

BEHOLD JESUS

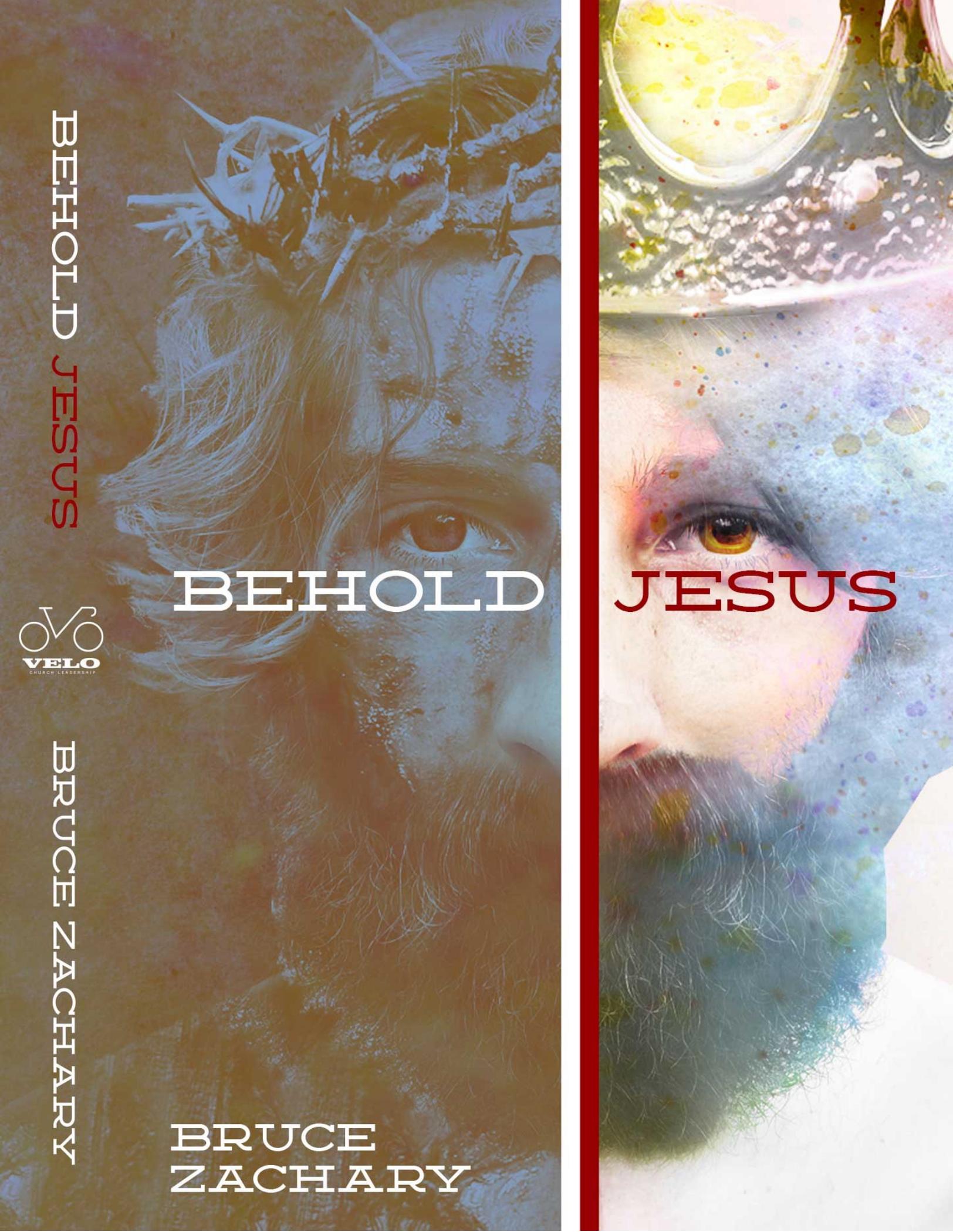


BRUCE ZACHARY

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Table of Contents:

Introduction:	4
I. Jesus is: Our Example	5
II. Jesus is: The Lamb of God	7
III. Jesus is: God's Servant	9
IV. Jesus is: King of kings and Lord of lords	12
V. Jesus is: Spirit-filled	15
VI. Jesus is: Compassionate	18
VII. Jesus is: The Builder of His Church	20
VIII. Jesus is: The Glorious God Who Dwells with Man	22
IX. Jesus is: The One Who Beholds Others and Loves	25
X. Jesus is: The Author and Finisher of Our Faith	28

Introduction:

There is a profound simplicity to the gospel and the Christian life. We are to come to Jesus, submit our will to Him, learn of Him, and follow Him. When we follow this simple plan, Jesus has promised to give us rest for our souls [Matt. 11:28-30]. We yearn for peace, contentment and satisfaction in this life. We are generally unaware that our souls are restless, hungry and in need of restoration. The hope we are seeking in this life, and in the life which is to come, is found in Jesus, yet despite the profoundly simple plan, we become distracted by our flesh, the enemy of men's souls, and the world around us. We are prone to seek to be satisfied by all the obstacles that can obscure Jesus, and we fail to experience rest for our souls. However, a soul that rests in Christ helps to produce a mind, body, and heart that also rest. Then we experience *shalom* a contentment and satisfaction that only God can provide, and that He wants you to know. Let's behold Jesus together and discover what we always desired ...

I. Jesus is: Our Example

Jesus always does the right thing. In Matt. 12:15-21 we see the word “justice” repeated. It means to do what is right. What can we learn from Jesus about doing right? How should we follow His example?

Jesus withdrew from the Pharisees following the conflict over Sabbath work. Great multitudes followed Him and Jesus healed them all [15]. Yet Jesus told them not to tell anyone [16]. This was done to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy [17] [Is. 42:1-4]. What did God, through the Prophet Isaiah, want us to know about the Messiah in the First Coming?

Here are five traits that are critical for us to behold:

1. Servant [18] *Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! We are to Behold Jesus.* We are to stop and contemplate, emulate and imitate Him. We are to focus upon Jesus. When you contemplate Jesus what do you think of or feel?

Jesus is God’s chosen servant: *My Servant whom I have chosen.* He is uniquely chosen (called) to His mission as Messiah to be the perfect example, and then the perfect sacrifice for man’s sin. A servant willingly places the mission of His master before his own desires or agenda. God’s “servant” is an endearing accolade ascribed to Moses, David, and Job. **Jesus is beloved by God and pleases God.** Jesus is loved by God, and pleases the Father, because he is submitted to Him. Jesus does the Father’s will. At Jesus’ baptism and the Mount of Transfiguration [Mt. 3,17] the Father affirms Jesus’ identity – beloved Son, who pleases the Father, and from whom we should learn. Here is an important principle: those who have experienced the love of God are motivated to serve Him. How does knowing God’s love motivate you to serve Him?

2. Spirit-led [18] *I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles.* **Jesus is anointed with God’s Spirit:** The prophecy *I will put My Spirit upon Him* was fulfilled at Jesus’ baptism [Matt.3]. **Jesus declares God’s righteousness, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles.** Jesus ministry to reconcile Gentiles, non-Jews who were outside of a covenant relationship with God, was foretold. But there is another important truth to discover and apply, those who are led by God’s Spirit will proclaim the gospel – how to be right with God. Since Pentecost, the Spirit of God has been available to believers to empower you to declare the gospel. How has the Spirit of God empowered you to declare God’s righteousness?

3. Self-controlled [19] *He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.* **Jesus is gentle:** *He will not quarrel nor cry out.* The Greek terms translated “quarrel” and “cry out” were used to describe barking dogs and brawling drunks. Jesus woos us with God’s love. He warns us of consequences of rejecting God and neglecting God because He loves us. He never abuses His authority.

Gentleness did not come naturally to me. When I encountered missionaries from cults I would often engage in a dialogue about doctrine that would tend to devolve into an argument or debate. I can't think of a time that it produced any attractive fruit for the kingdom. On the other hand, my lovely wife is gentle. She showers kindness and compassion, and allows the Spirit to woo people to Jesus. As I behold Jesus, and become gentle I appreciate this quality in my Lord and His people.

Jesus is humble: *nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.* Jesus' only autobiographical statement affirms that He is gentle and humble [Matt. 11:29]. Jesus does not seek attention, but directs our attention towards His Father. Similarly, we should not seek attention, nor praise, but focus attention towards Jesus.

4. Supportive [20] *A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench. Jesus seeks to restore those that are weak and weary: A bruised reed He will not break.* Reeds were used for flutes, pens, and measuring rods. They were cheap and disposable. If bent and unusable people generally just threw it away and grabbed another. But Jesus seeks to strengthen and restore those who are bruised, weak and weary.

Jesus seeks to restore those that are struggling: *smoking flax He will not quench.* Flax was used for wicks in lamps. Smoldering flax is an irritant and offers no light. Generally, you simply quench it and replace. Yet, Jesus seeks to encourage and restore. Jesus is gracious despite our struggles of faith. Jesus fans a spark of faith to a flame. It takes time, patience and love to restore someone who is struggling. Am I willing to invest time, energy, and love to support others?

5. Source of Hope [20-21] Jesus ensures righteousness triumphs: *till He sends forth justice to victory [20].* Jesus will be victorious. The cross and the grave cannot stop Jesus' resurrection and ultimate triumph of the gospel, and His power as Lord and Savior [Matt. 16:8; 28:18-20]. Jesus will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth [Is. 42:4]. **Jesus is the source of hope for all people:** *in His name Gentiles will trust [21] [Rom. 15:12].* All people are encouraged to discover comfort and hope that is available in Jesus. When you discover your hope in Christ, and the resulting peace and contentment that flows from following Him, you are likely to display His nature: servant, Spirit-led, self-controlled, and supportive of others. How does Jesus give you hope?

II. Jesus is: The Lamb of God

1. Jesus is the Lamb who delivers me from death:

The very first time we see the term “worship” in the Scriptures it is spoken by Abraham, the father of the faith, “The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” [Gen. 22:5]. Abraham’s love, devotion, and worship of God were being tested. Would Abraham be able to display the ultimate expression of love and give his only son Isaac? It is in this most dramatic of scenes that we learn the sacrificial nature of love and worship. We also learn about faith, and the confident assurance that God will do exactly as He has promised to do. And even when I don’t understand in the midst of my circumstances, I can trust that He is good. Abraham confidently declares that both he and Isaac will return. Although Abraham is prepared to give his son to God, he expects that God will deliver Isaac from death one way or another. Because Isaac is the child of promise, and God will keep His promise.

As they ascend Mt. Moriah, the same range where Christ would be crucified, Isaac ponders the preparation to sacrifice to God. Isaac is carrying the wood on his back, as Jesus did. His father is holding the fire, a symbol of purifying judgment, but something appears missing. So Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” The purpose of the burnt offering was to make atonement for sin. And Abraham replied, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering...” [Gen. 22:7-8]. Thus, Isaac was delivered from death.

God provided Himself as a substitute to take the penalty for my sin. Jesus is worthy of my worship, adoration, affection and gratitude for. I could never adequately express the gratitude He deserves for delivering me from the penalty I deserve.

2. Jesus is the Lamb who delivers me from sin:

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and declared, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” First, I’m encouraged to “behold” or to contemplate, meditate, and gaze upon Jesus. As I look at Jesus, John helps me to realize that He is the one who can deliver me, and the world from sin [Jn. 1:29]. John’s exhortation helps me to remember that there is a global sin epidemic.

My western culture does little to remind me that I offend an all holy and glorious God. To the contrary, it affirms my freedom to do whatever I please as long as it doesn’t hurt others. And the culture rarely compels me to wrestle with the issue of whether my behavior may in fact hurt others. The world screams so loudly that I have carte blanche to do what I want, that I can mute the still small voice of God. The voice that seeks to remind me that there is right and wrong in God’s universe, and that God sets the standard and I can’t ignore that reality. As a fish is presumably oblivious that it is in

water, I lived in an environment where I was oblivious to sin. Then I beheld Jesus, the One who delivers me from sin.

Once I beheld and received Christ, I became increasingly aware of my sin. Through Christ's death, resurrection, and His Spirit I have experienced victory and deliverance from sin. I'm not saying that I don't think and act in ways that are contrary to God. But I can rejoice that in the quarter century that I have followed Jesus there has been so much progress. I confess that through beholding Christ I have become increasingly aware of my sin. And I praise Him for the deliverance that I have experienced. Not simply changes in behaviors and attitudes, but I am now motivated to please God, and overcome sin. Apart from Christ there is no deliverance from sin. Thus He is worthy to be worshiped.

3. Jesus is the Lamb who redeems me to God:

Each appearance of the Lamb displays a progressive revelation of God, His love, and our redemption, resulting in genuine worship of God. In the Revelation, the Apostle John describes a heavenly scene and the appearance of the Lamb [Rev. 5:6-14]. There the angelic host and the twenty-four elders (a likely picture of the Church in heaven before the Tribulation), declare the worthiness of the Lamb because He has redeemed us to God by His blood [9]. Then a multitude, so great that it could not be counted by man, of the redeemed, the angelic host, and created beings submitted to God, declared praise: "Blessing and honor and glory and power to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" And then worship.

The reality of redemption to God inspires worship. The fact that I've been *delivered from* death and sin are remarkable. Yet, it may be significantly more wonderful that I'm *delivered to* God. It is because of what Jesus has done that I am reconciled to God. I'm not reconciled to God because of my need, nor my efforts, or whatever victory I've experienced over sin. I am a child of the True and Living God because of Jesus my Redeemer. And as John observed, no one else is worthy to redeem man to God and provide ultimate restoration [Rev. 5:1-7]. So it is not surprising to me that eternal praise, adoration, and worship is the reality of heaven. And to those who behold the Lamb, there are countless reasons to worship Him.

III. Jesus is: God's Servant

To serve or be served? That is the question. The very idea of being a slave or a servant is offensive to my flesh. My flesh, and the culture that surrounds me, beckons me to want to be served rather than to serve. Then I behold Jesus. Jesus is God's Servant [Matt. 12:18, Is. 42:1]. I discover the paradox that it is truly better to serve rather than to seek to be served. I discover that serving is an act or worship to God. **Here are three ideas about serving as worship.**

1. Attitudes:

Jesus' exemplary servant attitude is summarized,

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" [Phil. 2:5-8] [Emphasis mine].

Jesus attitude of humility is displayed as He *made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant*. Jesus yields His actual glory and universal authority to come as a servant as an expression of worship. People, on the other hand, are prone to selfish ambition, conceit, and pride [Phil. 2:3-4]. Our perceived glory and authority are temporal, illusory, and generally seductive. Our sense of position, prominence, and power are not perceived from an eternal perspective. I need to have Jesus' *mind*, or attitude, towards serving God and other people.

I need to appreciate that when I voluntarily humble myself to serve God and others, it is an essential display of worship modeled by Jesus. In contrast, service that is merely altruistic behavior is not intended to bless God. That attitude worships mankind. Similarly, if my motive to serve others is a perceived sense of my wellbeing then I'm not trying to bless God. Again, the object of worship is not God, but in that case self. The attitude is an important element of true worship and service to God.

2. Actions:

Jesus *humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*. The servant's attitude of worship is displayed by actions of obedience. Our Lord observed, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" [Mk. 10:45]. He unequivocally answered the question whether it is better to serve or be served. Even the Messiah, the glorious One who was worthy to be served, came to serve rather than to be served. Jesus' attitude would be proven by His actions. Jesus proves His mind to serve by countless actions, but most

noteworthy is His sacrificial death. Jesus' sacrifice was a unique fulfillment of the will of His Father, and the ultimate demonstration of love and obedience – worship.

I've discovered that it is relatively easy to talk about serving. It is generally easy to serve when I seek opportunities to serve that are comfortable for me. Comfortable serving doesn't seem to cost too much. It doesn't really involve much in the way of sacrifice emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Unfortunately, serving without some measure of appreciable sacrifice doesn't seem to nurture the soul. God's servants realize that all true worship involves a legitimate sense of sacrifice.

Certainly if my will is truly surrendered to Christ, as a servant's will must be submitted to his master, than my actions of service will bring me joy, rather than feeling like an onerous burden. But in the reality of the Christian human experience, there is a tension between my flesh and God's Spirit when I'm called to sacrifice as worship. I feel the tension, it is real, and I must choose. Am I worshipping God as His servant, or am I worshipping self (my will be done)?

I want to serve God by serving others for the Father's glory as Christ did. When I decline baseball playoff tickets to see my favorite team (that I love), because I have a prior commitment to serve my Neighborhood Group (small group), I don't feel like a martyr, or a hero. I simply know that I'm blessed when I choose to worship God by serving others. And I confess, as petty as it might seem, that there was a conflict. But I don't regret the choice, or what for me was a sacrifice. And my hope is to bless and glorify God.

3. Areas:

We are called to have an attitude and actions of a servant in numerous realms. Some of the typical areas are marriage, family, calling, career, and community realms. Here's a snapshot of servant worship to God in each area:

Marriage: When I choose to serve my wife for God's glory and her pleasure than I worship as I serve in my marriage. When I serve with any ulterior motive it is not worship, but manipulation and exploitation.

Family: When I choose to serve my sons for God's glory and their benefit than I'm blessing God. Our sons are wonderful, godly, young men. Nevertheless, I can at times resent or become frustrated by an attitude or behavior that seems to reflect a lack of appreciation for my service to them. God has called me to serve them with a humble and loving heart. I should communicate to them my feelings, or a desired behavior that I would like to see from them. But a servant has no place for resentment or frustration towards those he is called to serve.

Calling: Will I serve in the context of a local church ministry without desire for accolades? Will I serve to glorify God? Will I be in the right place, at the right time, with the right attitude, and do what I'm called to do as worship to God?

Career: Will I do my work in the marketplace, or at my campus, to glorify God? Will I seek to minister to others and put their needs before my own? Will I respond to difficult people and circumstances as a spiritual servant?

Community: As God's servant I choose to befriend and build relationships with my neighbors. I ask how they are doing, and listen to their replies. And I seek to genuinely care for their needs when I'm able.

IV. Jesus is: King of kings and Lord of lords

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought, “Who died and made you boss over me?” I was in a meeting, a few months ago, with our team of core pastors. Together we oversee the spiritual leadership and direction of our church. As the founding and lead pastor there is deference given to me. In a sense, I am first among equals. During the meeting one of my friends brought to my attention that I had again interrupted another pastor, and in effect silenced his idea before he had a chance to fully share the idea. Then it happened. The thought entered my mind, “**Who died and made you boss over me?**” And just as quickly the answer, “**Jesus.**” God has ordained that mankind is to be under spiritual authority. Our actions and attitudes reveal whether or not we are. **Here are three key questions to consider whether Christ is truly King in your life?**

Will you repent?

When confronted by my friend(s) there were several reactions that would reveal my attitude towards Christ’s authority. I can attempt to justify by suggesting that I have greater knowledge or expertise on the matter so it is justified to stop a discussion on an idea that I deem unworthy. I can defend myself by suggesting we have a busy meeting agenda and we need to move the discussion along. In effect denying any wrongdoing. I can apologize and acknowledge remorse at my behavior. **Or I can reflect, receive correction, and truly repent.** Repentance requires me to recognize my sin of pride in thinking that I am smarter or right. Acknowledging my wrong to Christ, and also confessing to those who I’ve offended. Therefore, I must choose to align my attitude and behavior to reflect that I am under God’s authority, and therefore under authority of spiritual leaders in my life. There is a chasm between “sorry” and repentance. Repentance is dynamic, life transforming, and evident by the fruit it yields.

When I repented, I rejoiced. It encouraged me that Christ was my King. And I know the fruit of repentance is sweet. I want Him to be King in my life.

Will you submit?

John the Baptist confronted King Herod about his sin and called him to repent [Matt. 14:1-12]. Herod imprisoned John because he repeatedly rebuked Herod’s adultery. Herod divorced his wife to marry his half-brother’s wife. To please his new wife, Herod imprisoned John. Herod repeatedly visited John in prison, and was urged to repent [Mk. 6:20], but refused. **Pride and refusal to repent of sin reveal our desire to be king rather than submit to the King of kings.** At Herod’s birthday feast, Herod’s stepdaughter was summoned to dance – probably a sensual dance. A royal princess would be shamed as a lowly dancing girl so Herod promised her whatever she wanted if

she danced. Herodias tells her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herodias had rebelled against God's authority and morality, and in effect murdered John. Herod was sorry (i.e. distressed or grieved) but did not want to lose face in front of his guests. Thus Herod granted the request, and John was beheaded.

Herod's actions reveal his attitude. Although he was a king, he was not sovereign. There was a greater king, and it wasn't simply the Emperor in Rome. There is One who is King of kings. Herod apparently struggled with John's call to repent, because the king kept returning to John. But when the pressure intensified at the birthday feast Herod clearly revealed that he would not submit to Christ's authority.

When the pressure intensifies, will I submit and remain under Christ's authority?

Imagine playing volleyball in a lake or swimming pool. You can easily hold the volleyball at the surface of the water, but as the volleyball is submerged deeper the pressure intensifies. The ball tends to pop-up to the surface rather than remain submitted to the authority of your hand. Similarly, when there is nominal pressure in the Christian life it is relatively easy to remain under Christ's authority. When the pressure intensifies so that there is a conflict between my authority and Christ's then you discover whether you are truly submitted.

In the context of the core pastors at our church, I experienced this pressure. As we were collectively seeking direction from Christ for our church, the vision moved toward an idea that may not have been my first choice. Nevertheless, I could see that the vision honored God and was likely from God. In that dynamic, I could choose to trust that God was speaking to and through the other members of the team and submit. Or in response to the pressure of a long-term vision, seek to impose my will.

When I submitted to Christ's authority in the context of our core team it was a defining moment for our team. And it also encouraged me that I was truly submitted to Christ as my King in the midst of the pressure. It is in the tests of pressure that reveal our desired king.

Will you honor?

There are many realms or spheres of life that reveal whether Jesus is truly King. I am called to honor my King in every realm. I need to determine whether I'm honoring Christ not only in my calling, but is He King in the personal, marriage, family, community, and career realms? For example, if my wife Karen was to assert, "Who died and made you the boss over me?" I would quickly reply, "Jesus." Although there is some theological truth in that answer, it doesn't go deep enough. I need to dig deeper. When Christ is King in my life, I choose to love my wife as Christ loves the church. Presumably, if I love Karen as Christ does then she would not chafe at my leading.

Therefore, whenever my attitudes or actions are called into question, in any realm of life, I need to humbly consider whether I need to repent and submit in order to honor Christ. Whenever, I recognize my wrongs and submit to Christ as *my* King, I'm comforted knowing that I'm the subject of the King of kings and Lord of lords [Rev. 19:16]. Is He *your* King?

V. Jesus is: Spirit-filled

Why do you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit? There are countless reasons that I find worthy to contemplate, and that motivate me to be filled with the Spirit. Let's consider five reasons, and then discover how to be filled with the Spirit.

1. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit as an example for us:

The prophet Isaiah foretold that God's Spirit would be upon the Messiah:

"Behold My Servant ... I have put My Spirit upon Him ..." [Is. 42:1].

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor ..." [Is. 61:1].

Then about 700 years later the prophecy was fulfilled at the Jordan River when Jesus was baptized and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and came upon Him [Matt. 3:16]. This was more than the fulfillment of prophecy, or the Father's full affirmation and identification of Jesus as Beloved Son and our Savior.

As I behold Jesus, I presume that the Spirit's coming upon Him is an example for His followers. It is perplexing to consider that Jesus could be lacking the Spirit in that He is always God, and yet in His humanity, He reveals the source of strength for victorious Christian living to us. We need the power, and leading of the Spirit to direct our minds (thoughts), mouths (words), hands and feet (actions).

2. We need the Spirit to produce Christ-like character:

The fruit of the Spirit is summarized as follows: love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control [Gal. 5:22-23]. These virtuous traits are a description of Christ-like character. I've discovered that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit that I cannot manufacture these virtues in my life despite my earnest desire and best efforts. Yet, by the empowering of the Spirit the fruit is produced in my life.

I remember being a relatively new believer in a believers' meeting (afterglow) at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa and wanting to pray to receive the gift of tongues. As I stood in a line I was thinking how cool the gift of tongues would be and how spiritual my friends would think I was (I appreciate the irony, I'm simply confessing). As I approached Pastor Ray Snook, he said, "Bruce I saw you in line and God told me that He was going to give you the gift of love." As long as I'm confessing, I'll share that I was actually a little disappointed at first. I was still a trial lawyer at the time, and being loving seemed like a professional liability. Nevertheless, people I worked with started to tell me that I had

become such a loving person. I could never have created the transformation, but the Spirit produced a radical transformation to produce Christ-like character and bring glory to God.

3. We need the Spirit to effectively walk in our calling:

I presume that there is an intended connection between Jesus beginning His earthly ministry and the Spirit's coming upon at His baptism. Each of us has a calling *generally* to walk worthy of Christ's calling, and to walk in the Spirit [Eph. 4:1, Gal. 5:16]. And each of us is *uniquely* gifted by God to edify the Body. Your calling is the area where you advance Christ's kingdom beyond your home or career realms.

It is interesting that Jesus engaged in His career as a stonemason/carpenter prior to the Spirit uniquely coming upon Him, but He received the filling of the Spirit prior to engaging in His calling or earthly public ministry. Certainly we want to be filled with the Spirit in every realm of our lives. Nevertheless, you cannot effectively walk in your calling apart from the Spirit. In varying seasons of my Christian life I have felt called to various roles as I seek to serve God by serving others. In each of those roles I have desperately needed the Spirit's leading and power to rightly represent Jesus.

4. We need the Spirit to properly share the gospel:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor ... [Is. 61:1]. To effectively bring the gospel, we need to be empowered, guided, and filled with the Spirit. I confess that on more than one occasion I have tried to share the gospel without being led by the Spirit. I've tried to share with family members at family gatherings, because it seemed like an opportune time, but it wasn't. I've tried to reason with people, essentially as an intellectual exercise. And although in attorney mode I can be persuasive, I cannot properly do the work of bringing the good news unless I'm submitted to the Holy Spirit.

5. We need the Spirit to have victory over the flesh:

I presume each of us can relate to the Apostle Paul's struggle, *"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do"* [Rom. 7:15]. Many of us have struggled with life-dominating sin. We all know the battle between God's Spirit and our flesh. No amount of self-discipline is sufficient to provide victory in the countless ways that our flesh, this world, and the enemy of men's souls tempt us. We, like Paul, yearn to be delivered from our struggle. And like Paul, we can rejoice in the work of God's Spirit making progressive victory over the flesh a reality [Rom. 8].

How to be filled with the Spirit: The filling of the Spirit [Eph. 5:18] or the baptism of the Spirit [Ac. 1:5] can occur at or subsequent to salvation. To be filled with the Spirit involves your submission to the Spirit's work in leading, and empowering. The more you submit the more freedom the Spirit has to conform you to Jesus' image. The greatest obstacle is rebellion (sin). The Spirit is grieved [Eph. 4:30] when we choose to remain ignorant of God's commands, neglect, or intentionally rebel against His commands. The Spirit is quenched when we resist His leading [1Th. 5:19]. Sin is what hinders the filling, and obedience is how we experience the filling. As long as we have bodies of flesh we will struggle with sin. Therefore our confession, repentance, and renewed commitment to yield to God are how believers experience the Spirit-filled life.

VI. Jesus is: Compassionate

Compassion is concern for the pain of others that moves someone to action to relieve the suffering. Compassion is the most frequent expression of Jesus' emotions. Jesus' compassion is displayed as He taught and miraculously fed the 5,000+ and the 4,000+ [Matt. 14-15], raised the widow's son at Nain [Lu. 7:13], and is portrayed in the parable of the Good Samaritan [Lu. 10:33].

There is a wonderful comfort to the compassion of Christ revealed by Jesus' dealings with bruised reeds and smoldering flax. God has exhorted us to,

"Behold Jesus" [Matt. 12:18, Is. 42:1]. As the Apostle John mused, "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen [Jn. 21:25]. In essence, there are literally countless wonderful truths about Jesus to contemplate, but God wants you and I to know, "*A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory* [Matt. 12:20, Is. 42:3]. What's so wonderful about supporting bruised reeds and smoldering flax?

"A bruised reed He will not break ..." In the ancient world, reeds were used for measuring rods and flutes, but their most common use was as pens. Reeds were like a stick pen rather than a luxurious Montblanc fountain pen. They were cheap and disposable. This reality hints at the remarkable nature of Jesus. Rather than dispose of the bruised, Jesus seeks to strengthen and restore.

Our world tends to gravitate towards the disposable. Razors are disposable. Pens are disposable unless it's an expensive fountain pen. Furnishings are disposable unless they are family heirlooms rather than an IKEA some-assembly required table. And alas, people and relationships tend to be perceived as disposable. If they are not accomplishing the perceived function we get rid of them. The world we live in tends to say, "If your spouse doesn't make you happy then get rid of them and move on." Or if the worker isn't getting the job done, "You're fired." And if a friend is too needy for too long, "This isn't working for me, I'm out."

Unfortunately, most, if not all of us, are likely to discover seasons of life where we are weak, weary, bruised, and in need to be restored. As a pastor, I want to advance God's kingdom. Yet, there are times that I feel weak, weary, and woefully ineffective for the task. As a follower of Jesus, I want to add value to my relationships with my spouse, sons, friends, and neighbors where I live, work, study, and play. Yet, when life, and ministry bruise me I wonder whether I'm adding or subtracting value. It is comforting to know that Jesus doesn't dispose of me when I'm bruised, weak, and weary. Instead He supports and restores me.

"Smoking flax He will not quench ..." Flax was used for wicks in oil lamps. Smoldering flax is an irritant and offers no light. Generally, people would simply quench it and

replace with another cheap wick. Yet, Jesus seeks to encourage and restore. Jesus is gracious despite our struggles of faith. It takes time, patience, and love to restore someone who is smoldering. They have seemingly lost their passion for Christ, their light has faded, and there remains barely a spark. Many find it much easier to invest the effort where there is a seemingly greater return on investment. Nevertheless, Jesus gently and tirelessly fans a spark of faith to a flame.

It is the nature of the life that we move towards apathy, and former passions grow cold. For most there is likely to be a season where the flame seems to grow dim. It may be multiple seasons, and they may be brief or long in duration. I've been there, and I suspect you have too. Imagine if we were disposed of in those times. Presumably, if you've read this far you are likely in a season where a spark of faith has been stirred to a flame (or perhaps a blaze). And again, we have reason to rejoice in the compassion of the Christ.

Jesus shows compassion without compromise. He never encourages or endorses sin, but shows compassion to sinners. To the woman caught in adultery, He assured her that he had no desire to condemn her [Jn. 8]. But He also instructed her that she needed to repent from her sin ("Go and sin no more"). I'm comforted that as I seek to grow in Christ-likeness that Jesus is patient with me and "my stuff." But His compassion also moves Him to action to relieve my pain that is aggravated by my sin. So, He reminds me to repent and yield to Him. If Jesus simply showed compassion without calling me to repent ironically He would prolong my pain rather than reducing my suffering.

The Greeks and Romans tended to view compassion as weakness rather than a virtue. Similarly, the very idea of a compassionate kingdom leader is counter-intuitive to our word system that seems to gravitate towards a perceived strong leader. Nevertheless, God has assured that Jesus shall remain compassionate *"till He sends forth justice to victory"* [Matt. 12:20, Is. 42:3]. God will ultimately bring judgment upon the unrepentant. But until that time, Jesus is compassionate and seeks to restore people to Himself. This is the type of king that I would choose to serve. This is the type of king that I want to be subject to, and this is the type of king that I need, especially when I'm struggling. And He is the one that when I behold Him I marvel and want to be more like every day.

VII. Jesus is: The Builder of His Church

There is a tremendous sense of peace in knowing that Jesus will build His Church [Matt. 16:13-28]. The glorious peace is threatened by apathy and anxiety. For example, a person who doesn't care about advancing God's kingdom and is apathetic toward their part of the mission, and excuses their condition by saying, "Jesus will build his Church, I don't have to." Conversely, the anxious person is constantly worried about the state of the local or global church, and may try to shoulder the work to advance God's kingdom well beyond the load that Christ intended them to bear. In order to experience God's peace, we need to know and apply the right answers to three of life's most important questions: **Who is Jesus? What will He do? What is the cost of being His disciple?**

I. Who is Jesus?

Caesarea Philippi is about thirty miles north of the Galilee, and is where the Jordan River begins. It was an epicenter for various ancient religions because of a large cave at the site. There the Canaanites worshipped Baal, the Greeks and Romans built temples to their gods, and Jews referred to the cave as a gateway to the underworld. It was as if Jesus deliberately took the 12 to this particular site to place Himself on trial among the various religions. Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say I am?" In essence, "What's the word on the street?" There were a variety of opinions, and all were favorable and equate Jesus as a prophet. Some thought Jesus was John returned from the dead because of Jesus call to purity and repentance, some Elijah because of the miracles, some Jeremiah the weeping prophet because of Jesus' compassion. They are endearing reviews, but sorely miss the mark. They are the wrong answers.

Who do people (i.e. the un-believing culture around you) say that Jesus is? I grew up in an observant Jewish home. In our home, Jesus was a good guy, rabbi, or sage, but not a prophet and certainly not Messiah. In an increasingly post-Christian America the cultural view of Christ is shifting. Today, your culture may view Jesus as one of many enlightened thinkers, a cosmic genie, or one of many light bearers. Culture and environment shape your view of Jesus, but don't change the reality of who He is.

Then Jesus asked His disciples, "**But who do you say that I am?**" It is the most important question that any human can contemplate, and the most consequential answer of a life and eternal life. Peter responds as a spokesman for the group, that **Jesus is the Christ** or Anointed One, the Son of the living God, and the long-awaited Messiah who will restore man to God. This correct answer was shaped by their experiences with Jesus, His teaching, and the Scriptures, but was ultimately revealed By God. The better I know Him and who He is, the greater my sense of peace.

II. What will Jesus do?

Jesus promised to build His Church and prevail against evil opposition. Peter's profession of Jesus as the Christ is the rock upon which Jesus has promised to build. Jesus gives assurance that His Church will not be thwarted in its mission of regaining ground taken by the enemy of men's souls. Presently, billions of people on this planet who identify as followers of Christ authenticate the initial fulfillment of this promise.

Jesus gave His life as a perfect sacrifice as foretold by the prophets. Jesus explained to the twelve that He had to die in Jerusalem at the hands of the Jewish leaders. The prophecies of Messiah's death had been extensively foretold and foreshadowed [Is. 53, Ps. 22, Ex. 12, Gen. 22]. His sacrifice would usher in the New Covenant and clear the way for sinful man to be reconciled to a holy God.

Jesus rose on the third day as predicted. This proved that the Father had accepted the Son's sacrifice, confirmed Jesus identity as the Christ, encouraged the twelve (and us) that Jesus will build His Church, and more. One moral is: don't freak out when things don't seem to be going well. Between the cross and the resurrection, the disciples are discouraged, fearful, and suffice it so say, not on mission. When things don't seem to be going well for the local, regional, or national church, leaders often panic. They lament, bemoan, retreat from mission, and doubt Jesus' plans and promise(s). This undoubtedly negatively influences those that follow them.

Moral: since Jesus died and was resurrected as He and the prophets foretold, I should trust that He would build His church.

III. What is the cost of being His disciple?

Three requirements to be Jesus' disciple are described [Matt. 16:24]:

1. Deny self: yield your will to God. Purpose to submit yourself to God.

2. Take up your cross: The cross is a symbol of death. We are called to die to self. Luke records that we are to take up the cross daily [Lu. 9:23]. In order to experience life with God we need to die to the pursuit of this life, the world, and our flesh.

3. Follow Jesus: we are to follow Jesus not simply a creed or set of principles.

When my sons were small they would sometimes try to follow in my literal footprints. It was awkward as they looked on the ground and tried to stretch and step. Sometimes we would hold hands, especially in a crowded place or dangerous crossing, so that they would not get lost. But as they matured, and we walked together, they did not need me to hold their hand to know which way to turn, or when to stop or go.

If I'm following Him, deny self, and take up my cross, I will discern and do my part of the mission. Jesus will continue to build His Church, and He has chosen to use people for that work. When I discover who Jesus is, what He will do, and what I must do to be His disciple I experience a tremendous sense of peace. I hope that you will too.

VIII. Jesus is: The Glorious God Who Dwells with Man

During the Christmas season, we are especially likely to marvel at the incarnation. The idea that God clothed Himself in humanity and came to dwell with man is truly marvelous. This truth is something that we need to consider throughout the year. The apostle John highlighted this truth as an eyewitness as he began his gospel account, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” [Jn. 1:14]. John was likely referring specifically to the events described at the Mount of Transfiguration [Matt. 17:1-13]. The glorious God who dwells with man can transform us, like the disciples. At Caesarea Philippi, the disciples had just affirmed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God [16:1-12]. Jesus wants His disciples to understand that He is more than a mere mortal man like Moses or Elijah, but is in fact God in the flesh. **The better you know Jesus, and behold His glory, the more Jesus will transform you.**

Sometimes you need time away with Jesus to perceive His glory. Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. Why only Peter, James, and John? These three had the privilege of being there when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead and saw His power over death [Lu. 8]. They will also be the only three when Jesus goes further into the Garden of Gethsemane and they see His submission to the Father even unto death [Matt. 26]. At the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus prepared them. James will be the first martyr of the church [Ac. 12]. And Peter and John will be leaders in the early Church prepared to surrender their lives if necessary to follow Jesus. Jesus’ glory is the glory of God displayed. Jesus was transfigured before them. The Greek *metamorphoo* refers to a change of form. Jesus’ face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light. Imagine, as best you can, the scene. They saw Jesus in a new light, literally and figuratively. Moses reflected God’s glory when he descended from Mt. Sinai [Ex. 34], but Jesus radiates God’s glory.

Jesus’ glory encourages and strengthens your faith. I’ve discovered that when I am intentional to create margin in my life to spend significant time with Jesus that I’m more likely to behold His glory. I need time with Jesus uninterrupted by distraction from media, social media, the web, my “to do” list, and even people. The Sabbath is a gift to man to encourage rhythms of time with God that would allow us to better behold Him, and then experience rest for our souls. This peace or contentment of soul eases the mind and heart, and encourages and strengthens faith. I need meaningful time with Jesus in prayer, Bible reading, reflection and contemplation.

Time with Jesus has helped me to better understand that I’m actually called to love God *and* my neighbors. Also, that Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, and that I’m one of them. And that ministry can be an obstacle to healthy relationships with God, my wife, our sons, friends, and those I serve. Time with Christ has also given me great encouragement that He will continue to conform me to His image as I abide in Him.

Consider an experience when you spent some significant time with Jesus. What did you do, what happened, and how were you transformed?

Jesus gloriously fulfills the law and the prophets. The disciples saw Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus. Luke tells us they spoke of Jesus' death and departure [Lu. 9:31]. Moses was the great lawgiver. The Mosaic Law reveals God's standard of perfection to reveal our need for a Savior, the Messiah. Moses died without entering the Promised Land [Deut. 34:5-6], but God graciously raised him in glory in the Promised Land. Elijah was recognized as the greatest prophet. **Jesus' life, death, and resurrection fulfilled what Moses and Elijah had sought to prepare man for.** Peter suggested they construct three tabernacles, one for each. Perhaps Peter was expecting a lengthy stay, or wanted to erect a memorial for the event. The problem is that Peter was suggesting that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were equals.

Jesus is the One we must hear. The Father was manifest as a bright glorious cloud that overshadowed them [Ex. 13:21, 40:35, 1Ki. 8:10]. The Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" The Father affirms that Jesus is not merely another prophet, but that Jesus is the One we must hear [Heb. 1:1-2, Deut. 18:15].

We can easily neglect the profound truth that we need to hear Jesus. In our culture there is not only the sound of conflicting philosophies, religions, and world-views, but there is the competing distraction of the material world, our flesh, and the enemy of men's souls. Again, in order to behold His glory and be transformed we need to learn to hear Jesus' voice better. In this season of my life, I'm seeking to create healthy patterns for time with Christ, and healthy boundaries regarding time on social media and media generally. I want to be better tuned to the still small voice of God.

How have you learned to hear Jesus' voice better?

Jesus' glory should produce reverence not fear. The disciples fall on the ground and were greatly afraid, as the glory of God was manifest. Jesus came and touched them and encouraged them not to be afraid. I love the idea that the glorious God desires to provide a comforting touch and assure me that I need not be afraid. The manifestation of God's glory is intended to produce reverence not fear. It produces life-transforming faith and worship of God. And stirs me to fear sin, not God.

Here are some ways that experiencing God's glory can transform you:

1. You revere (worship) God.
2. You are comforted knowing the glorious God who dwells with you.
3. You are humbled [Is. 5-6].
4. You reflect God's glory [Ex. 33:18-23].

5. You serve God [Is. 6:1-8].

6. You share your experience [Jn. 1:14].

How has the glorious God who dwells with man transformed you?

How would you like to be transformed in this coming season?

IX. Jesus is: The One Who Beholds Others and Loves

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him ... [Mk. 10:21].

The truth that Jesus beholds others and loves them is not surprising. This truth is so profound and full of rich meaning that lies below the surface. Insight that is waiting to be mined, discovered, and appropriated. A great place to start digging is Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the rich young ruler's quest for eternal life [Matt. 19:16-23, Lu. 18:18-23, Mk. 10:17-27]. The young man is wealthy, presumed to be an elder of the synagogue, and is religious. Despite abundant possessions, prominence, and practical religion he is aware that something is lacking in his life. Thus he desperately pursues Jesus to ask, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

1. How did Jesus love him? Jesus is compassionate. He sorrows over choices that keep us separated from God. He communicates truth directly, and uses **questions that are intended to cause us to reflect, contemplate, and discover self and God better**. His questions have often caused me to reflect and receive insight from Him. This has helped me to see myself, and my sin, in a new light. Yet, like the parables they often require additional effort on the part those seeking eternal life. Nevertheless, Jesus' gospel provides assurance of eternal life, and explains what we must do to experience eternal life.

2. What does good really mean? So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God [Mk. 10:18]. Jesus' answer affirms that only God is good. Thus, the rich young ruler must recognize that Jesus is God and therefore must submit to Him. This in effect would answer the question what must one do to experience eternal life. Or an alternative discovery that God's standard of "good" is much higher than man's. Jesus' discussion of the commandments begins to reveal God's perfect standard of goodness.

Jesus loved me by revealing that I'm not a good person. The world seeks to affirm that everyone is good, all deserve a trophy, and that no one is really all bad so there must be good in all. This may be how the world seeks to love. But when I consider "good" in light of God's standard I realize that I don't measure up. That realization is critical to growth, development, and discovery of eternal life.

3. What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? The man asks Jesus which of the commandments that he should keep. Jesus recites six of the Ten

Commandments that focus on the relationship between people [Ex. 20:12-16], “Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.” And Jesus adds the command to, “love your neighbor as you love yourself” [Matt. 19:19, Lev. 19:18].

The rich young ruler was quick to affirm, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.” It appears that he was genuinely seeking to be right and do right with God. And he also realized that something was missing, “What do I still lack?” [Matt. 19:20]. He assumes that he loves his neighbor as he loves himself, but also realizes there is something lacking.

It wasn’t until I began to contemplate that I don’t really love my neighbors that I began to discover what was lacking. Do you ever feel that you don’t love your neighbors? Do you ever feel that something is lacking? Do you ever wonder what it might be?

4. What was lacking? Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me” [Mk. 10:21].

What was lacking was a supreme love for God and neighbors. Jesus had not referenced the first four of the Ten Commandments related to revering God supremely. Nor did Jesus mention the last of the Ten Commandments related to coveting. When Jesus challenged the young man to give up his wealth a conflict was revealed. The rich young ruler’s external behavior masked a heart that was divided between a love for God, love for possessions, and love for this world. That division was an obstacle to allowing God to fill the void. People have to choose between temporal comfort from this world or God’s completeness.

Jesus was not suggesting that charity or perfect obedience was the means to salvation [Eph. 2:8-9]. But was seeking to help a man, and mankind, to understand that we must love God and neighbors more than our possessions or this world. The rich young ruler had a choice. He chose his possessions rather than submit to God, and he went away sad. Jesus was sad too for He loved him; and he understood the consequences of his decision. The man was exchanging temporal pleasure from wealth for a relationship with God in this life and the life to come. Thus he would continue to lack. *Which will you choose?*

5. Which is more valuable, treasure on earth or in heaven? Jesus assured the rich young ruler that he could trade earthly treasure for heavenly treasure, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and *you will have treasure in heaven*; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me” [Mk. 10:21]. Jesus was offering an exchange, temporal pleasure and treasure for eternal pleasure and treasure.

Jesus observed how difficult it is for those with wealth to enter the kingdom [Mt. 19:23-26]. But Peter inquired about treasure in heaven. He asked the Lord how the disciples would be rewarded in light of all that they had left behind to follow Him. Jesus assured that all who followed Him would receive a hundredfold increase and eternal life [Matt. 19:26-29].

Most investors would be impressed with a hundred percent increase, but Jesus offers a hundred times increase. He is appealing to our sense of reason, because He loves us and knows the perverse value we place on earthly treasure. And He assures of eternal life, because He loves us, and understands the eternal consequences to our soul.

I am so grateful that He beholds you and I and loves. It has helped me to love God and neighbors better, and stop loving this world so much. How about you?

X. Jesus is: The Author and Finisher of Our Faith

When I was in high school I ran cross-country. We would train by running eight to ten miles a day about four times a week. The purpose was to build endurance and effectiveness when the pressure of a two-mile race up and down hills was the runners' reality. Suffice it to say it wasn't always fun, but it did prepare me to run better.

A cross-country team can have an unlimited number of runners compete for a school. Runners are not required to meet a specific time to qualify to run the next race. You simply need to keep running and endure. A cross-country course will generally create some hills to challenge the runners' endurance. Our school raced at a local agricultural college. When my heart rate was at capacity and I was breathing heavily, running by pigs and cows provided additional challenges. Every year many quit and give it up, the race is too unpleasant and the benefits seem too elusive.

The race of faith is like a cross-country endurance race or marathon. There are difficult people and difficult circumstances. We are fallen people in the midst of a fallen world. Our flesh, the enemy of men's souls, and a culture that generally opposes Christ create pitfalls, and hurdles. It is not surprising that you and I have felt like giving up the race. How will I ever finish this race and finish well?

The author of the Book of Hebrews understood the nature of this endurance race when he penned, *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* [Heb. 12:1-2].

1. Jesus is the One to focus on: There are many who have run the race of faith well. Many enshrined in the "Hall of Faith" receive honorable mention in the preceding chapter of Hebrews. Our faith is encouraged and inspired by this great cloud of witnesses. Furthermore, there are contemporaries who have set a fine example for us. Although they provide an example and help us to run they are unable to get us to the finish line. That is why we are exhorted to *look unto Jesus*. We are to stay focused on Jesus. He is the one who keeps us on course. He empowers us to finish well, and is the ultimate example of endurance. And to behold Him we must look away from other things that tend to take us off course.

When I behold Jesus, I'm more likely to jettison the sin and other hindrances that keep me from running well. It has been a long time since I ran cross-country, but I did start riding long distances on a bicycle. For the longest time I resisted wearing bicycle shorts, a cycling jersey, or cycling shoes. When I finally gave in and got appropriate gear I discovered that riding was easier, less painful, and more efficient. Similarly, when I deal

with my sin, *and* other distractions that keep me from running well in my spiritual race I discover that it is generally easier, less painful, and I'm more effective for Christ.

2. Jesus is the author: The Greek term translated "author" in Heb. 12:2 can refer to a captain, chief leader, or prince. The term also refers to the originator. Jesus begins our faith, and like a captain he steers it to a desired destination. As a prince, He oversees our faith like a loving Sovereign.

The term "author" also relates to a creative process and implies a story. The whole of the Bible is an epic meta-narrative of redemption. Joseph's story is just one of countless epics within the meta-story. The arc of Joseph's life swings: dreams that his brothers would bow before him, enslavement at the hands of his brothers, imprisonment when falsely accused, apparent near deliverance from prison, and then forgotten in prison for two years. But the Lord was not done writing Joseph's story. Joseph would be released and would rise to authority in the Egyptian Empire second only to Pharaoh. And the brothers did bow before Joseph, just as God foretold. It is a story that only the Lord could write, direct, and produce in Joseph and through Joseph to impact the world. Undoubtedly during the difficult valleys that Joseph had to experience in real time there would be concern about how the story was going to end, and what does the next chapter hold.

I wonder what the next chapter of my life holds and how my story will unfold. Those concerns are real to me in difficult times. Through the years I've seen many chapters in my life written. I've seen the red ink of redemption spread across the pages. And I've learned the goodness of the Author. And this has helped me to trust the Author as He keeps allowing me to experience my story with Him. Ultimately, I know that when my story ends on this earth the best part of my story begins (one of the few times that I'm confident that the sequel will surely be better).

3. Jesus is the finisher: The Greek term translated "finisher" in Heb. 12:2 can be translated "completer" or "perfecter." The sense is bringing something to its conclusion. Jesus initiates, sustains, and completes my faith. It was and is a gift from God. I'm comforted by this truth when I experience difficult circumstances, doubt, or realize areas of my life where I need to grow.

Paul wrote, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" [Ph. 1:6]. I can relate to the construction analogy as well as the endurance race of faith imagery. Sometimes I feel like I'm a construction project. At times it feels that caution tape should be around the construction site. And I rejoice that Jesus will finish the project. The project will be done on time from His perspective. It was delivered on budget, because He paid the price. And it will be beautiful from His perspective, and Lord willing will glorify Him.

Let's choose to stay in the race, behold Jesus, jettison our stuff, and finish well for His glory. And let's enjoy the Author and the unfolding of our story.