

Sick of Religion?

Weekly Devotional

A ministry of Chapel Hill

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WEEK 3

This daily devotional pairs with Mark 2:13-17 and the sermon preached March 9-10.



Written by Serena Blair

Worship leader at Chapel Hill. Jesus is the King of my heart. I love being John's wife, proud to get the title "Mama" to twin girls, and have been a hairdresser my entire adult life. I have a passion to live out my faith and not hoard it. I love God's Word. It is the plumb bob, the vertical reference line written straight from the loving heart of Father God to our hearts and the depth of our souls. For fun: I love family, people, yummy coffee, vacation, fashion (yes!), and all things salty.

LifeGroup Guide

Prayer

Welcome/Vision/Group Guidelines/Prayer

Review

How has Jesus been challenging you this week? Where have you experienced transformation?

Story

Mark 2:13-17

Head

Why are the Pharisees and Scribes mad with Jesus in this story?

What does Jesus spend his time doing in this story? What does this say about what matters to God?

What else do we know about Levi? (See Mark 3:18; Matthew 9:9)

Heart

Have you shared with your LifeGroup the story of when you accepted to follow Jesus for the first time, or perhaps a significant moment of his calling you to some particular place, role, or relationship? Today might be a good opportunity to hear the stories of one another!

Jesus is spending time in this story with tax collectors and sinners, before they change their lifestyle. Moral repentance isn't a pre-condition of Jesus' love and acceptance. Think about your regular weekly rhythm. When do you come into contact on a regular basis people whose lives or beliefs don't line up with yours? If you do spend regular time with them, do you ever intentionally get to know them over a meal? Why or why not?

Hands

Jesus called Levi after noticing him "as he passed by." How many moments do we miss every single day to have spiritual conversations because we don't have eyes to see those we pass by? Pray for open eyes and heart to what God might have on your plate today.

How does your weekly schedule reflect your availability or desire to call sinners to follow Christ? If it's not already a priority, what's one small change you can make to your attitude, relationships, or schedule to make room for this?

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:13-14; Matt. 9:9; Luke 5:27-28

Ask

What people groups do I avoid?

Reflect

When Jesus saw Matthew sitting at the tax booth, he saw a person that could be—and would be—his disciple; a person that was despised and known as a traitor and an extortioner. Tax collectors in biblical days were to be avoided. They worked for the Roman government and were the most visible Jewish collaborators with Rome. They were turncoats. Jesus saw a person not for how they identified at the moment, but how they would identify eventually. Matthew was a tax collector; his life was identified by what he did and not who he would become by the matchless grace of God. Matthew left everything he had to become a follower of Jesus and his new identity was found in him.

How can we see people for who they can become and not how they identify?

What makes this story amazing is that Jesus chooses Matthew the tax collector and then Matthew chooses him. So we ought to believe there is something deeper going on here. There was nothing random about Jesus' invitation or Matthew's response. I truly believe Matthew longed for something more in life. I believe he wanted to have worth and belonging and Jesus would give him just that.

We tend to lean towards the influential and the "in crowd" when we want to make a mark in this life, don't we? We choose the best and brightest because we want to be a part of what the world says is the best. Jesus chose a rag-tag bunch of nobodies, tax collectors, traders, and fishermen. Jesus never gets sucked into what the world deems "best," does he? He knows what his mission and purpose are.

Ask Jesus to open your eyes to see what he sees.

DAY 2 – Tuesday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:14; Mark 10:29-30

Ask

When Jesus asked me to “follow him,” what did I leave behind?

What radical change was made in my life through the work of the Holy Spirit?

How did I “identify” after this moment?

Reflect

As a twelve-year-old, I asked Jesus into my heart and asked him to cleanse me of my sin, even though I wasn't really sure what sin was. I knew for sure that God was real and I wanted to follow him, but sin was a little foreign to me and following him was tricky because I couldn't see him. I couldn't have known that my small mustard seed of faith would be put to the test almost immediately.

Through some hard family trials over the course of a few years I basically walked away. In my kid's heart I didn't know what else there was besides belief. I didn't know that I could read the Bible and the Holy Spirit was my teacher. At 16 I took matters into my own hands and grew a long root of pride. I set to the task of being successful, probably never marrying, going where I wanted to go, and doing what I wanted to do. “You do you” could have been tattooed on my forehead. In the world's eyes I had it all as an up-and-coming 23-year-old with a promising career in the hair industry. Bought my first house, made better-than-average income, mowed my own lawn, and fixed my own toilet. “I am woman, hear me roar!” It was all grand—right?

Jesus got ahold of me when I turned 30. What I had craved and what I had longed for came true in the person of Jesus Christ. My career as a hairdresser would be put to the test, as it is not really popular being a Christian in a mostly secular career. My long-time friends would look at me like I had lost it. How could I betray them? How could I believe that God was real? And the Bible—wasn't that written by man? Every question came at me.

I remained strong in my faith, but only because I had landed headfirst in the Word of God. My adult heart knew God could speak for himself this time around. I compared everything I heard to scripture, including scrutinizing how I identified in my life. (I use this term “identify” because it is a buzz word. If we are not finding our identity in Christ, we are finding it in other things—life styles, habits, and careers.) Within a year I left my career at Gene Juarez because I knew God was calling me away. I couldn't have known what Jesus had in store even in the very near future.

Mark 10:29-30a says, “Anyone who leaves his home behind and chooses me over children, parents, family, and possessions, all for the sake of the gospel, it will come back to him a hundred times as much in this lifetime.” (The Passion Translation)

When I turned away from the things in which I found my identity and instead to the person of Jesus Christ, I received a hundred-fold and more. As I invested in the body of Christ and they invested in me, I got brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers.

What have you left behind? If you are not finding your identity in Christ, where are you finding it? Pray about it.

DAY 3 – Wednesday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:14-15; Isaiah 45:22

Ask

Yesterday we went over what we turned from to follow Jesus. Today, reflect on the question: How you have turned to Jesus? How is God using your personality, skills, and time as a part of his mission here on earth?

Reflect

So how did it end up anyway? I left my career with a lot of faith and not a lot of direction but somehow felt at peace. I had a lot of quiet moments where I sensed God's presence and continued on in Bible study (I was in a Precepts class during that time).

I remember getting a call from someone I didn't know. She convinced me to come to her house and cut her hair. I couldn't have known that phone call would launch me back into the world of hair and that it would become an area of ministry for me. You see, God was allowing my career outside of the church to be a part of his mission here on earth.

When I quit my career the year before, I would have said I will never be a hairdresser again because it had been an area of identity and pride for me. Once I was seeking Jesus with my whole heart and finding my identity in him, Jesus used that skill for his glory. I have done hair from the jungles of Ecuador to the tundra of Alaska on missions trips. I have prayed with and over countless clients in my chair, I have cut hair in the prison and given haircuts to children in need.

God has used me inside of the church as well. I was asked by Chapel Hill's Beth Burgess years ago if I would help with children's ministry. I started leading worship by singing without a mic and in front of kindergarteners at kids church. That led to being asked to lead worship in the modern service. I also led Women's Life for a season. I have led many Bible studies inside and outside of the church, and currently lead a LifeGroup for young girls. I was a youth leader for one season. I got to be a part of missions week on the campus of Arizona State University with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM). I am now committed to Alpha. God has allowed me to be a part of what he's doing here in Gig Harbor, and I couldn't be more grateful. He has used my personality and talents for his kingdom purposes.

I hope my story has encouraged you. Would you consider telling your story to someone this week? You are welcome to practice on me! I love peoples' stories! When we take time to remember, our hearts turn towards God and the byproduct is thanksgiving.

DAY 4 – Thursday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:15-16; Matt 9:10-11; Luke 15

Ask

What was Jesus doing dining with these people? How do we see the “one”?

Reflect

The scandal of all scandals: Jesus was a friend of sinners.

Notice the scripture in Mark 2:15 - it says, “And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his (Levi’s) house, and **many** tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there **were many of them**, and they were following Jesus.” (Emphasis mine).

So many of them! Jesus had a disproportionate priority for the lost.

In Luke 15, Jesus, while dining with tax collectors and sinners, tells a parable so that his outer audience, the Pharisees and scribes, could hear. The parable was about a man who has a hundred sheep and has lost one. The man leaves the 99 and goes to find the one and when it is found there is rejoicing. In verse 7 Jesus says: “I tell you in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.”

What does it take to leave the 99 and go out and find the one? (Because we are called to do the same thing.) Does it take a degree in theology? Does it take being a missionary? Does it take time and effort? Is it costly? Is it annoying? I ask you these questions because I am curious how you see the “lost one”? Is it someone else’s problem? Hard questions, aren’t they?

This last year I became involved in Alpha. If you have never explored Alpha can I take a moment to encourage you to check it out at alphausa.org? Alpha is a vehicle to allow people to explore faith through the lens of the gospel. Our church has a place of hospitality for people to come and ask questions with no bait-and-switch. It is not a Bible study. It is a trust-building space built on the gospel that is revitalizing the Church. It is a place for a believer to learn to be an authentic listener to the many voices grappling over what they’ve heard and not force a conclusion.

Each one of us at Chapel Hill can be involved in evangelism through this vehicle called Alpha. It has taught me to listen quietly. It has rekindled my faith watching how the Holy Spirit works. It has reminded me of my own journey with Jesus. It has reminded me of the reckless love Jesus has for us!

Might this be a next step for you too?

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:27-29

Ask

Do we as Christians only hang out with other Christians?

Reflect

Have you ever started a project that you were super excited about only to realize that the outcome was not how you thought it would turn out?

As we start the project of digging into the character of Jesus, we wonder if we will like the outcome. Will we be more like him? Can we even? Jesus seemed to seek out the shaky business partners and women of the night, the physically deformed, and the emotionally needy and he never wrote people off. In fact, he invited everyone in with grace into his circle of hope.

Do we? Can we? I hope you will be honest with Jesus about this. I know the Holy Spirit will teach me all I need to know and lead me, but I have to be honest first.

In Luke's gospel account of this story, it says Matthew had a great reception for Jesus and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with him. The first thing Matthew did when he met Jesus was introduce Jesus to his friends. Matthew didn't waste a minute; he told others of Jesus. Do we drag our feet here?

Do we as Christians only hang out with other Christians? How many people do you hang out with regularly who aren't Jesus followers? How many people do you invite into your home that don't have your values or don't look like you? If I'm being honest, I can count on one hand all of these outcomes. Do you know how many opportunities I have missed to show the love of Christ to the needy world around me? Countless!

The Holy Spirit is the one who changes us and we need his help. Becoming more Christ-like is hard work and the outcome will be better than we expect. If we want to be the "hands and feet" of Christ we are going to need his "eyes and ears."

DAY 6 – Saturday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:17; Luke 7:36-39, 44-48; Deut. 30:3

Ask

Can I recall missed opportunities to show the love of Christ?

Reflect

A few years ago, my sister was in town. We headed to the grocery store very early in the morning, too early for regular shoppers, and came across a girl. She was very pretty, with curly dark hair, and she was young. She was barely dressed, she was a mess, and it was freezing outside. She was at the customer service counter trying to get money from Western Union. My sister and I thought the same thing at the same time. She was a prostitute or she was being trafficked. She seemed very desperate. After she left the store, my sister and I processed what we had seen. We both said we regretted not talking to her and not helping her. It was all very sad. We both wish we had had the guts to speak up and show her the love and mercy of Christ.

In Luke 7 Jesus is invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee. In walks a prostitute. She comes to the party and literally cries tears on Jesus' feet; she wipes his feet with her hair; then she pours perfume on his feet. The host let us know what he thought in he said in verse 39. Essentially, he said something like this, "if he really was a prophet, he would surely know who's touching him. She is a sinner!" Jesus' answer to the Pharisee sets all things straight. In Luke 7:44-48, Jesus shows great mercy to the prostitute. He sees her not as a prostitute, but as a child of God; not as she is, but who she would become.

Jesus has a heart for all of us who make big mistakes. Jesus has a heart for all the world's "throwaways" and he is seeking them out no matter what they, you, or I have done. Jesus' entire mission—his entire purpose—was to seek out the broken and restore them back to life! Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous; I have come to call the sinners."

Deuteronomy 30:3-4 says: "God, your God, will restore everything you lost; he'll have compassion on you; he'll come back and pick up the pieces from all the places you were scattered, no matter how far away you end up, God, your God, will get you out of there."

I wish I had spoken this verse to that girl many years ago at the store. What is God asking you to do differently today?

DAY 7 – Sunday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:17; Luke 7:11-15; Matt 12:20

Ask

Who did Jesus come for?

Reflect

There is a little story in Luke 7. Jesus is walking towards this town, and coming out of the town is a funeral procession. The scripture says that a young man has died, his mom is there, she is crying, and she is a widow. This is what happens: When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her. (Isn't that just like Jesus?) He said, "don't cry." Then Jesus went up and touched the coffin they were carrying him on; the bearers stood still, and he commanded the young man to get up. The dead man sat up and began to talk. He was restored to his mom. In one encounter with Jesus, the life of this widow and mother was changed—and there was new life in her son!

Jesus had a way with people because he dearly loved them. He didn't love them for what they could give in return; he loved them because they were children of God. Even on the cross, Jesus gave one last invitation...made one last relationship with a condemned thief who was dying next to him.

What did I learn about Jesus from these few verses we studied over this week? I believe his favorite place would be out there with the unwanted, the least, the lost, and to everyone we might reject.

What do we do with this Jesus who kept company with the unwanted and undesirables? I think we need to embrace our own brokenness and in turn recognize others. We are all broken. If we get straight with that we can see our need for Christ in every moment of our lives. We are the people who need restoration. We are the sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus is continually asking to dine with us, to be in relationship with us, to be with us. He is Emmanuel and he says, "I choose you, will you choose me?"

I pray that I know my need for Jesus every day. I pray that he will teach me to love those he loves. We can do none of this without the Holy Spirit's help.