

# GOD SO LOVED YOU

A 40-DAY DEVOTIONAL

*Inspired by*

3:16

MAX LUCADO

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SO LOVED  
YOU

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**MAX LUCADO**

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ISBN 978-0-8499-2002-8

*Printed in the United States of America*

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## DAY 40

## DAY 1

*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

JOHN 3:16 NIV

John 3:16 elevates Christ to thin-air loftiness, crowning him with the most regal of titles: “One and Only Son.”

The Greek word for “one and only,” *monogenes*, highlights the particular relationship between Jesus and God. Though God is the father of all humanity, Jesus alone is the monogenetic Son of God, because only Christ has God’s genes or genetic makeup.

The familiar translation “only begotten Son” (John 3:16 NKJV, NASB) conveys this truth. When parents beget or conceive a child, they transfer their DNA to the newborn. Jesus shares God’s DNA. Jesus isn’t begotten in the sense that he began but in the sense that he and God have the same essence, eternal life span, unending wisdom, and tireless energy. Every quality we attribute to God, we can attribute to Jesus.

# 3:16

## DAY 2

*I am God, and there is none like me.*

ISAIAH 46:9 NIV

God is whispering to you. Those are his arms you feel. Trust him. That is his voice you hear. Believe him. Allow the only decision maker in the universe to comfort you. Life at times appears to fall to pieces, seems irreparable. But it's going to be okay. How can you know? Because God so loved the world. And,

Since he has no needs, you cannot tire him.

Since he is without age, you cannot lose him.

Since he has no sin, you cannot corrupt him.

If God can make a billion galaxies, can't he make good out of our bad and sense out of our faltering lives? Of course he can. He is God.

# 3:16

## DAY 3

*My ways [are] higher than your ways and My thoughts  
than your thoughts.*

ISAIAH 55:9 NASB

Christ claims ultimate clout. Unshared supremacy. When he darts his eyes, oceans swell.

He is to history what a weaver is to a tapestry. I once watched a weaver work at a downtown San Antonio market. She selected threads from her bag and arranged them first on the frame, then on the shuttle. She next worked the shuttle back and forth over the threads, intertwining colors, overlapping textures. In a matter of moments a design appeared.

Christ, in like manner, weaves his story. Every person is a thread, every moment a color, every era a pass of the shuttle. Jesus steadily interweaves the embroidery of humankind. “‘My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the LORD. ‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine’” (Isa. 55:8 NLT). God says, “My artistry is far beyond anything you could imagine.”

# 3:16

## DAY 4

*“It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . I did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners.”*

### MATTHEW 9:12–13 NCV

God didn’t look at our frazzled lives and say, “I’ll die for you when you deserve it.” No, despite our sin, in the face of our rebellion, he chose to adopt us. And for God, there’s no going back. His grace is a come-as-you-are promise from a one-of-a-kind King. You’ve been found, called, and adopted; so trust your Father and claim this verse as your own: “God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners” (Rom. 5:8 NCV). And you never again have to wonder who your father is—you’ve been adopted by God and are therefore an “heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7 NKJV).

*In the Grip of Grace*

## DAY 5

*Then He turned to His disciples and said privately,  
“Blessed are the eyes which see the things you  
see.”*

LUKE 10:23 NKJV

Have you seen him? Have you caught a glimpse of His Majesty? A word is placed in a receptive crevice of your heart that causes you, ever so briefly, to see his face. You hear a verse explained in a way you'd never thought and one more piece of the puzzle falls into place.

Someone touches your painful spirit as only one sent from him could do and there he is.

Jesus.

The man. The bronzed Galilean who spoke with such thunderous authority and loved with such childlike humility.

The God. The one who claimed to be older than time and greater than death.

Gone is the pomp of religion; dissipated is the fog of theology. Erased are our own blinding errors and egotism. And there he stands. Peter said it best. “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

*God Came Near*

## DAY 6

*There is none righteous, no, not one.*

### ROMANS 3:10 NKJV

Surely that verse is an overstatement. Can it be that “we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us” (Rom. 3:23 MSG)?

This generation is oddly silent about sin. Late-night talk shows don’t discuss humanity’s shortcomings. Some mental-health professionals mock our need for divine forgiveness. Yet the twentieth century saw more slaughters than any other century in history—from the Ottoman massacre of 1.5 million Armenians in World War I to the 1990s slaughter of 3 million people in Rwanda and Sudan.

Can God overlook our sins as innocent mistakes? No. Jesus made his position clear: “Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14 NCV).

Where does that leave us? “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13 NASB). Christ exchanged hearts with you.

# 3:16

## DAY 7

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God.*

ROMANS 8:16 NASB

When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, he also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear. Here is how it happens. You come before the judgment seat of God full of rebellion and mistakes. Because of his justice he cannot dismiss your sin, but because of his love he cannot dismiss you. So, in an act which stunned the heavens, he punished himself on the cross for your sins. God's justice and love are equally honored. And you, God's creation, are forgiven. But the story doesn't end with God's forgiveness.

...

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but he does more. He gives you *his* name.

*The Great House of God*



## DAY 8

*To him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*

### ROMANS 4:5 NKJV

God wants you to believe in him. “Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV).

The phrase “believes in him” doesn’t digest well in our day of self-sufficient spiritual food. “Believe in yourself ” is the common menu selection of our day. Try harder. Work longer. Dig deeper. Self-reliance is our goal.

And tolerance is our virtue. “In him” smacks of exclusion. Don’t all paths lead to heaven? Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and humanism? Christ walks upriver on this topic. Salvation is found, not in self or in them, but in *him*.

Paul assures salvation to the most unlikely folks: not to the worker, but to the trust-er; not to the able-bodied, but to the unable; not to the affluent saint, but to the bankrupt and unemployable—the person who will trust.

# 3:16

## DAY 9

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.*

### PHILIPPIANS 4:8 NKJV

This is more than a silver-lining attitude, more than seeing the cup as half-full rather than half-empty. This is an admission that unseen favorable forces populate and direct the affairs of humanity. When we see as God wants us to see, we see heaven's hand in the midst of sickness, Jesus working on a troubled youth, the Holy Spirit comforting a broken heart. We see, not what is seen, but what is unseen. We see with faith and not flesh, and since faith begets hope, we of all people are hope filled. For we know there is more to life than what meets the eye.

*Every Day Deserves a Chance*

## DAY 10

*But they shouted, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!”*

LUKE 23:21 NKJV

When the crowds demanded, “Crucify him!” why didn’t he make their noses grow? No angelic shield protected his back from the whip. No holy helmet shielded his brow from the thorny crown. Even when he came out, he didn’t show off. He just walked out. Mary thought he was a gardener. Thomas had to have hands-on (or hands-in) proof. Jesus still ate, he still talked, he still broke bread with the Emmaus-bound disciples.

Do you see the point?

God calls us in a real world. He doesn’t communicate by performing tricks.

God speaks in our world. We just have to learn to listen for him amidst the ordinary.

In the final week those who demanded miracles got none and missed the one. They missed the moment in which a grave for the dead became the throne of a king.

*And the Angels Were Silent*

## DAY 11

*When he arrived, he saw a great crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them. . . . So he began to teach them many things.*

MARK 6:34 NCV

When Jesus lands on the shore of Bethsaida, he leaves the Sea of Galilee and steps into a sea of humanity. Keep in mind, he has crossed the sea to get away from the crowds. He needs to grieve. He longs to relax with his followers. He needs anything but another crowd of thousands to teach and heal.

But his love for people overcomes his need for rest. . . .

Many of those he healed would never say “thank you,” but he healed them anyway. Most would be more concerned with being healthy than being holy, but he healed them anyway. Some of those who asked for bread today would cry for his blood a few months later, but he healed them anyway. . . . He had compassion on them.

*In the Eye of the Storm*

## DAY 12

*God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners.*

### ROMANS 5:8 NCV

Can anything make me stop loving you?” God asks. “Watch me speak your language, sleep on your earth, and feel your hurts. Behold the maker of sight and sound as he sneezes, coughs, and blows his nose. You wonder if I understand how you feel? Look into the dancing eyes of the kid in Nazareth; that’s God walking to school. Ponder the toddler at Mary’s table; that’s God spilling his milk.

“You wonder how long my love will last? Find your answer on a splintered cross, on a craggy hill. That’s me you see up there, your maker, your God, nail-stabbed and bleeding. Covered in spit and sin-soaked.

“That’s your sin I’m feeling. That’s your death I’m dying. That’s your resurrection I’m living. That’s how much I love you.”

*In the Grip of Grace*

## DAY 13

*The Lord knows those who belong to him.*

### 2 TIMOTHY 2:19 NCV

Imagine the event. You are before the judgment seat of Christ. The book is opened and the reading begins—each sin, each deceit, each occasion of destruction and greed. But as soon as the infraction is read, grace is proclaimed. . . .

The result? God's merciful verdict will echo through the universe. For the first time in history, we will understand the depth of his goodness. Itemized grace. Catalogued kindness. Registered forgiveness. We will stand in awe as one sin after another is proclaimed, and then pardoned. . . .

The devil will shrink back in defeat. The angels will step forward in awe. And we saints will stand tall in God's grace. As we see how much he has forgiven us, we will see how much he loves us. And we will worship him.

*When Christ Comes*

## DAY 14

*These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

MATTHEW 25:46 NKJV

Exactly where is hell? Jesus gives one chilling clue: “outside.” “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness” (Matt. 22:13 NIV). Outside of what? Outside of the boundaries of heaven, for one thing. Abraham, in paradise, told the rich man, in torment, “Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” (Luke 16:26 NKJV).

Hell is also outside the realm of conclusion. Jesus describes the length of heaven and hell with the same adjective: *eternal*. “They will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46 RSV). Hell lasts as long as heaven. It may have a back door or graduation day, but I haven’t found it.

# 3:16

## DAY 15

*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*

### 1 JOHN 4:9 NKJV

Peek through the Nazareth workshop window. See the lanky lad sweeping the sawdust from the floor? He once blew stardust into the night sky. Why swap the heavens for a carpentry shop? One answer: love.

Love explains why he came.

Love explains how he endured.

His hometown kicked him out. A so-called friend turned him in. Hucksters called God a hypocrite. Sinners called God guilty. How did Jesus endure such derision?

“Observe how Christ loved us. . . . He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us” (Eph.

5:2 MSG).

Your goodness can’t win God’s love. Nor can your badness



lose it. But you can resist it.

Don't. For heaven's sake, don't.

# 3:16

## DAY 16

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says  
the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to  
give you a future and a hope*

JEREMIAH 29:11 NKJV

Innocence slaughtered. Goodness murdered.

Heaven's tower of strength pierced. Mothers wept, evil danced, and the apostles had to wonder, *When all that is good falls apart, what can good people do?*

God answered their question with a declaration. With the rumble of the earth and the rolling of the rock, he reminded them, "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD sits on his throne in heaven."

And, today, we must remember: he still is. He is still in his temple, still on his throne, still in control. And he still makes princes out of prisoners, counselors out of captives, and Sundays out of Fridays. What he did then, he will do still. It falls to us to ask him to do so.

*America Looks Up*

## DAY 17

*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 NKJV

It was the gladness that danced through the Red Sea, the joy that blew the trumpet at Jericho, the surprise that put the springtime into Easter morning. It is God's gladness. And He promises it to an unlikely crowd:

- *"The poor in spirit."* Beggars in God's soup kitchen.
- *"Those who mourn."* Sinners Anonymous bound together by the truth of their introduction: "Hi, I am me. I'm a sinner."
- *"The meek."* Pawnshop pianos played by Van Cliburn. (He's so good no one notices the missing keys.)

*Applause of Heaven*

## DAY 18

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

MATTHEW 5:6–8 NKJV

But this joy is not cheap. No, Matthew 5 describes God's radical reconstruction of the heart. Observe the sequence. First, we recognize we are in need (we're poor in spirit). Next, we repent of our self-sufficiency (we mourn). We quit calling the shots and surrender control to God (we're meek). So grateful are we for his presence that we yearn for more of him (we hunger and thirst). As we grow closer to him, we become more like him. We forgive others (we're merciful). We change our outlook (we're pure in heart). We love others (we're peacemakers). We endure injustice (we're persecuted). It's no casual shift of attitude. It is a demolition of the old structure and a creation of the new. The more radical the change, the greater the joy. And it's worth every effort, for this is the joy of God.

*Applause of Heaven*

## DAY 19

*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, . . . the things which  
God has prepared for those who love Him.*

### 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9 NKJV

God gives us glimpses of heaven. Gold-drenched sunsets. Diamond-studded night skies. Appetizers of heaven.

But nothing compares with his crowning jewel: the New Jerusalem. Scripture reveals its jaw-dropping dimensions: an exact square of 1,400 miles (Rev. 21:16). Large enough to contain all the land mass from the Appalachians to the California coast—Canada to Mexico. Forty times the size of England, ten times the size of France. And that's just the ground floor.

The city stands as tall as it does wide. Supposing God stacks floors in his metropolis, the city would have over 600,000 stories, ample space for billions of people to come and go.

Come and go they will. The gates are never closed (Rev. 21:25). Why shut them? The enemies of God will be banished, leaving only a perfect place of perfected people.

# 3:16

## DAY 20

*But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

MATTHEW 16:23 NKJV

When Peter told Christ to sidestep the cross, Jesus wouldn't entertain the thought.

"The girl is not dead, only asleep.' But the people laughed at him" (Matt. 9:24 NCV). You know what Jesus did with the naysayers? He silenced them. "After the crowd had been thrown out of the house, Jesus went into the girl's room and took hold of her hand, and she stood up" (9:25 NCV).

Two types of thoughts continually vie for your attention. One says, "Yes you can." The other says, "No you can't." One says, "God will help you." The other lies, "God has left you." Here's the great news: you select the voice you hear. Why listen to the mockers? Why give ear to pea-brains and scoffers when you can, with the same ear, listen to the voice of God?

## *Facing Your Giants*

## DAY 21

*But this was God's plan which he had made long ago;  
he knew all this would happen.*

### ACTS 2:23 NCV

We are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be turned over to the leading priests and the teachers of the law, and they will say that he must die. They will give the Son of Man to the non-Jewish people to laugh at him and beat him with whips and crucify him. But on the third day, he will be raised to life again.”

Note Jesus’ detailed knowledge of the event. He tells who —“the leading priests and teachers of the law.” He tells what —“they will give the Son of Man to the non-Jewish people to laugh at him and beat him with whips and crucify him.” He tells when—“but on the third day he will be raised to life again.”

The journey to the cross began long before. As the echo of the crunching of the fruit was still sounding in the garden, Jesus was leaving for Calvary.

*And the Angels Were Silent*



## DAY 22

*We love Him because He first loved us.*

1 JOHN 4:19 NKJV

John 3:16 is an alphabet of grace, a table of contents to the Christian hope, each word a safe-deposit box of jewels. Read it again, slowly and aloud, and note the word that snatches your attention. “For God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

“God so *loved* the world . . .” We’d expect an anger-fueled God. One who punishes the world, recycles the world, forsakes the world . . . but loves the world?

God became a man so we could trust him. He became a sacrifice so we could know him. Don’t we need someone to trust who is bigger than we are? Jesus says: I am that person. Trust me.

# 3:16

## DAY 23

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.*

JOHN 3:36 NIV

*Whoever* unrolls the welcome mat of heaven to humanity. *Whoever* invites the world to God. The pronoun is wonderfully indefinite. After all, who isn't a *whoever*?

*Whoever* makes it clear: God exports his grace worldwide.

*Whoever* acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (Matt. 10:32 NIV)

*Whoever* comes to me I will never drive away. (John 6:37 NIV)

*Whoever* lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:26 NIV)

Titus 2:11 assures us that “the grace of God . . . has appeared to all men” (NIV).

We need to know this. The downturns of life can create such a sad state of affairs that we wonder if God still wants us. When others reject you, let God accept you. The door is open, and God invites you in.

# 3:16

## DAY 24

*Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.*

### EPHESIANS 4:32 NCV

Jesus wraps a servant's girdle around his waist, takes up the basin, and kneels before one of the disciples. He unlaces a sandal and gently lifts the foot, covers it with water, and begins to bathe it. One by one, one grimy foot after another, Jesus works his way down the row . . .

You can be sure Jesus knows the future of these feet he is washing. These feet will dash for cover at the flash of a Roman sword. Only one pair of feet won't abandon him in the garden. One disciple won't desert him at Gethsemane— Judas won't even make it that far! . . .

Behold the gift Jesus gives his followers! He knows what these men are about to do. . . . And when they do, he wants them to remember how he washed their feet. He wants them to realize those feet are still clean. . . . He forgave their sin before they even committed it. He offered mercy before they even

sought it.

*Just Like Jesus*

## DAY 25

*“They will give the Son of Man to the non-Jewish people to laugh at him and beat him with whips and crucify him. But on the third day, he will be raised to life again.”*

MATTHEW 20:19 NCV

For a period ever so brief, the doors to the throne room were open and God came near. His Majesty was seen. Heaven touched the earth and, as a result, earth can know heaven. In astounding tandem a human body housed divinity. Holiness and earthliness intertwined.

This is no run-of-the-mill messiah. His story was extraordinary. He called himself divine, yet allowed a minimum-wage Roman soldier to drive a nail into his wrist. He demanded purity, yet stood for the rights of a repentant whore. He called men to march, yet refused to allow them to call him King. He sent men into all the world, yet equipped them with only bended knees and memories of a resurrected carpenter.

*Everyday Blessings*

## DAY 26

*And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.*

ACTS 6:15 NKJV

God is in the business of changing the face of the world.

Let me be very clear. This change is his job, not ours. Our goal is not to make our faces radiant. Our goal is not to conjure up some fake, frozen expression. Our goal is simply to stand before God with a prepared and willing heart and then let God do his work.

And he does. He wipes away the tears. He mops away the perspiration. He softens our furrowed brows. He touches our cheeks. He changes our faces as we worship.

But there's more. Not only does God change the face of those who worship, he changes those who watch us worship. David cites the evangelistic power of honest worship: "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many people will see this and worship him. Then they will trust the LORD" (Ps. 40:3 NCV).

*Just Like Jesus*

## DAY 27

*“Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will quickly find a donkey tied there with its colt. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks you why you are taking the donkeys, say that the Master needs them, and he will send them at once.”*

MATTHEW 21:2–3 NCV

I don't know his name or what he looks like. I only know one thing: what he gave. He gave a donkey to Jesus on the Sunday he entered Jerusalem. Was it hard to give? Was it difficult to give something to Jesus for him to use? I want to ask that question because sometimes it's hard for me. Did you know? Did you have any idea that your generosity would be used for such a noble purpose?

That guy who gave Jesus the donkey is just one in a long line of folks who gave little things to a big God. Scripture has quite a gallery of donkey-givers. In fact, heaven may have a shrine to honor God's uncommon use of the common.

*And the Angels Were Silent*

## DAY 28

*As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*

MATTHEW 26:26–28 NKJV

When you read Matthew's account of the Last Supper, one incredible truth surfaces. Jesus is the person behind it all. It was Jesus who selected the place, designated the time, and set the meal in order. And at the Supper, Jesus is not a guest, but the host. The subject of the verse is the message of the event: "he took . . . he blessed . . . he broke . . . he gave . . ."

Often, we think of the Supper as a performance, a time when we are on stage and God is the audience. That's not how it was intended. He was in charge and he still is.

*And the Angels Were Silent*



## DAY 29

*Then Jesus went about a stone's throw away from them.  
He kneeled down and prayed.*

LUKE 22:41 NCV

The final prayer of Jesus was about you. His final pain was for you. His final passion was for you. Before he went to the cross, Jesus went to the garden. And when he spoke with his Father, you were in his prayers . . .

And God couldn't turn his back on you. He couldn't because he saw you, and one look at you was all it took to convince him. Right there in the middle of a world which isn't fair. He saw you betrayed by those you love. He saw you with a body which gets sick and a heart which grows weak . . .

On the eve of the cross, Jesus made his decision. He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you.

*And the Angels Were Silent*

## DAY 30

*Through the prophet he said, "I did not hide my face  
from mocking and spitting."*

ISAIAH 50:6 NIV

Mingled with his blood and sweat was the essence of our sin. Angels were a prayer away. Couldn't they have taken the spittle away?

They could have, but Jesus never commanded them to. For some reason, the One who chose the nails also chose the saliva. Along with the spear and the sponge of man, he bore the spit of man. Why? Could it be that he sees the beauty within the beast?

In the fable, the beauty kisses the beast. In the Bible, the Beauty does much more. He becomes the beast so the beast can become the beauty. Jesus changes places with us. We, like Adam, were under a curse, but Jesus "changed places with us and put himself under that curse" (Gal. 3:13 NCV).

The sinless One took on the face of a sinner so that we sinners could take on the face of a saint.

*He Chose the Nails*

## DAY 31

*Don't you even fear God when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done one thing wrong.*

LUKE 23:40–41 TLB

Lodged in the thief's statement are the two facts that anyone needs to recognize in order to come to Jesus. Do you see them?

“We are getting what we deserve. This man has done nothing wrong. We are guilty and he is innocent. We are filthy and he is pure. We are wrong and he is right. He is not on that cross for his sins. He is there for ours.”

And once the crook understands this, his request seems only natural. As he looks into the eyes of his last hope, he made the same request any Christian has made. “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

At this point Jesus performs the greatest miracle of the cross. Greater than the earthquake. Greater than the tearing of the temple curtain. Greater than the darkness. Greater than the resurrected saints appearing on the streets.

*Six Hours One Friday*

## DAY 32

*And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

LUKE 23:43 NKJV

Ever wonder why there were two crosses next to Christ? Why not six or ten? Ever wonder why Jesus was in the center? Why not on the far right or far left? Could it be that the two crosses on the hill symbolize one of God's greatest gifts? The gift of choice.

The two criminals have so much in common. Convicted by the same system. Condemned to the same death. Equally close to the same Jesus. In fact, they begin with the same sarcasm. But one changed. One of the criminals on a cross began to shout insults at Jesus. But the other criminal stopped him and said, "You should fear God! You are getting the same punishment he is. We are punished justly, getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

*Experiencing the Heart of Jesus*

## DAY 33

*Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but  
I pray that you will be able to know that love.*

### EPHESIANS 3:19 NCV

It wasn't right that spikes pierced the hands that formed the earth. And it wasn't right that the Son of God was forced to hear the silence of God.

It wasn't right, but it happened.

For while Jesus was on the cross, God sat on his hands. He turned his back. He ignored the screams of the innocent.

He sat in silence while the sins of the world were placed upon his Son. And he did nothing while a cry a million times bloodier than John's echoed in the black sky: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Was it right? No.

Was it fair? No.

Was it love? Yes.

*The Applause of Heaven*

## DAY 34

*At that time there was a strong earthquake. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, and rolled the stone away from the entrance.*

MATTHEW 28:2 NCV

Mary and Mary knew a task had to be done—Jesus' body had to be prepared for burial. They thought they were alone. They weren't. The two women are not climbing the mountain to receive; they are going to the tomb to give. Period. They thought their journey was unnoticed. They were wrong. God knew. He was watching them walk up the mountain. He was smiling at their hearts and thrilled at their devotion. And he had a surprise waiting.

There are times when we, too, are called to love, expecting nothing in return. Times when we are called to give money to people who will never say thanks, to forgive those who won't forgive us, to come early and stay late when no one else notices. Service prompted by duty. This is the call of discipleship.

*He Still Moves Stones*

## DAY 35

*“He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”*

MATTHEW 28:6 NKJV

Why did the angel move the stone? For whom did he roll away the rock?

For Jesus? That’s what I always thought. I just assumed that the angel moved the stone so Jesus could come out. But think about it. Did the stone have to be removed in order for Jesus to exit? Did God have to have help? Was the death conqueror so weak that he couldn’t push away a rock? (“Hey, could somebody out there move this rock so I can get out?”) I don’t think so. The text gives the impression that Jesus was already out when the stone was moved! Nowhere do the Gospels say that the angel moved the stone for Jesus. For whom, then, was the stone moved? The stone was moved—not for Jesus—but for the women; not so Jesus could come out, but so the women could see in!

*He Still Moves Stones*

## DAY 36

*“Go quickly and tell his followers, ‘Jesus has risen from the dead. He is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there.’”*

### MATTHEW 28:7 NCV

Mary and Mary don't have to be told twice. They turn and start running to Jerusalem. The darkness is gone. The sun is up. The Son is out. But the Son isn't finished. Suddenly, Jesus met them. The God of surprises strikes again. It's as if he said, "I can't wait any longer. They came this far to see me; I'm going to drop in on them."

God does that for the faithful. Just when the womb gets too old for babies, Sarai gets pregnant. Just when the failure is too great for grace, David is pardoned. And just when the road is too dark for Mary and Mary, the angel glows and the Savior shows and the two women will never be the same. The lesson? Three words. Don't give up.

*He Still Moves Stones*



## DAY 37

*Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*

JOHN 2:22 NKJV

Is the resurrection a reality? Are the claims of the empty tomb true? Some accuse the disciples of stealing the body in order to fake the resurrection. They say that Jesus' followers—ordinary tax collectors and fishermen—overcame the sophisticated and well-armed Roman soldiers and detained them long enough to roll back the sealed stone and unwrap the body and escape. Hardly seems plausible, but even if it were, even if the disciples did steal the body, how do we explain their martyrdom? Many of them died for the faith. They died for their belief in the resurrected Lord. Would they fake the resurrection and then die for a hoax? I don't think so. We have to agree with John R. W. Stott, who wrote, "Hypocrites and martyrs are not made of the same stuff."

*When Christ Comes*

## DAY 38

*We know that when Christ comes again, we will be like him, because we will see him as he really is.*

### 1 JOHN 3:2 NCV

When you arrive [in heaven] . . . something wonderful will happen. A final transformation will occur. You will be just like Jesus. . . .

Of all the blessings of heaven, one of the greatest will be you! You will be God's magnum opus, his work of art. The angels will gasp. God's work will be completed. At last, you will have a heart like his.

You will love with a perfect love.

You will worship with a radiant face.

You'll hear each word God speaks.

Your heart will be pure, your words will be like jewels, your thoughts will be like treasures.

You will be just like Jesus. You will, at long last, have a heart like his.

*Just Like Jesus*

## DAY 39

*... Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you!"*

JOHN 20:19 NIV

Picture the scene. Peter, John, James. They came back. Banking on some zany possibility that the well of forgiveness still had a few drops; Daring to dream that the master had left them some word, some plan, some direction. But little did they know their wildest dream wasn't wild enough.

It was a moment the apostles would never forget, a story they would never cease to tell. The stone of the tomb was not enough to keep him in. The walls of the room were not enough to keep him out. The one betrayed sought his betrayers. What did he say to them? Not "What a bunch of flops!" Not "I told you so." No "Where-were-you-when-I-needed-you?" speeches. But simply one phrase, "Peace be with you." The very thing they didn't have was the very thing he offered: peace.

*Six Hours One Friday*

## DAY 40

*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead,  
descended from David. This is my gospel . . .*

2 TM2:8 IV

In what was perhaps the last letter Paul ever wrote, he begged Timothy not to forget. In a letter written within earshot of the sharpening of the blade that would sever his head, he urged Timothy to remember. “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel. . . .”

When times get hard, remember Jesus. When tears come, remember Jesus. When fear pitches his tent in your front yard. When death looms, when anger sings, when shame weighs heavily. Remember Jesus.

Can you still remember? Are you still in love with Him? Remember, Paul begged, remember Jesus. Before you remember anything, remember Him. If you forget anything, don’t forget Him.

*Six Hours One Friday*

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