church for the apostle Paul in his mission endeavors. The church of Antioch was full of ordinary people who God used to do extraordinary things.

You may think you are not significant and that you are just ordinary. Well, you are in good company because God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. The heart of God is very clear in Scripture, *“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” (1 Corinthians 1:27)* God desires to use you right where you are to do something significant. Those who are willing to surrender to the mission of Christ and live with risky obedience, God will use greatly.

## **Day 20: Led By Jesus**

*“And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:10*

One aspect of the early followers of Jesus is they were people of action. It is very apparent as you read through the book of Acts that the people of God were on a mission and they were action oriented. The apostle Paul was no exception. In fact, Paul was probably the individual who set the pace.

Being a man of action, Paul seemed to always have a strategic plan to advance the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Any light study of Paul’s missionary journeys reveals a man of action with a commitment to the cause of Christ. He was a man with a plan! But in Acts 16, we see something very different leading Paul’s journey:

***“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:6-10***

Let’s look at the passage more closely. The writer of Acts tells us that Paul traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia. Why? Because the Holy Spirit prevented him from entering the province of Asia. Then Paul headed toward the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow him. So, onward Paul went to Troas, and then he had a dream to go to Macedonia. Do you see what is leading Paul? It was God. In fact, it was the whole Trinity of the Godhead leading Paul. The Holy Spirit prevented him from going into Asia, the Spirit of Jesus prevented him from going to Bithynia, and finally, God called him to Macedonia. Paul followed the leading of God into Macedonia, and as a result, the first recorded conversion on the continent of Europe took place.

There are a few observations we can make from this passage and the posture of the apostle Paul. First, Paul was always charging, always going, always moving forward to take new ground for the Kingdom. We do not see Paul sitting around waiting for a “sign” or a specific message from God before he took action. Paul just went with what he thought was the next strategic move to saturate Rome with the gospel.

The second observation we see in the life of Paul is though he was a man of action, always moving forward, he ultimately yielded to the direction of God. He moved forward, but when the Holy Spirit said, “no” and when the Spirit of Jesus said, “no,” he yielded and obeyed. It is clear to summarize that Paul was truly led by God.

There are times when we think we always have the right plan, but to be used by God we have to be willing to be led by the Spirit. Paul writes to the church of Rome, *“for those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” (Romans 8:14)* Now that you are home you may be thinking, “What do I do next?” The answer: you follow Paul’s example, you stay on mission, move forward in advancing the gospel, and along the way you listen and yield to God’s direction. Every time we are being led by the Spirit, we can rest assured we are in the center of God’s plan.

## **Day 21: Until Not One Is Left**

***“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” Acts 20:26-27***

As we conclude our journey through the life of Christ, the life He shared with His disciples, and make observations of the early church after Christ ascended back to heaven, we come to possibly the most important observation of all. The apostle Paul and the early church lived with an urgency and took responsibility to declare the gospel to every man, woman, and child.

Toward the end of Paul’s missionary work, he made a last stop on the shores of Miletus. Paul was making his way to Jerusalem and he called for the Ephesian elders to meet him in Miletus. It was in Miletus where we see a true picture of Paul’s heart, not just for the churches, but for all people. The book of Acts tells of this account:

*“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: ‘You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.’” Acts 20:17-27*

A little background is helpful to fully grasp the weight of this moment. Paul loved the church of Ephesus. Of all the places the Apostle Paul planted churches and ministered, he spent the most time in Ephesus. For some 3 years, Paul labored for the sake of Christ among the people of Ephesus. When Paul thought of the elders and people of Ephesus, his heart was full. In this moment, Paul gathers all the elders of Ephesus, his dear friends, and gives his final words to them. Paul knew that he would never see them again. The passage tells us that the Holy Spirit testified to Paul that imprisonment and affliction awaited him. It was with tears that Paul shared his heart to the Ephesian leaders.

In Paul’s words, you observe a man of deep conviction that there is urgency to sharing the gospel. Not only urgency, but Paul was willing to carry the burden and responsibility that every man, woman, and child would see, hear, and feel the gospel. Paul said, *“I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable...Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:20,26)* Listen to the words and absorb them, *“I am innocent of the blood of all.”* What was Paul saying? Paul was saying, I left everything on the field, I gave it my all, I let no conversation with anyone go wasted. Paul was saying, I can stand before the Lord Jesus with confidence that I did all I could to share the good news of Jesus until not one was left.

Look deep, dig deep into your heart and ask the question, **“Do I have an urgency and commitment to share Jesus until not one is left?”** Paul said, *“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)* It will take this type of commitment and passion from you to see your school, workplace, neighborhood, and community be transformed with the gospel. Our prayer is that you will finish your course and you will finish what God calls you to do and do so until not one is left.