

this is
THE WAY



¹ When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³ He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. ⁵ If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶ So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

⁷ Now Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. ⁹ But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him.

Picture this: You are preparing to go on vacation to a place you have never been before. But you know someone who has been there before. Do you ask them for suggestions on what to pack? Where to go? What to look for? What to expect? What if you

hear something you don't like? Would you change plans? Go somewhere else?

It's hard to change your mind when you have been so excited to go to a certain place with certain expectations.

Can you imagine how excited the disciples must have been as Jesus was preparing them to head out on their own? They had been training under Jesus. They had already been privy to several wild miracles and unbelievable things. Now Jesus was saying to them, your turn.

These guys were apprentices of Jesus and part of the apprenticeship process is to come to a point where you are done watching the expert and it's your turn to act.

And they had to be excited. Jesus started the sending with the good stuff. Giving them power and authority to heal people and drive out demons. Amazing!

But then the second part comes that would be less exciting. Don't take anything with you. Rely totally on me.

Walk around the desert in Israel with nothing.

Don't take anything which will help you to sustain yourself. But leave all the sustenance to God.

Relinquish all control for your well-being. Your life is no longer your own.

How could anyone do this? Well, if you think about it, we are willing to do this all the time. Have you ever been on a cruise or to an all-inclusive resort?

All the food and beverages are provided for you. You aren't responsible for any of your meals or beverages. You just trust that the resort or the boat is going to provide something on which you will be able to survive. And if you are reading this, you have been right so far.

So, functioning like this is possible in some environments. We have proof we can do it. We **can** trust like that because we have in the past.

Maybe the switch we need to flip in our minds is looking at the calling of Jesus like an all-inclusive worldwide cruise. He'll take us all over the world and we need to rely on Him to give us what we need to thrive.

That might sound a little bit silly, but much of the New Testament points to Jesus sending His followers out. As followers of the Way, we are to go to the edges of known civilization to share the Good News. And Jesus will be with us the entire time.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...and surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

And it seems like we will need the presence of Jesus with us always because the challenge before us is difficult and dangerous.

Jesus sent out his best friends into an environment that was dangerous for His followers. Death was a distinct possibility, but the mission and the message were more important than the risk.

DISCUSS:

1. Have you ever been on a cruise or to an all-inclusive resort? Did you think about relying on strangers for your sustenance during that trip? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to rely completely on someone else to survive or thrive? How did these situations make you feel?
2. In what parts of your life do you feel it's easiest to relinquish control? In what parts is it the hardest?
3. With the knowledge that followers of Jesus receive eternal life, why do we so vehemently protect this life?
4. What does, "to live is Christ, to die is gain," mean to you? Do you believe the statement?

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

¹⁹ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

²⁰ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

When was the sweet spot in your life where upon being asked a question, you could answer it and not worry about what other people thought? Do you remember?

Do you remember the freedom of being asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and you just said what was true for you in the moment? An NBA star, a horse trainer, a firefighter, a teacher, a baseball player, an astronaut, the President, a mom...

You could say whatever you believed or thought at the moment and felt safe that no one would judge you or make fun of your answer. Instead, the response would be, “Yeah, I can see that”.

At some point in time, we become so measured in our public responses that we aren't even sure what we actually believe anymore. We are focused on what we think we are supposed to say. Or on what others want to hear.

Instead of being able to freely answer, we almost always think first, "Why do you want to know that?" or "What are you going to do with that information?"

It hasn't always been that way and it doesn't have to be that way anymore. We can choose a different path.

Can you imagine being put in a position where someone asks you to say the one thing everyone has been thinking but is afraid to say themselves?

The question itself is super simple. "Who do you say I am?"

The answer is so complex because of the implications, which is why we are slow to say what's true for us in public.

Peter's choice of words is really interesting. He said, "God's Messiah." In reality, Peter was starting to grasp that Jesus was his Messiah. This personal relationship between Jesus and himself was saving him.

Peter was able to share what was true and becoming true for him.

How do we share what's true for us? How can we be honest about what's true for us? We have opportunities to be self-defining and share how we actually feel. What will we do with those chances? Will we go for it or hold back?

This truth for Peter was shared in front of a small group of intimate friends and family. Often when we are in these groups, this is when we feel least free to share what's true for us. We don't want to disappoint someone or let someone down.

The reality is these small groups are where we should be the freest to define who we are and be honest about what is true for us.

If that isn't possible in our current context, maybe it's time to invest in some new relationships that will allow for this to become true.

DISCUSS:

1. Where do you feel most comfortable sharing how you truly feel? Why?
2. Can you think of the last time you were able to answer a question or share something where you didn't feel like you had to be measured in your response?

3. What was unique about that situation?
4. Who do you think Jesus was looking at when He asked, "What about you? Who do you say I am?"
5. Imagine right now, Jesus is looking into your eyes asking, "What about you? Who do you say I am?" What's your answer?

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹ He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

How do you receive hard news? How do you respond when what is communicated lands outside your expectations?

“You didn’t get the job...”

“I don’t love you anymore...”

“You have cancer...”

What do you do with the hurt, disbelief, and anger that can stem from those interactions?

Jesus was a peacemaker, not a peacekeeper. Peacekeepers try to keep everyone happy, not ruffle any feathers, and say what people want to hear.

Peacemakers have perfected the art of speaking with grace and truth. Jesus was the best of all time at this. He was concerned about the truth, but He could communicate it with vast amounts of grace and mercy.

The truth Jesus shares in this passage would have been difficult for the hearers. But what He shared is true. Jesus isn't interested in fence sitters or mere fans of His teaching.

Either you are all in, or He isn't for you.

The examples He uses are extreme but make the point. Jesus is the most important thing in all of our lives. He doesn't compromise, He deserves more than that.

Our tendency as humans is to avoid situations where there is something hard shared with us. We don't want to hear it, we don't want to be faced with hard truths, so we just avoid the opportunities altogether.

That doesn't help us to grow and become better versions of ourselves. It only keeps us stuck in a place we were never intended to be in the first place.

How do we adapt our minds to seek out the truth Jesus wants to give to us?

First, we need to fully grasp that Jesus loves us. He loves us more than we love ourselves. That means that everything He does for us, no matter how hard, is for our good. We have to believe that. We have to trust that.

God is for you.

God loves you.

God wants what's best for you.

All of this is true for God, more than it is true for even ourselves. Slow down when you receive a hard truth from God. Remember. Remind yourself that God is for you. God loves you. God wants what's best for you.

Sometimes what's best for us is unexpected. What's best for us isn't what we would choose for ourselves. It's not what we have chosen for ourselves in the past.

DISCUSS:

1. What's a hard truth you have received in your past? How did you receive it? What do you wish you would have done differently?
2. Describe how you personally know God loves you.
3. Share a time when you questioned if God was for you and your flourishing. What were the circumstances? How did you respond?
4. Are you a peacemaker or a peacekeeper? Why?

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” He replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took

care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Do you have "those people"? A group of people who disgust you? A group of people you wouldn't want to be caught spending time with, even if your life depended on it? A group of people you wish ill upon?

At first blush, most of us would say of course not. Absolutely, no.

But what if we dig a little deeper? How do we feel about suicide bombers? Foreign terrorists? Political adversaries? Pro-abortion advocates? People who have hurt your children? People who have hurt you?

Are we starting to get uncomfortable?

Jesus was radical and the grace He offers is offensive.

There is an episode of a show called “The Chosen” where Jesus and his disciples are out of their home territory. Jesus intentionally took them to the home of a man who was injured. He had a broken leg.

He couldn’t work and his family was struggling. So, Jesus and the disciples went into town and bought enough food to share with the man’s family.

What you come to perceive about who this man is, because it’s never explained, is that he was one of the men who beat up and robbed the man in the story of the good Samaritan. Running away with what he stole, he broke his leg.

Jesus and His disciples spent the night at the family’s house and then in the morning, Jesus healed the man of his broken leg.

Jesus’ grace and mercy are so offensive based on the two examples in this story: the hero in the passage above was someone from the most hated group of people in all of Israel, a Samaritan. And in “The Chosen”, Jesus chose to help and heal one of the robbers who had left the man for dead.

The grace and mercy of Jesus is offensive. And the Kingdom of God will be filled with people we don’t expect to see there.

What that means is if we have a group of “those” people” or “that person”, they might just be with whom God is asking us to share the Gospel, asking us to do life with them. Inviting them into discipleship relationships.

DISCUSS:

1. Who are your “those” people in your life? Have you ever spent any time with them, to be curious about their life? Or are you afraid of what other people will say if they see you with “those people”?
2. When was a time you were offended by the grace and mercy of God? A time when God was good to someone you felt did not deserve it, according to your standards?
3. Do you have someone you avoid in the grocery store because they hurt you or someone you know in some way? Have you extended God’s grace and mercy to them?

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Have you ever done any of those personality tests? DISC assessment, StrengthsFinder, Enneagram, Working Genius, et. al.

These are designed to give you and those around you some insight into how you prefer to work or interact with a team. It might also show your tendencies. How you will interact when you aren't intentionally thinking about showing up one way or another.

These can be really handy for you and those around you. And for some of us, we can use these

to create excuses for how we are in certain situations.

In this passage, we see a classic example of the difference between someone who is task-oriented and someone who is relationally oriented.

Here Jesus says Mary (relational) is getting it right while Martha (task) is missing it. In this moment that is true. What is the moment? Jesus is right here before you. His goal is to have a relationship with you. It doesn't matter to him when He's standing right next to you what tasks you are doing for Him.

This passage is also an illustration of the new kingdom Jesus was ushering in. A kingdom of doing (Old Testament, sacrificial system) to a system of being (the new covenant, having a personal relationship with Jesus, being a believer). This was no simple transition for the people of God. They had been raised one way for centuries.

And Jesus isn't saying that all tasks are always bad just that we should pay attention to what's most crucial in the moment.

In the book of the Bible called Ecclesiastes, there is a pretty famous passage that fits well with this subject. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:

¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the
heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to
gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain
from embracing,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

There is a time for tasks and a time to pursue relationships. God made us relational beings. He designed us to be present with each other. We need it, and someone has to take the garbage out occasionally.

DISCUSS:

1. Are you more task-oriented or relational? Why?
2. Have you ever done one of the assessments mentioned or something similar? Can you describe/share the results?
3. Which is easier for you to pursue, the things of God or the presence of God? Why?

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

²⁷ “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes

near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We are being sold worry.

You don't need a new iPhone, but you could be left behind if you don't get one.

You don't need a new car, but what if you have to parallel park? You need a car that does it for you.

You probably have 20 disorders that your doctors have missed, you should bring them all up with your doctor so you can take this medicine and enjoy the side effects.

You need a new house, a new wardrobe, a new playlist, a new spouse, a new job...

You won't survive if you keep going like this, the only way out is through this new and better thing.

And even if you can see the ad for what it is, we might still worry that they were right.

Worry is powerful because it causes action. If you are worried about a friend, you call them or stop by to see them.

If you are worried your golf shot is going to hit someone you yell "fore".

If you are worried you aren't in good enough shape, you go get a gym membership.

Worry gets us into action. It's why ads are designed to make us feel worried. The wild thing is, once we get the thing that was supposed to make us not worry about that thing anymore, something else causes the same feeling by design.

But what does worry actually get us? The act of worry, what does it change? Worry is terribly inefficient. It takes us to places we didn't have to go at a rate we weren't prepared for.

We can be frenetic to prevent the ever-elusive "bad thing" from happening to us. But the "bad thing" ends up being a mirage or a moving target.

Worry is a defense mechanism designed to keep us safe. It's a gift given to us by God for our protection. Worry is designed to show up quickly, alert us, and then dissipate as we realize the reality of any given situation.

We aren't designed to live in a constant state of worry. The feeling wasn't created to be sustained for long.

Jesus reminds us that His creation doesn't need to worry about anything. We are His and He takes care of us and sustains us, even when we don't notice Him.

The antidote to worry isn't to stop worrying. How does it go when someone says to you, "Oh, don't worry..."? You worry.

The antidote to worry is trust. This is where we may struggle. I trust you Jesus, but...

There doesn't need to be a "but" here. Things that can't care for themselves are sustained by God. He always sustains us, all the time.

DISCUSS:

1. What do you worry about the most? Why? What would help you worry less about that?
2. With what part of your life can you trust Jesus wholeheartedly? Why?
3. How do you practice trusting Jesus?
4. Do you talk about trusting Jesus with others in your sphere of influence? Why or why not?
5. Who do you trust more than Jesus? Why?