



21 DAYS TO A
A FRESH START
DEVOTIONAL



MARY

Read

Luke 1:26–38

Mary's life was marked by her belief in God's ability to do the impossible. She was a seemingly normal, young girl when an angel appeared and told her she was going to have a baby as a virgin. Hebrew law dictated that Mary should've been killed for having sex outside marriage, and she was engaged to a man who might not have believed her story about the angel. Despite these circumstances, Mary chose to respond in faith, "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). Imagine what her pregnancy was like or what it was like to be the mother of the man who created everything. The power of God was inside her womb. Jesus grew up before her eyes, becoming strong and filled with wisdom (Luke 2:40). Mary was there for it all. She saw Jesus' character shaped through His experiences. She saw her suspicions about Him proved through His actions. She became not only Jesus' mother on Earth but also a devoted disciple. God worked through a humble woman to change the course of human history. Mary was faithful with little and then with much. God trusted her with an intangible promise and then with a child: our Savior. No matter what others said about her, or her son, Mary believed. And in the end, her faith was satisfied as she saw the prophecies about Jesus become reality through His death and resurrection.

Reflect

- » Are you going through difficult circumstances that lead you to question God?
- » What has God entrusted you with that seems small?
- » How is God asking you to step out in faith in this season?

ANDREW

Read

Mark 1:16-17

As the son of a fisherman, Andrew would have spent hours learning his dad's trade and preparing to follow in his footsteps. Day after day, Andrew and his dad cast their nets until, on one seemingly mundane fishing trip, Jesus lured Andrew with an invitation: "Come follow me and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mark 1:17). Jesus extends the same offer to each of us. As Andrew soon learned, life change starts when we accept Jesus' invitation and follow Him. Andrew had heard about Jesus and probably heard some of Jesus' preaching (John 1:35-42), but this was only the beginning of Andrew's journey with Jesus. Because Andrew had faith, he was willing to follow Jesus and leave the life he was accustomed to. As a result, Andrew witnessed numerous miracles including Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus was no longer a distant celebrity or rumored messiah. As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, Andrew knew Jesus intimately and personally. But this relationship only began after Andrew left his former life for the new life Jesus had to offer.

Reflect

- » **What do you most want God to change in your life?**
- » **Has there been a time in your life when you had to ask God for the faith to leave something behind?**
 - » **What next step do you need to take today?**

— THE GUARDS WHO SAW — JESUS CRUCIFIED

Read

Matthew 27:45-54

There were many spectators at Jesus' crucifixion, but none were as unlikely to be changed by that event as the Roman soldiers. These military men were the type of people whose lives were immersed in violence. They'd seen countless criminals beaten, tortured, and crucified just as Jesus was. To them, He was simply another criminal who deserved to die. But that day, they realized He was different. These Roman soldiers were probably some of the same men who earlier mocked Jesus. Instead of fighting back or condemning them, Jesus prayed for His persecutors: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus chose to love instead of retaliating. We don't know what became of those soldiers or if their lives changed after that moment. But we do know they faced a decision that day. They had to decide what to do with Jesus, and they admitted, "Surely He was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). The soldiers' story reminds us that Jesus interrupts our routines and changes our minds. In the midst of performing their jobs as torturers and guards, Jesus' presence affected them. When God gets involved in our lives, we are forced to make a decision: What will we do with Jesus?

Reflect

- » Who in your life would you consider unlikely to believe in Jesus?
Will you pray for that person now?
- » How has God gotten involved in your life? When have you sensed His presence with you?
- » How has Jesus changed your mind?

JOHN

Read

Matthew 4:20-22

Jesus was by the Sea of Galilee, choosing and calling men to be a part of His inner circle of friends. This group would walk with Jesus every day of His ministry. Here, among a sea of seemingly low-status men, Jesus began to call His disciples. "Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him" (Matthew 4:21-22). Jesus wasn't looking for equipped men when He chose His disciples, He was looking for men He could equip. And the qualifications for Jesus' calling? Nothing. Jesus knew John fully and loved him completely. Jesus called John to a complete life change, not because of anything John had done or was able to do, but because Jesus loved him. Jesus does the same with each of us. He calls us to a life full of joy, not because of what we do, but because of His uncontainable love for us.

Reflect

- » Do you feel like you have to earn Jesus' love? Why or why not?
- » How has God's love changed you?
- » What is Jesus calling you to put aside so you can follow Him completely?

THE RICH MAN

Read

Mark 10:17-27

A wealthy man approached Jesus and asked what he could do to inherit eternal life. The man sensed that Jesus was a good teacher, and wanted help because his lifestyle of riches and rules left him empty. When Jesus told the wealthy man to sell his belongings, give to the poor and follow Him, the man left saddened because he loved his possessions. The wealth he had gathered became a barrier to following Jesus. Some people don't change right away when they meet Jesus. Change can be a process, not just a moment. Jesus wanted to change the wealthy man's life, but He wanted the man to want to change. Unfortunately, the man resisted change when Jesus called him into a better life. God wants us to live completely devoted to Him, not chained to our possessions or status. Our identity is shaped by our provider, not our possessions. Jesus is better than our possessions. God has generously given us Jesus, and He asks us to dedicate ourselves to Him, because God wants to do amazing things with our lives.

Reflect

- » Do any of your possessions steal your affection from Jesus?
- » What's holding you back from taking your next step in following Jesus?
- » How prepared are you for change? What can you do now to be ready for when and how Jesus calls you to change?

THE GIRL POSSESSED BY DEMONS

Read

Matthew 15:21-28

When the mother of a demon-possessed girl came to Jesus, she broke every rule of society. Jews like Jesus did not associate with non-Jews like this woman. For a non-Jewish woman to approach a Jewish man was as taboo as interracial marriage before the Civil Rights Movement. Clearly, this woman was desperate to petition Jesus for her daughter's healing. Even after Jesus said "no," the woman was not disheartened and her faith was not hindered. She pressed on and Jesus healed her daughter. This woman received the change she desired for her daughter because her faith was tireless, even in the face of discouraging circumstances. This woman's courageous, persistent faith is the kind of faith God wants for us. If we want to see change in our own lives, we must have the faith to persevere. Faith is the precursor to change.

Reflect

- » When was the last time you were so desperate to see Jesus move that you stopped caring what other people think? What stops you from having that kind of bold faith all the time?
- » How do you respond when God doesn't answer prayers right away? What can you learn from the mother of the demon-possessed girl?
- » Is there anything that you hesitate to talk to God about? What's holding you back?

THE BLEEDING WOMAN

Read

Mark 5:25-34

Looks can be deceiving. It's easy to live a life that appears perfect but lacks a desperate need for Jesus. We can know the Bible, have godly spouses and be involved in church, but sometimes it takes significant pain to force us to fall at the Lord's feet. Sometimes, we see God's mercy best through the pain. In Mark 5, Jesus encountered a woman who was driven to Him by her own weakness. For years she had lived with the same problem. She was ostracized by the society in which she lived. She was not considered fit for marriage, and would not have been welcomed by the "church people" of her day. Though it was likely difficult for her to recognize, all of this was God's way of drawing the woman to Jesus. Jesus changed this woman's life on the spot. At some point, many of us have believed the lie that we need to clean up before coming to the Lord. We have lived in fear that God wouldn't be able to handle the mess we have made and that we would be left to begin the cleanup process alone. What God asks of us is to seek His help and the help of His people. God welcomes our mess, and often His voice is the clearest when our lives are the messiest.

Reflect

- » What messes are you dealing with today?
- » What could God be trying to teach you through your pain?
- » Are you willing to seek the help of other Christians in this area?

Why or why not?



THE ROMAN CENTURION

Read

Matthew 8:5-13

A centurion was a career military officer in the Roman army. This man would have been the boss of more than 100 soldiers. He had money, power, and influence. Still, the centurion had the ability to see what so many others could not: Jesus was not just another teacher. The centurion was a caring man, as evidenced by his concern about his servant's suffering. The centurion could not control this illness, but he knew Jesus could. Despite being a powerful man himself, the centurion was able to see the power that Jesus had. Jesus had authority over all things, including illness. Because the centurion understood Jesus' authority and acted upon this belief, the servant was healed. Often, we believe that the greatest miracle occurs when Jesus saves those who have little—whether little status, money or health. We love dramatic testimonies that begin in poverty and end in prosperity. Just as much of a miracle occurs when a person who is great by the world's standards sees his poverty and, in light of God's greatness, recognizes his need for Jesus. While pride, wealth and status kept others from Jesus, those things didn't hinder the centurion because he humbly understood Jesus' authority over all things.

Reflect

- » What part of your life feels out of your control right now?
- » Do you believe Jesus has authority over all things and you don't?
How do your actions reflect that belief?
- » Do you have trouble asking for help? Is pride stopping you from coming to Jesus for help with any area of your life? Why or why not?

ZACCHAEUS

Read

Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus, Jericho's chief tax collector, was so intent on seeing Jesus that he climbed a tree just to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passed through town. We don't know what Zacchaeus was thinking, other than "How can I get a clear view of this man?" Maybe Zacchaeus felt guilty about his past choices. Maybe he had heard of Jesus and knew Jesus was the only hope for change. Maybe calling out to Jesus was spontaneous. All we know is the result of this encounter: Zacchaeus was changed. We often think of faith as something that is confined exclusively to our head and our heart, but our faith doesn't just affect our thoughts and emotions; it produces action. After a simple invitation from Jesus, Zacchaeus offered to return money to anyone he had defrauded and to give half his possessions to the poor. Faith changes us. Zacchaeus was wealthy, crooked and greedy. However, his faith in Jesus changed the way he lived his life. How is your faith being demonstrated in your life?

Reflect

- » How has your faith in Jesus shaped your relationships, your approach to your job, and your attitude toward your hobbies?
- » How can you show someone else the love of Jesus today?
- » What recent actions have you taken in faith?

MARY MAGDALENE

Read

John 20:1-18

When we love someone, we do crazy things. Mary Magdalene was consumed with love for Jesus. He changed her life. Once demon-possessed, Mary had been set free because Jesus healed her (Luke 8:1-3). There was no way Mary was going to forget this man. She knew He was the Savior of the world, because He had saved her when no one else could. Jesus paid attention to Mary and had given her life value; He delivered her from torture. Jesus showed Mary that she was accepted, no questions asked. Mary Magdalene wasn't rich. She wasn't cultured. She didn't have power or authority or much to give Jesus and she knew it. But what she did have, she gave Him: her heart and life. When Jesus rose from the dead, the first person He saw was Mary, because she was waiting by the tomb. Her passion was all-consuming and logic-defying. When Jesus fulfilled the most impossible promise through His resurrection, Mary's faith was proved right.

Reflect

- » What has Jesus healed you from?
- » When it comes to the thousands of decisions you make each day, are you motivated by what others think, or what pleases God? Why?
- » What's the craziest thing you've ever done in the name of Jesus?

NICODEMUS

Read

John 3:1-21, John 19:38-42

Nicodemus thought he was doing everything right. He was a Pharisee, a religious leader of the time, and upheld every Jewish law in the book. He had Scripture memorized and was a part of the prestigious Jewish council — a group of leaders who made important decisions for the religious community. He was revered for his knowledge of the Bible. Nicodemus was doing all the right things and knew the right information about God, but he didn't know God. Nicodemus saw Jesus teaching at the temple and, regardless of the other religious leaders' opposition of Jesus' teaching, Nicodemus wanted to know more. In John 3, Nicodemus snuck out in the dead of night to meet Jesus and hear more about what Jesus was teaching. His curiosity and desire to understand Jesus' teachings led to more than he bargained for. Jesus boldly told him that only through being born again could he truly know God. Though Nicodemus had an encounter with Jesus that night, it wasn't until he and Joseph buried Jesus' body that he went public with his faith. Change for Nicodemus happened steadily over time, and that's OK! God isn't looking for instant perfection in our relationships with Him. God is after our growth, and growth takes time.

Reflect

- » Relationships take time and effort. How intentional are you about getting to know Jesus?
- » Are you growing in your relationship with Jesus? How has your faith grown since you first met Jesus?
- » What steps can you take today to continue growing in your relationship with Jesus?

BARTIMAEUS

Read

Mark 10:46-52

All of us have reached a point where we desperately needed help. Whether it's help with relationships, finances or life decisions, there are challenges we can't face alone. It's easy to say we have faith that God will bring us through struggles. It's far more difficult to walk through conflict trusting He will take care of us. Bartimaeus was a blind roadside beggar who cried for help when he heard Jesus was walking by. There's no record Bartimaeus had ever met Jesus or interacted with Him before but Bartimaeus believed something about Jesus even before he encountered Him. Bartimaeus sensed he needed Jesus' mercy and he asked Jesus to do something. He wanted Jesus to do a miracle in his life by restoring his sight. Despite others telling him to be quiet, Bartimaeus continued to beg Jesus for healing until He did it. Jesus changed Bartimaeus' life by restoring his sight. After he was healed, Bartimaeus immediately followed Jesus, using his newfound vision to participate in the work Jesus was doing. With even the smallest amount of faith, God can work the most amazing miracles. God hears the cries of broken people and heals us in His timing. Let's not be like the naysayers in verse 48, discouraging those around us from begging God for help. And let's not give up ourselves in asking God to work miracles in our lives. Jesus loves when people seek Him with the faith that He will change their lives.

Reflect

- » **What miracle are you asking God for today?**
- » **How can we continue to walk with Jesus in faith, even though we don't know when God will show up with a miracle?**
- » **Do you tend to be a critic and naysayer or a positive supporter of others? Why or why not?**

MARTHA

Read

Luke 10:38-42

Martha was intensely practical. She knew what needed to be done, how much time it would take, and how many people she needed to accomplish the task. But Martha's schedule left her exhausted. Always thinking, planning and adjusting, but never resting. When others wouldn't listen to her realism, she felt ignored and had to work all the harder. Her busyness led to self-righteousness, bordering on a lack of faith. Martha knew the power of God that was in Jesus, or so she thought. She believed He was the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and she knew He could heal any sickness. Yet, Martha's focus on tangible, practical issues masked the deeper questions she wrestled with: Why am I the only one working to make things better? Why do people ignore me? Why don't other people follow the rules? Why am I always worried? Is it OK to enjoy things? Jesus knew this, so when Martha confronted him in exasperation, He paid attention to her. He heard her words, but more than that, He heard her heart. He redirected her focus, calling her out of her circumstances: "but few things are needed—or indeed only one" (Luke 10:42). The one thing she needed was Him. Like Martha, the answer to our anxiety, fear, and need for order is to focus all our attention, thought and worship on Jesus. He is the only one who provides lasting purpose to fulfill our deepest desires.

Reflect

- » What are you worried about right now?
- » How can you trust God with your circumstances?
- » What step do you need to take to make time for rest?

JAMES

Read

John 7:1-5, 1 Corinthians 15:1-7

James, Jesus' half-brother, grew up under the same roof as the Messiah, but did not initially believe in Him. As Jesus started to gain celebrity status, his family attempted to get him out of the public eye, saying, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). After Jesus rose again, He appeared to James, and that encounter changed James forever (1 Corinthians 15:7). From then on, James devoted his life to Jesus. James was no longer a naysayer. Instead, he became a leader of the church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). Like James, we will never do what Jesus wants until we recognize who Jesus is. Even if our encounter with Jesus goes against all we've ever known, when we see Him for who He really is (the Son of God and Savior of the world), our lives will be changed.

Reflect

- » When was the last time you changed your mind on an issue?
What prompted the change?
- » What has most influenced your view of who Jesus is?
- » Why is it dangerous to allow our view of God to be shaped by what we've always heard?

THE LAME MAN BY THE POOL

Read

John 5:1-15

In John 5, Jesus goes to pools believed to have healing powers. If someone got into the pool at the right time any illness he had would be healed. As Jesus approached these miraculous pools, He saw a lame man who had been lying by the pools for a long time. Jesus boldly walked up to the man and asked if he wanted to be healed. "'Sir,' the invalid replied, 'I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me'" (John 5:7). Jesus' response? He rescues the lame man from a hopeless situation and heals him on the spot! When the lame man was healed, his circumstances changed. But believing in Jesus is what changes a man's heart. A little while later, Jesus finds the formerly lame man at the temple and warns him, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). The reason for healing is not to change our circumstances; God wants to change our hearts. God rescues us from seemingly hopeless situations all the time, but believing in Jesus is the only way to change our hearts.

Reflect

- » What has God healed you from? What has God forgiven you of?
- » God changes our circumstances in order to change our hearts. How has your heart changed as a result of what God's done in your life?
- » What seemingly hopeless situations are you facing today?
God wants to rescue you. Will you accept His help?

— THE MAN BORN BLIND —

Read

John 9:1-41

In John 9, Jesus provokes the religious establishment by breaking their man-made traditions. He heals on the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest, and mixes water and dirt to make mud, a forbidden Sabbath activity. After one encounter with Jesus, the man born blind was no longer the same. Jesus confronted the Pharisees for their made-up rules, their self-righteousness, their entitled attitude, and their lack of compassion. Spiritually speaking, the Pharisees were as blind as the man before Jesus. Through the blind man's story, we see the miracle of our salvation and the slippery slope of religion. Too often, we forget who we were and what we were doing when Jesus saved us. When that happens, we can become like the Pharisees — full of knowledge and lacking in gratitude. We must never forget that we have been rescued. When we stay connected to our salvation, when we continue to live just as we did when we first declared Jesus as Lord, we will be strengthened in faith and overflowing with thankfulness. That's what it means to truly see.

Reflect

- » What was life like before you met Jesus? What was different after you began a relationship with Jesus?
- » Can you say that you are just as passionate now as when you first believed? If not, what is different?
- » The greatest revelation Jesus can give us is a clear picture of Himself. Take this opportunity to pray for a clearer vision of Jesus.

— JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA —

Read

Matthew 27:57-60, John 19:38

Sometimes we carve out a portion of our lives and choose to live it differently than the rest. What we fail to realize is half-hearted obedience is really disobedience. God does not mean for us to go through life wearing a mask for certain people or in certain settings. He calls us to live honestly. After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea goes public with his faith. He is remembered for stepping out in faith to claim the body of Jesus, but what might he have missed out on because he delayed? Joseph was a secret disciple. As one of Israel's wealthy religious elite, it was dangerous for Joseph to associate with Jesus. It was not until Jesus' crucifixion that Joseph was willing to risk a public association. Fear and hesitation caused Joseph to miss out on three years of miracles and life change. What are you missing out on because of an unwillingness to go public for Jesus? Imagine looking back at your life and realizing that you missed countless opportunities to be a part of God's miracles on earth. This is Joseph of Arimathea's story. He knew Jesus, but missed being a part of many of the miracles Jesus did during His ministry.

Reflect

- » **Are you the same person at work or home on Monday as you are at church on Sunday?**
- » **What changes do you need to make to live consistently for Jesus in all areas of your life?**
- » **Who can support and encourage you as you commit to living for Jesus everywhere, all the time?**

PAUL

Read

Acts 9:1-19

Paul had an outstanding resume for a Jewish person in the first century. Not only was he devout and upstanding in his faith, he was also a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. When we first meet Paul, he's holding coats for the mob of Jews who stoned the apostle, Stephen (Acts 7:58). Paul's Jewish upbringing taught him that we are made right with God by following a strict set of rules. If you followed the rules, you were righteous. If you didn't, you weren't. After encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul's view of righteousness was forever changed. Paul had been killing Christians for preaching Jesus as the son of God and the only way to heaven. Turns out, they were right. We're made right in God's eyes by accepting Jesus as our savior, not because of anything we do or have done (Ephesians 2:8-9). When Paul began preaching this message saying that salvation came from Christ and not our own behavior, it rocked the religious world. He would go on to share the gospel with thousands of non-Jews all over the known world. Only a change of heart can lead to a lasting change in behavior.

Reflect

» **Are you a rule follower at heart?**

What is it about following rules that we find so attractive?

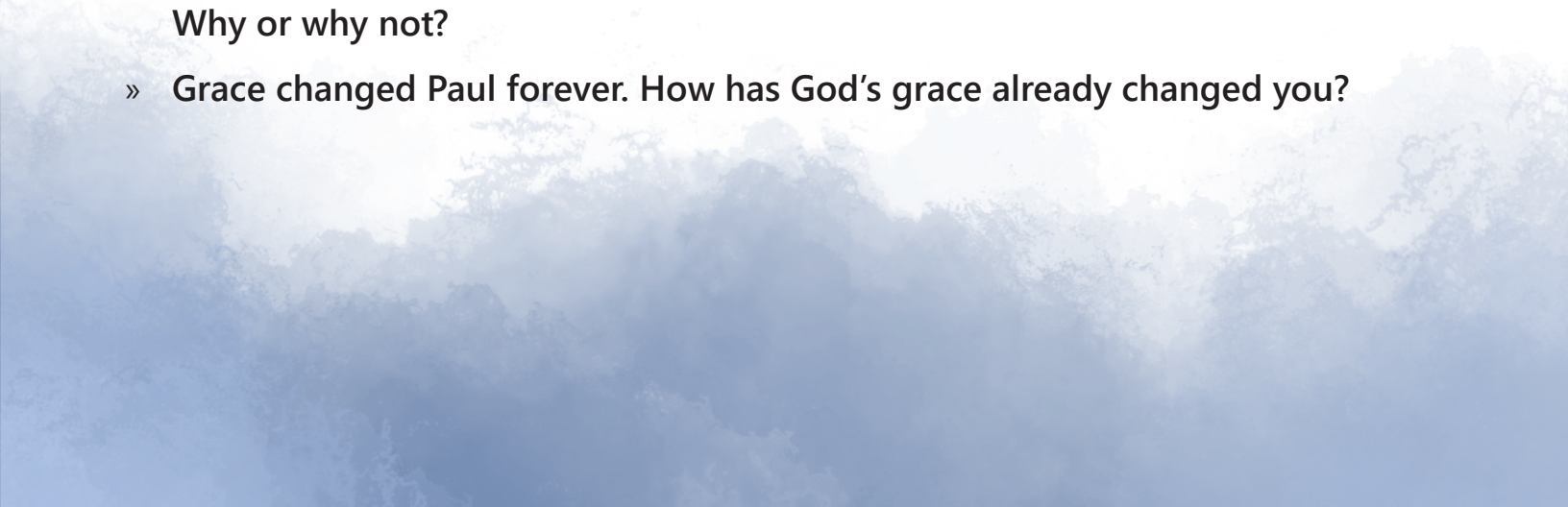
» **Are you lowering your expectation of what God wants to do in you?**

If so, how?

» **Do you struggle with the idea that you can't earn Salvation?**

Why or why not?

» **Grace changed Paul forever. How has God's grace already changed you?**



PETER

Read

Matthew 4:18-20, 16:18

Wake up, go to work or school, come home, go to sleep, and repeat. Falling into a routine is normal. But God wants more than normal for us. God wanted more than normal for Peter. When Peter first met Jesus, he was casting nets into the Sea of Galilee. Fishermen in Peter's day were the equivalent of high school dropouts. Peter's daily routine probably went something like this: wake up, cast a net, catch some fish, come home, sleep and repeat. This all changed when Jesus told Peter, "Come, follow me" (Matthew 4:19). Peter didn't hesitate. He dropped his nets and followed Jesus. Peter wanted a new, more purposeful life, but he couldn't find that life until he met Jesus. It isn't until Jesus calls us to be something or someone greater that we realize how limiting the expectations we have for our lives can be. By dropping his nets and following Jesus, Peter learned God had great plans for his life. "...You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). No longer was Peter a dropout. He became the foundation for the church and led thousands of believers as the Gospel spread across the earth.

Reflect

- » Are you stuck in a rut? What do you need to do to break free?
- » Are you lowering your expectation of what God wants to do in you? If so, how?
- » What is Jesus calling you to? What step do you need to take to begin following Him?

MATTHEW

Read

Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew was a tax collector, a corrupt position no self-respecting Jew would take. So when Jesus went to a party with Matthew and his friends, it caused quite a commotion. Religious people couldn't understand why someone like Jesus would want to hang out with sinners like Matthew and his co-workers. Jesus answered saying, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13). Those who are physically sick need a doctor. Those who are spiritually sick need a savior. When Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, Matthew got up, left everything and followed Him. Matthew recognized his sickness of sin and his need for Jesus. Matthew's willingness to drop everything without looking back is a beautiful picture of obedience. Matthew is also proof that Jesus can use anyone, no matter his or her past. We were all born with a sickness called sin and only Jesus can make us healthy. Are you willing to drop everything and follow Him?

Reflect

- » Are there any areas of your life you need to submit to Jesus?
- » Is anything keeping you from leaving your old life behind to follow Jesus? What and why?
- » When was the last time you brought someone to church or started a friendship with someone far from God?

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Read

John 4:1-30

Ever feel like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders? Sin weighs us down and nothing we do can take that weight off of us. It is so easy to get caught up in our sin and lose sight of our Savior. Here's the good news: God wants to give us a new life. The Samaritan woman Jesus met in John 4 was weighed down by sin. She was weighed down by her five ex-husbands and the new man she was living with. To have one ex-husband at this time was scandalous enough. To have five made her an outcast. The fact that this woman was living with a man she wasn't married to and getting water during the hottest part of the day were good indicators that she was done playing by society's rules. She didn't want to hear what anyone had to say and she had all but given up. Jesus met this woman where she was. Using the well water as a metaphor, Jesus offered her a new life, and love that would fulfill her forever (John 4:14). After meeting Jesus, the Samaritan woman was so changed that she ran into town and told everyone about her encounter. Jesus knows everything we've done and will ever do. He doesn't want us to try to fix our lives. Jesus wants us to accept His gift of salvation and follow Him. In doing so, He'll give us a new life, a life greater than the one we imagine for ourselves.

Reflect

- » **What's weighing you down today? Confess it to Jesus.
He can handle it.**
- » **How do you respond when you make a mistake? What's the difference between hiding it or fixing it and confessing it?**
- » **The woman at the well couldn't wait to tell people about the man who knew everything about her and loved her anyway.
Who do you need to share the gospel with or invite to church?**