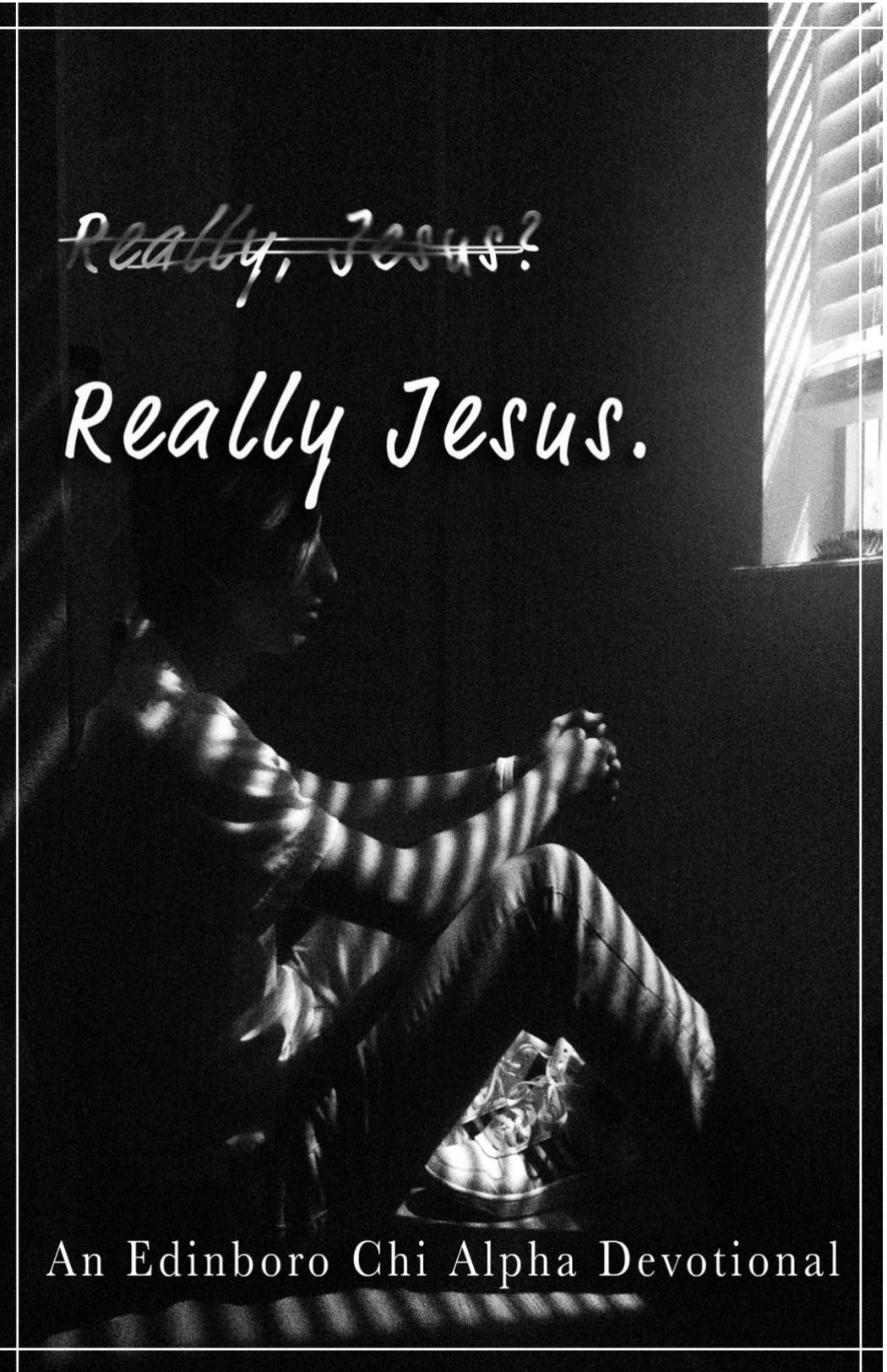


~~Really, Jesus?~~

Really Jesus.



Volume III
Spring 2021

An Edinboro Chi Alpha Devotional

Really Jesus

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While it looks like things
are out of control, behind
the scenes, there is a God
who has not surrendered
authority.
—A.W. Tozer—

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Introduction

I've got to clear my head. The thought is enough to get you off the couch and out the door for the next few hours. At first, you hope the collective noises of life moving around you will be enough to quiet the incessant noise of your inner-world, but with each step those intrusive thoughts beat like a drum against your skull. The rhythm of your thoughts clashes with the cacophony of everything around you, and as it gets louder and louder it makes you want to scream: *Really, Jesus?*

As you take a look at the world in its current state, words like turmoil and division rise to the surface as you try dig deep and explain our circumstances. Turmoil sits with us at dinner as families decide how to navigate new relational, financial, and emotional dynamics. Division shapes our social media feed as we slowly lose ability to see the beautiful complexities of the individual and choose to transform them into misshapen caricatures of unsavory ideas and beliefs. The fact that you've been staring at the same four walls of your bedroom or dorm for who knows how long is just a testament to the growing isolation you feel as you try to tackle classes that no longer feel like they make any sense. Where is Jesus in everything that's happening and if He's still here, *what the heck* is He doing?! Is all of this *Really...Jesus?*

At the end of the day, we all want to make it across the shifting sands of life's circumstances. We might be afraid of coming to the Lord because every time with think we have a handle on what we need to know, the chaos takes a different shape. We don't know what conversation we need to have or the right question to ask. Where do we even begin? The comforting thing is that Scripture helps us understand not only *how* to have this dialogue with God, but it

encourages us by affirming that He *wants* to engage with us in this way. He wants to help us understand the nature of authority, He wants to help us love our enemies, He wants to help us understand what's truly valuable—He wants to bring order to the chaos.

Within the pages of this devotional, you'll catch glimpses of a countercultural uprooting of the turmoil. Each day in this book ends with a prayer we invite you to steal, so that you can start a meaningful conversation with Jesus. You'll also see a reflection space filled with questions and practical ways you can begin living out what you've read as you face the world with Him by your side. We hope that you'll see a God with a plan. Come expecting that you'll encounter a God ready to calm the storm inside. He's inviting you to take the next step. Don't be afraid. That flutter of anticipation? That tug you feel on your heart? THAT is *really* Jesus.

Be Still and Know

Ally Sarring

Fun fact about me: I love thunderstorms. In my opinion, nothing is better than sitting on my front porch, watching the clouds quickly rolling in, while waiting patiently for the perfect summer storm to blow through. I love soaking in the last few moments of stillness before the chaos ensues—the heavy winds, the bright flashes of lightening, the sound of clanging thunder. One minute the sun is out and the birds are chirping, and in the next breath, the scene is overtaken by darkness. It always amazes me how an environment can go from complete peace to utter craziness at a moment's notice.

Life can feel like that sometimes. Everything is going good. You love your job. Your friendships are going great. You are in a healthy relationship. You are doing well in school. You feel driven and motivated. You feel purposeful. You have time for the things you love. You and your loved ones are happy and healthy. **The sun is out and the birds are chirping.**

But then, in a moment's notice, there is a shift in the atmosphere. **The storm clouds start to roll in.** Your hours get cut at work. Or you begin to have some serious tension in one of your friendships. Or you experience a breakup. **The wind starts to pick up and lightening begins to crack.** You start to struggle in a class and are now barely passing. Or you feel lazy, unmotivated, and you numb your feelings with Netflix and Taco Bell. Or you begin to feel purposeless. **The sound of thunder starts to get louder and louder.** You begin to get really stressed and stop making time for the things that refresh you. Or someone close to you passes away.

In a moment's notice, everything can change, and you find yourself in the middle of a storm that you didn't ask for or didn't see

coming. Jesus tells us in *John 16:33*, **“In this world you will have trouble...”** Jesus is honest that difficult times in our broken, sinful world are inevitable. But He also reminds us in *Psalms 46:10*, **“Be still, and know that I am God.”** Be still and know that no matter the storm, He is with you.

When we are facing something difficult, I think one of the hardest things is being honest with others about what we are feeling. We get good at painting a smile on our face while pretending that we are not falling apart on the inside. It can be hard for us to be still like Jesus tells us—always looking for ways to avoid feeling our feelings.

God asks us to be still because He wants us to sit in His presence and share with Him our raw, honest, unfiltered emotions. God can handle our questions, fears, doubts, anger, anxieties, etc.

In *Psalms 13:1-4*, the author, David, is in the middle of his own storm. We see him cry out to God saying...

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
And day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
And my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
And my foes will rejoice when I fall. (NIV)*

David takes time to be still, come close to God and share the deepest parts of his heart and pain with Him. David doesn't hold back. David doesn't pretend that he is okay, but takes this opportunity to come close to the one, true God.

Now pause right here. Take some time to be still. Think about what is weighing on your heart. Have a conversation with God how you're feeling. Be honest. He can handle it.

While our feelings are very real, they often can become so consuming that we forget the truth of who God is. God doesn't tell us to be still and forget that he is God. He tells us to be still and KNOW that He is God. We can be feeling one thing, while still knowing something else to be absolutely true. Both can exist at the same time.

Here are some real-life examples...

I feel stressed, but I know that God will provide peace.

I feel hopeless, but I know that God is my source of hope.

I feel broken, but I know God can carry my pain.

I feel unloved, but I know that God's love for me is unconditional.

After David spills his heart out to God, we see him acknowledge what he knows to be true about God in ***Psalm 13:5-6***...

But I trust in your unfailing love;

My heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing the Lord's praise,

For he has been good to me. (NIV)

David reminds himself that God's love will never fail him, that God is the giver of eternal life, and that God has been good and faithful through the storm.

Now what about you? Write down things about God that you often forget when you are in the middle of a storm—things that despite how you are feeling, you know to be true. Draw back on this list when it's hard to be still and know.

Ex. words describing his character, nature, & promises

Steal This Prayer

God, I praise You for not leaving me in the middle of a storm. I thank You for not being afraid of my emotions or questions when a hard situation arises. Please help me to draw near to You in times of trouble and share my honest heart with You. I pray in difficult moments, no matter how I feel, that You can remind me of the truth of who You are—which never changes.

Love *WHO* Now?

Bri Brusco

I like when things are easy. Challenges are exciting...at first. When I can plunge myself into something new and stimulating for a day or maybe two, I almost get a high. Even when I'm not consciously thinking about it, it's in the back of my mind being turned around 8,000 different ways and inside-out. But if I can't solve it by then, when we reach day three, day four, week two, "challenging" becomes strangely less enticing. At that point, "challenging" becomes tedious, dull, and downright aggravating because I like when things are easy.

So the longer I'm a Christian, the more frustrated I am. I thought it would get easier because I would be more practiced and more full of Holy Spirit, but despite how simple faith and growth are, they're never easy. To be completely transparent, I want Christianity to end at God giving His Son for me (John 3:16), having a plan for me (Jeremiah 29:11), empowering me for all situations (Philippians 4:13), and taking golden hour walks with me by still waters (Psalm 23:2).

But the more time I spend reading Scripture, the more I come across verses like Luke 6:27...

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you," (NIV, emphasis mine)

Commands like that shake me. Even when I feel like I can do this for a day or maybe two, by day three, day four, week two, this challenge becomes obviously less enticing. At that point, this challenge often become rooted in pride and full of bitterness and hopelessness.

Whether it's the guy who cuts me off in traffic or the girl who has been tearing me down since middle school, I don't want to love them or show them kindness day after day when I keep failing at it and

I never see a good result. And what about when it comes to people who have actually done us wrong or people who are propagating beliefs that we see as dangerous?

What about your ex or your current partner's ex? What about the person on the other side of the aisle or the person who is aggressively condemning people on *your* side of the aisle and everything you stand behind? What about the person who hurt you physically just because they could? What about the person who hurt the one you love?

When I really think about this, I start to question God. Of all people, He should understand the hurt they're causing me! He should see why they don't deserve to be loved. He should care more about me than them. I'm offended because commanding me to love them feels like He's sticking up for them.

When God tells me to love my enemies, I feel like He's siding with them...until I realize I was His enemy, and He still sided with me. See Jesus concludes this lesson nine verses later when He says, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

God was the first one to love His enemies. He was the first to show mercy. Jesus isn't asking us to do anything He didn't do, and when all of humanity, you and me included, stood vehemently opposed to Him, He actually came and died in our place. God isn't just throwing out rules to make life more challenging. He's inviting us to imitate Him as a young child imitates their parent. If our Father is merciful, we can be too. That's not easy. It's a challenge. It takes discipline and awareness. But if my Father did it for me, I need to try. I want to try!

So how do we practice imitating that? First, remember that they're a person. Honestly. They're more than their profile picture or the group of people they're associated with. There is a whole being

with thoughts and emotions and reasons and hurtful pasts and joyful potential behind what you disagree with or have been hurt by. And it's so easy to think of our enemies as some monster defined solely by the wrong things they did or the ideologies they represent. Then when we've sufficiently built up their wickedness, we attack the beast and feel perfectly justified in doing so. But they are, in fact, not a monster. They are a flesh and blood human just like you. And just like you, they make mistakes. And just like you, they're still figuring out life, whether they know it or not. If we could accept that, the mask we've put on them might just start to come off of the person in front of us.

That one, first step really does take us a mile. Maybe it doesn't take us all the way, but it's much easier to show mercy to a person than a monster. So as we keep pressing forward, the next leg of the journey is prayer. Pray for them. And praying curses on them doesn't count. Pray for their good. Pray over their faith journey. Pray that they would feel loved. Pray for blessings on their family. Not only is prayer one of the most loving things we can do for someone else, but if there's anything that could turn our hearts away from animosity and toward love, it's prayer.

In essence, the best way to love our enemies is to stop treating them as "them." Our brain naturally categorizes things. It's a divine blessing to keep our sanity as we try to make sense of the world. But our words have power, and verbally ostracizing "them" from "us" builds walls that are not easily torn down. In word and in action, we must love our enemies so sincerely that they lose that title.

Now let's take a moment to accept that even in all that, loving our enemies isn't always letting them back into our life or laughing on the phone with them every day—just because we forgive someone and love them, doesn't mean we trust them. Loving our enemy does not mean accepting abuse or manipulation. Love can exist with

boundaries. It is good and okay to remove dangerous situations from your life, but we absolutely cannot use a lack of trust as a disguise for resentment, bitterness, or hatred.

Do you like when people tell you who to be? No? Me either. So let's take the opportunity to not let the animosity and conflict of our culture determine how we treat each other. Will that be hard? Yes. Is that a worthwhile challenge? Absolutely! Instead of being influenced by culture, let's influence culture. Let our mercy overflow from the deep recesses of our own hearts that have already been shown mercy. Let our love flow from what we have received all the way out to the ones we have resented the most. Let our enemies be more overwhelmed by our kindness than they ever were by our attacks. Let us be the forerunners in a culture that doesn't retaliate to hurtful words or actions, but who responds with the wellbeing of the attacker in mind.

- Who is your "enemy"—the person who makes your blood boil or the hardest person to speak kindly of when they're not there?
- Have you ever encountered the reality of all that God has shown you mercy for? Spend some time with God reflecting on all the ways He has been patient with you. Let this be a time of rejoicing in and appreciating how God loves you, not a time of self-condemnation.
- What masks were you putting on this person (or people) to hide their humanity? Take some time to journal about why those masks have hurt you or how they scare you, but then take those masks away from them, and pray for this person.

Steal This Prayer

God, I don't like them. I certainly don't love them, but I know You do. I know you loved me when I didn't deserve it, so please help me do the same for them. Please give me patience for their words and actions. Please give me wisdom and insight for how to handle upcoming encounters with them. And please help me to appreciate Your grace all the more through this.

The Authority to Stand

Jonathan Mendoza

The altar. Growing up, the few feet between the front row and the church stage was a place of anxiety and shame. It seemed like every week I ran up there hoping to find some relief—something that would ease a heart weighed down by guilt for as long as I could remember, but it never came. *You failed Him... You'll never truly love Him no matter how much you say you do...* Thoughts like this were well-worn paths in my brain that reduced me to tears when I was sure no one could hear; they were familiar and the hopelessness was almost comforting.

When I figured out that the Lord was calling me to go to a private Christian university, I was convinced that those days were behind me, but sometime during a chapel service during my sophomore year, I found myself using a chair to kneel and beg the Lord's forgiveness as I entered that same thought spiral. I don't know how long I was there whispering intensely to a God that I felt was wagging His finger at me for the umpteenth time, but soon, I felt a tap on my shoulder. "He wants you to know that it's time to stand up."

Maybe you find yourself in a situation that has robbed you of your ability to stand. Your world might seem like it's shaking at its foundations as you deal with the insurmountable weight of daily stress, of broken relationships, of failure, of sudden loss. Maybe your thoughts lead you down the same well-worn paths—constant reminders of how you'll never measure up to what the world needs you to be or how you'll always be stuck in the same cycle of self-destruction. Destruction and division might feel like the status quo for a world that seems to be tearing itself apart at the seams. Yet, as your

inner and outer worlds tremble, He wants you to know that it's time to stand up.

Does *anyone* have the power to change this situation? Who gave this guy the authority to tell me to get on my feet? These were the thoughts that ran through my head as I tried to ignore what I had just heard. These are probably the thoughts running through your head as well. Does anyone have the power and authority to change my circumstances for the better? Who is this guy to call out my insecurities and ask me to find my footing in a world that shifts each and every day?

Throughout His ministry, Jesus went about His day, shaking up the realities of the people around Him. He called people to holiness, compassionately forgave their sins, and challenged the oppressive emptiness that passed for religion during His day. The people who challenged Him openly asked "...by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?" (Luke 20:2 CSB). Jesus was ready. He pointed to the ministry of his cousin John, who had been slaughtered at the hands of these same religious leaders. Wanting them to acknowledge that John (who dedicated His life to telling others about the power of Jesus' coming ministry as the Son of God) was sent from God, Jesus asked, "was the baptism of John from heaven or of human origin?" (Luke 20:4 CSB). The priests knew that by affirming John's ministry, they were also confirming that Jesus was the Messiah. They knew the answer but they decided to pretend that they didn't, so Jesus decided to let them stew in their thoughts.

When we question Jesus' authority, what we're truly asking Him is "Who are you?" And Jesus? He *loves* this question. Throughout Scripture He makes seven "I am..." Statements that serve as an answer. He confidently states: I am the Bread of Life (John 6:35), I am the Light of the world (John 8:12), I am the Gate (John 10:7), I

am The Good Shepherd (John 10:11), I am The Resurrection And The Life (John 11:25), I am The Way, The Truth, and The Life (John 14:6), and I am the true Vine (John 15:1-5). Each statement is Jesus declaring the ultimate Truth: I Am God.

Our first challenge is to acknowledge that Jesus has authority over every situation, because He is Lord. Whether you've said that your entire life or you're still trying to figure it out, that's the question that Jesus is asking back: *Do you believe that I am who I say I am?* "What difference does that make? My circumstances are still the same!" In a world that bases their joy, success, and worth off of shifting circumstances, those that see Jesus as the Lord He professed to be, place authority back in the hands of a God who spent His life on Earth showing us His Wisdom, Love, and Righteousness. Circumstances may leave us uncertain, but God never leaves us uncertain about His desire for those who believe in Him: that we would be made "completely one" with Him knowing that the Father loves us just as much as He loves the Son (John 17:22-23).

Fine. Jesus has the authority to change my situation, but as I kneeled before Him unable to stand, who was this random dude to tell me what God was saying? As I slowly made my way to my feet, I happened to make eye contact with some kid I had never seen in my life. He grabbed my crutches off the ground, and passed them to me with a smile on his face. That's the beautiful thing. While Jesus holds *all* authority, His ultimate goal was to die and live again so that we could be in a relationship with Him and share in all that He has. In other words, if we acknowledge that Jesus has authority, when we welcome Him into our lives, we must also understand that we now live with that same authority. In a world where standing on our feet seems impossible, we've been given the authority to confidently stand regardless of age, race, or our past because of who Jesus says He is.

I had to remember that the child who tapped on my shoulder was operating in power, reminding me of God's authority in my life, and encouraging me to move in the empowerment that I was equipped with to get on with the mission to which I was assigned. My thoughts didn't dictate reality and neither did my circumstances. Who I was in the eyes of the Lord was unchangeable because of the work of Jesus.

Be empowered to find peace and joy, knowing the one who has granted you the authority to stand. Steal this prayer each time you're overwhelmed by the seemingly immovable situations in your life:

- What are some of the things that rob you of your ability to stand?
- Label each of those things on your list. Which ones are doubts? Which are fears? What kind of circumstances are you facing (i.e. financial, family, etc.)
- Take the time to study what the Bible has to say about the things you've labeled. How does the Bible say we should view fear, doubt, family issues, financial trouble, etc.?
- Write those things down somewhere you can see on a daily basis, and as you pray thank God for the authority you have been granted to look towards Him.

Steal This Prayer

Jesus, I'm thankful that You died and rose again to have authority over ever situation.

Help me to remember that I am one with You.

Help me to remember that in You I have the authority to Stand.

The God Who Sees Me

Johnnie Hice

When I was in the sixth grade, my teacher asked me and another girl named Kassy to stay after class. She felt that our papers from the night before were too similar. Neither my friend nor myself had cheated, however, both of us ended up getting a failing grade on that assignment. You see, Kassy and I were best friends, we sat beside each other in every class, hung out on the playground, and ate lunch together every day, but after that meeting with the teacher, Kassy refused to speak to me. She was convinced that I had copied her homework and caused her to take a failing grade. I felt helpless. How could I convince my friend that I was telling the truth? How could I prove my innocence? Why was I being treated so unfairly? A failing grade, a crumbling friendship, it didn't make any sense...

Sometimes this is what life feels like. Unfair. The thing is, as we get older, the things that evoke these feelings in us are no longer as simple as a failed grade-school assignment or an upset friend. Now the things we deem unfair are much more life-changing—things like divorce, natural disasters, abuse, or sickness. Things like a worldwide pandemic that completely changes the way we live our lives, or even just trying to balance all of our class load on top of full-time jobs or families. Life just doesn't always feel fair. Unfair situations tend to cause us to lose our sense of control, and thus, we worry constantly that something else will happen, that some other unfair situation will derail us yet again. We attempt to avoid the pain of the unfair things, only to find ourselves back in the middle of this same pain again. It is an ugly cycle of unfair situations and worry that seems to never end, and the worst part about all of it is that we often find ourselves feeling alone in the midst of it.

This cycle isn't a new thing—feeling like life has dealt us an unfair hand, worrying how we will handle the things that are in front of us, trying to avoid the next unfair thing—it's not new. It brings to my mind the life of a woman in the Bible named Hagar. She was no stranger to the unfair nature of life; in fact, it seems to be all that she really knew. Let me set the scene for you. Hagar was a servant for a woman named Sarai. Sarai had been trying to have children for a long time to no avail, so she decided to take things into her own hands. Sarai went to her husband Abram and told him that she would give him her servant as a wife so that maybe they could have children through her. Abram agreed to this arrangement and took Hagar as a wife. Hagar then became pregnant. When she knew she was pregnant she stopped respecting Sarai but treated her with contempt. This, of course, made Sarai very upset; she was so upset, in fact, that she began to mistreat Hagar. Because of this unfair treatment, Hagar decided to run away, and this is where we will pick up in Scripture.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. The angel said to her, "Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai," she replied.

The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority." Then he added, "I will give you more descendants than you can count."

And the angel also said, "You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God hears'), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.

Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord, who had spoken to her. She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?"

Genesis 16:7-11; 13 NLT

Talk about your unfair situation. When we read this story, it can be uncomfortable. Sarai gave away her servant to her husband so that he would have sex with her in the hopes that the servant would become pregnant and Sarai could have children through her. The servant, Hagar, didn't have a say in any of this; for all intents and purposes she was given to be a sex slave. Not only that but when she does the very thing she was supposed to do, became pregnant, she got treated horribly for it. I cannot imagine the turmoil Hagar must have been experiencing. It's understandable why she ran away. I probably would have as well. I can imagine that she fled out of fear for her safety, as well as the safety of her unborn child. This was most definitely an unfair situation marked by worry, fear, and shame... That is, until Jesus stepped into the scene.

You may be asking "hold on, I didn't see Jesus anywhere in this story?" Well, we know that in this context "the angel of the LORD" is actually Jesus. So quite literally in the middle of her most unfair, worrisome, darkest hour, Jesus stepped into the scene. Not only did He meet with her personally, but He called her by her name. You see, up until this point in the story any time Hagar had been addressed or talked about by others she had been called "servant," she was either talked about as "my servant" or "your servant," but was never called by her name. However, when Hagar encounters Jesus, the first thing He said was "Hagar..." He called her by her name. This was the first moment when Jesus showed Himself to be different than anyone she

had ever encountered. It gets better, not only did Jesus call her by name, but He addressed her situation. He asked her where she had been and where she was going, He took notice to her situation and gave her the opportunity to speak to it. Even though, being Jesus, He already knew what was going on, He listened to her.

After that moment His answer probably wasn't the one, she wanted to hear, "return to your mistress, and submit to her authority." Imagine Hagar having just run away from this situation out of fear and worry, and here is Jesus telling her to go back to this place. Often times this is where I find myself. When an unfair situation strikes, I have the tendency to want to run and hide from it; maybe you can relate. I want to escape rather than face the situation. But Jesus had another approach, He commanded Hagar to go back to the situation in which she was fleeing.

I want to stop for a moment and make it clear that I am **not** saying that returning to the unfair situation is always the answer. Hagar's situation is the exception, not the rule. God does not intend for us to return to abusive or unsafe situations. If you are in an abusive or unsafe situation, please seek help immediately by reaching out to friends, family, or the authorities. However, there are some unfair things in our life that we do have to return to, that we can't escape from. Take the pandemic for an example: a lot of things associated with it are unfair, they cause worry, and yet it hasn't just disappeared. Some things in life such as divorce and sickness don't always just end or change, but the good news is that when it comes to those situations Jesus doesn't just tell us to go back to it and leave us hanging. He didn't just leave it at telling Hagar to return to this situation. He followed up that command with a promise; He promised her more descendants than she could count, and He also assured her that He had heard her cry of distress.

Jesus made sure that Hagar knew that He saw the unfair situation she was in. Beyond that, Jesus commanded her to name her son Ishmael which literally means "God hears." This may not seem significant, but this means that when she returned to her situation and gave birth to this son, each time she said his name would be a constant reminder that God heard her cries of distress and she isn't alone in her situation. He wanted her to know that she was known, seen, and heard, not just in that moment, but in all moments that were to come.

After this encounter with the LORD, Hagar said to the LORD, "You are the God who sees me." In the original Hebrew this name of God is El Roi. In this moment Hagar was the first person in scripture to name God. From this extremely unfair situation comes a beautiful moment in the lens of history when Hagar named the Lord because she saw the beauty and truth of who He is, she said "You are El Roi, the God who sees me."

El Roi, the God who sees, still operates in our lives today. Scripture says in Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." He is still the God who sees you in every single situation. Maybe your situation isn't as extreme as that of Hagar's... or maybe it is. No matter what situation you are facing today God hears you, sees you, and calls you by name. Sometimes your situation may change, and you may feel that balance is restored, but more times than not, it seems that we find ourselves still in the middle of unfair situations. Hagar's situation didn't change, but her perspective did. She was able to return to her mistress knowing that she was seen, known, and heard by El Roi, the God who sees.

He is the God who sees. He cares about the big things, and He cares about the little things. The best part is that the reason He cares about all of those things is because **He cares about you**. God not only saw Hagar's situation, but He saw her. He called her by name, a thing

that nobody else in her life did. God saw Hagar, and He sees you as well. You are seen, known, heard, and loved by the God of the universe. It takes a perspective shift to be able to say in the middle of your unfair situation that God is the God who sees, but when we allow our worry to subside and we remind ourselves that God not only cares about our situation but He cares about it because He cares for us, it changes everything.

You can trust that when life feels unfair, you don't have to be overcome by worry but instead can take to heart this truth that says:

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” 1 Peter 5:7 NLT

He cares for you, He calls you by name, He is the God who sees.

- Are there any places in your life where you have allowed unfair circumstances to cultivate worry?

- How can you invite El Roi (the God who sees you) to speak into those places (even if they don't change)?

- Take some time to journal with the Lord through unfair places in your life, past or present, and ask the Lord to show you how He was/is with you in those places.

Steal This Prayer

God, El Roi, thank You that You are the God who sees me. Thank You for calling me by name. I'm sorry for all of the times when I haven't been aware of Your presence in the middle of my circumstances, for the times when I've let worry overcome me. Help me to become more aware of Your presence in every situation. Help me to hear Your voice calling me by name and speaking truth into every unfair place. Remind me that You care for me and that I can trust You hear me in my distress. You are so good. You are so faithful. You are El Roi.

Amen.



You Can't Have Your Cake and Eat It Too

Tj Schaefer

I've always pushed the boundary of this idea. Why can't I get the best of both worlds? Hannah Montana did, so I can too. Why should I have to pick between two different ice cream flavors when I can get a scoop of both Let's Dough Buffalo and mint chocolate chip? Why do I need to choose between two books when I can read them simultaneously? Why can't I like *The Office* and *Parks N' Recreation*? I can be a night owl and a morning person too, dang it!

In fifth grade I believed this American idiom to be true. There were three girls in my grade that I had a crush on, and I wanted to date them all. So I did. All three girls said yes to my cheesy fifth-grade "circle yes or no" method. That obviously proved to work, but I really didn't expect all three to circle yes. So I was in a pickle. I had all that I wanted, but God taught me quick why polygamy wasn't His design for humanity. I couldn't balance all of their favorite colors and birthdays, their handwritten notes with tons of hearts around the border, keeping each conversation straight. The fifth-grade gossip went around, and

my three "girlfriends" all discovered the truth, banded together and like the power rangers, they verbally kicked my butt, dumping me that day. I was single once again because I couldn't choose.

It wasn't until a couple years ago that I really started to realize that I can't be everything and have everything. If I were to choose a major, it was unrealistic to graduate with other degrees. If I were to step into full-time college ministry, then I couldn't also be a full-time physical therapist. If I were to marry Nicole, I was going to be her husband *only*.

Choices are hard because they reveal and solidify the person we become. Every choice is like casting a ballot for the person you will become.

Each time you choose to read, for example, you are casting a vote for your identity as a reader. Every time you choose to stay up late, you are slowly but surely identifying with the night owls. The same holds true for your faith. A single decision to skip your abiding time with God doesn't seem harmful, but the ballot has been cast for something or someone else. Missing a couple services doesn't feel like a shift in your identity, however, those votes went towards a different value in your life.

With every "yes" we give, there are many implicit "no's" that are given as well.

It's a struggle to choose something knowing that you are saying no to the other option(s). No matter how decisive you are, we all experience a fork in the road; a situation where we must choose only *one* path.

I want to eat my cake and still have it to eat too!

Sacrifice isn't a popular word in our western culture. I am the chief example when it comes to avoiding sacrifice. Ideally, I want to have it all without missing out on anything. I don't want to sacrifice.

However, **my ideal isn't reality, this is a false hope.** Though sacrifice may be inevitable, there is a silver-lining. Like saving up to buy a car and studying hard to get a good grade, with sacrifice comes a rewarding result. That is what makes our decisions that much sweeter; we sacrificed because even though all the options seemed good, one was better.

Sacrifice makes the decision more valuable.

Sacrifice also reveals what we care about *the most*. When push comes to shove, we align ourselves with what we value, and we sacrifice to protect and nourish it. This is why the cross is beautifully significant to humanity; here is where we see the heart of God on full display. "God did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all." (Romans 8:32). We see that God *is* love, redeeming and reconciling us back to Him (Romans 5:10). God chose us because He values us. God chose the cross for *you* because He values *you*. He sacrificed because you were valuable. And your value isn't in what you can *do*. Your value is in who you *are* to Him. You are His beloved (John 15:19), His child (John 1:12), His chosen royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). You are the lost sheep worth venturing to retrieve (Matthew 8:10-14). You are worth seeking and saving (Luke 19:10).

You are God's most valuable; do you feel the same of God?

In the parable of the hidden treasure and the priceless pearl, we see how significant sacrifice is when we see the value of what we desire.

Jesus: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:44-46 CSB)

It is when we see the value of our salvation, that everything else in our life will become secondary. Everything else will become the currency that we use to preserve our faith. What we hold onto with a white-knuckled grip shows what we hold closest to our heart. I pray that throughout your life you will see the richness of your salvation and the beauty of sacrifice.

•*Spend time and read Romans 12:1-2... Allow God to show you something with His word.*

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (NIV)

•*What feeling and thoughts does this passage bring to the surface?*

•*Does your life reflect the value of your salvation? How so?*

•*What is something that would be challenging to "sell" for the treasure?*

•*How can you prepare yourself for the forks-in-the-road to come?*

Steal This Prayer

Use this breath prayer to remind your soul about what holds the utmost value in this life.

God, you are my treasure that I sell everything for.