

# Unexpected Sacrifice

September 20, 2020



## Daily Devotionals Introduction

As you read about Jesus in the Gospels, you might see some things that perhaps you weren't expecting. For this 13-week series, we'll open the Book of Mark together and study the life of Jesus—The Unexpected King. During this series, we will gain a better understanding of who Jesus is and what it really means to be his disciple.

As an individual or as a family, use these daily devotionals and reflection questions to connect with Jesus each day this week.

Each day, there will be a thought stemming from our Scripture passage along with 2-3 questions. Our hope is that as we journey together through the book of Mark, we'll be able to come out the other side knowing more about the life of Jesus.

Be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, passages, and each of the questions. If you are a part of a life group, let these devotionals stir your thinking and be the foundation for your group conversation.

Our prayer is that these devotionals, questions, and reflections will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

## Day 1

We ended last week contemplating the question Jesus asked His disciples in **Mark 8:29**, “Who do you say I am?” How did you answer this question? Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” What a good and right answer! But Peter, like us, was restricted by his humanity with its limited knowledge, distorted ideas about God, and lack of understanding of how the Messiah would establish His kingdom.

Throughout our journey through Mark, we have seen Jesus as the Good Teacher, tutoring those who have ears to hear and eyes to see. Is it possible that, just before posing His question to the disciples, He gave a hidden lesson in the healing of the blind man? Before moving on, let’s back up a few verses to see if there might be a lesson for us as well.

### Read Mark 8: 22-25.

What did you notice? Why did Jesus only partially heal this man’s blindness initially? Didn’t Jesus know the man’s eyesight was still blurry? Did He want the onlookers to hear the man say, *I see people; they look like trees walking around*? Did he want them to consider what it means to see only partially—an incomplete picture, distorted images, missing important details and nuances?

Jesus did not leave the man groping around. He finished the good work He started. Verse 25 says, “Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened. His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.”

This week, we will watch as Jesus speaks openly with His disciples about what is to come—that the Messiah will establish His kingdom through unexpected sacrifice. He begins to paint a picture that the disciples can see only partially. He invites them to follow in a way they simply cannot envision. We will see how the restrictions of our own humanity limit *our* knowing God, distort how *we* see Him, and hinder *our* understanding of how He is establishing His kingdom.

As we end today, consider how you might be like the blind man who described what he saw as “trees walking around.” Ask Jesus how your humanity might be restricting your relationship with God.

- How might your family of origin, church experiences, Bible studies, worldview, etc. limit or confine your knowledge of God?
- How might unhealthy relationships, hurt or neglect, fear or anxiety, perfectionism, etc. distort how you experience Him?
- How might close-mindedness, prejudice, fear, self-righteousness, etc. hinder your understanding of how He is establishing His kingdom?

**Prayer:** Ask God for the spiritual eyes to see whatever He has for you as you look to Him for clarity and healing this week.

## Day 2

Yesterday, we looked at the healing of the blind man—first, only partially, so people looked *like trees walking around*. We considered how we are similarly limited in our view of God.

This week, we will look at three passages where Jesus speaks openly about the future. He is now laser-focused on fulfilling God's plan—surrendering His life and going to the cross as God's sacrificial Lamb. In all three passages, Jesus speaks the same message with a few distinctions, hoping to correct the disciples' distorted picture of the Messiah and what it means to follow Him. Let's look at the first one.

### Read Mark 8:31-9:1.

Jesus speaks plainly to His disciples. We have the advantage of hearing this passage from our side of the cross. How must it have been for them to hear: the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, killed...and rise after three days? Peter rejects this message and rebukes Jesus. Jesus knows Satan wants to sift the disciples like wheat (**Luke 22:31**). He knows the inner and outer ploys Satan will use to disrupt His world-changing mission. Jesus strongly reminds his disciples, "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Jesus then speaks to the crowd of potential followers, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." What a perplexing message. It appears this is a *requirement* for being a true disciple. Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, could do this. He could deny Himself. He could and would take up His cross. **Hebrews 12:2** says, "For the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame..." We cannot do this work on our own. In **John 15**, Jesus emphasizes the importance of being connected to and remaining in Him, and says, "Apart from me, you can do nothing" (v. 5). To deny ourselves and take up our cross, we must *remain in Him*.

We cannot truly deny ourselves through self-control alone. We cannot white-knuckle our way to the cross. This *obedience* is not something we *do*. This dying to self is a heart posture of surrender. God used our dog to teach me what this looks like. She was high-strung, always *on*. We learned that when she was in *control mode*, it was due to feeling unsafe and out of control. She needed an alpha dog. So, I would hold her to the ground, letting her know I would protect her, I *had this* for her; I was her alpha dog. Soon, she would take a breath, let out a big sigh, and totally relax—surrender. I've learned that I too need my Alpha—I need to surrender to Jesus and trust Him to protect and lead me.

- What goes through your mind when you hear the words, "Deny yourself and take up your cross"?
- Hold your thoughts out to Jesus. Ask Him to bring clarity, and healing if it is needed.
- Jesus is our Alpha. He was the first to deny Himself and take up His cross. How willing are you to trust Jesus with areas of your life you try to control?

**Prayer:** Write or speak an honest prayer to Jesus about your willingness to surrender to Him. Be honest about the difficulties you may have. Ask Him to show you the way to surrender.

## Day 3

Yesterday we saw Jesus telling His disciples that being the Messiah meant unexpected sacrifice: suffering, rejection, death. We also looked at Jesus' requirement of a true disciple: deny self, take up one's cross and follow Him. Today we will hear Jesus restate what was coming. This teaching was so important that Jesus avoided the crowds to focus on teaching His disciples.

As you read today's passage, consider Jesus' desire. What did He long or hope for? Contrast this with what the disciples desired.

### Read Mark 9:30-35.

As we reflect on this passage, let's revisit a verse from yesterday, **Hebrews 12:2**: "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

"For the *joy* set before him...." How could Jesus have possibly seen joy in enduring the cross? *Only* by seeing *beyond* the cross: To returning to the Father. To restored glory. To overcoming sin and death. To redeeming our relationship with God. His desire was for the Father to be glorified and us reunited with Him. Jesus was willing to be the least, to be servant of all, even to die, to accomplish this!

And what about the disciples' desire? It appears they were concerned about who would be greatest. Their eyesight remained distorted. They were incapable of seeing the whole picture Jesus was painting.

Jesus' hope for His disciples and for us is to desire what He desires: to glorify God and see God's kingdom extended to others. Our desire is our motivation. Advertisers know this. They market products to answer two questions: *What do you want? What do you fear?* What we *want* often grows out of what we *fear*. "I fear being lonely, so I desire connection." "I fear not being enough, so I desire affirmation." Did the disciples fear being insignificant, causing them to argue rather than *fixing their eyes on Jesus* and desiring what He desired?

Jesus' admonition to the disciples in today's passage is, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." How does this bump into our desires—what we long or hope for?

Invite God to search your heart regarding the following:

- Looking back over the past day or so, when are some times you found it difficult to be last, or the servant of all? What might these times reveal about your desires? Ask God for the grace to desire what He desires.
- Where might underlying fears be driving your desires? Be honest with God about your fears, asking Him to help you identify them. Consider talking about them with someone you trust.
- How might *fixing your eyes on Jesus* help you desire what He desires? When you fix your eyes on Him, how does He look back at you?

**Prayer:** Ask God to help you identify your fears, present them to Him, and receive His love. Linger with **1 John 4:18**, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear."

## Day 4

When we look at Jesus' parables as stand-alone teachings, they certainly offer spiritual lessons. But, when we contemplate them in the context of the greater narrative, the lessons drill into our souls in fresh ways. As we look at Jesus' third iteration of upcoming events and His teaching around them, let's expand the context. Prior to Jesus' once again predicting His death, He and His disciples encounter a rich man who is unwilling to sell all to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples are amazed that it appears impossible to enter God's kingdom. Jesus looks at them and says, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Again, Jesus points to total reliance on God and His ways.

**Read Mark 10:32-45** (pause between verses 34 and 35 or you may get whiplash).

In the first part of this passage, Jesus speaks seriously about what he will face: be betrayed, condemned to death, handed over to enemies, mocked, spit on, flogged, killed, and rise three days later. Were James and John paying attention at all? Was their response a form of disassociation—distancing themselves from the traumatic future Jesus just described? Were they distracted by their own thoughts, desires, and fears?

Three times this week, we've seen Jesus speak plainly of what will happen. By the disciples' response each time, we might expect Jesus to be disappointed with them. But, **Psalms 103:14** says of God, "He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust." Because Jesus sees clearly and knows what His disciples will become through His transformative power, He looks at them with eyes of patient hope. He knows, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (**Mark 10:27**).

After the resurrection and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, this motley crew of short-sighted, self-focused disciples become nearly unrecognizable. They come to desire what Jesus desires: To glorify God and extend His kingdom to others.

You too have this hope. Jesus knows how you were formed and remembers that you are dust. He sees what you will become as you surrender to Him, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. Fix your eyes on the One Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame. All things are possible with God.

- Are you able to focus on Jesus and what He is saying to you, or are you distracted by your own thoughts, desires, and fears? Name your distractions, hold them before God, and confess that they are coming between you and Him. Release them to Him.
- When have you have felt like a disappointment to God? How does it feel to hear *he remembers you are dust* and has hopes for you?
- Are you beginning to trust and surrender to God in new ways? How does this change your desires?

**Prayer:** Consider Jesus' joy in setting you free from the bonds of sin and self. Offer a prayer of joy and gratitude for the hope that He offers.

## Day 5

We bookend our week with two stories of blind men being healed. Both illustrate a lesson for *those who have eyes to see*. Today we end with Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus. This follows on the heels of Jesus admonishing James, John, and the other disciples for their prideful desires. Interestingly, the question Jesus asked James and John, “What do you want me to do for you?” is the same question Jesus now asks Bartimaeus.

### Read Mark 10:46-52.

Note Bartimaeus’ response when Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Rabbi, I want to see.” Is this your response to Jesus? Do you want your eyes opened—that you might see what He sees and desire what He desires—that you might offer yourself as a living sacrifice to Him? Take a few moments to quiet yourself before Jesus. Invite the wise, all-knowing presence of the Holy Spirit to sift your heart as you slowly pray, asking Him where He would like you to linger to allow His transformative power to do its good work in you.

### Litany to Obtain Holy Humility (1867)

Lord Jesus. Meek and humble of heart...

*Hear me.*

From the desire of being esteemed...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being loved...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being extolled...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being honored...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being praised...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being preferred to others...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being consulted...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being approved...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being humiliated...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being despised...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of suffering rebukes...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being calumniated [slandered by false assertions]...

*Deliver me, Jesus.*  
From the fear of being forgotten...  
*Deliver me, Jesus.*  
From the fear of being ridiculed...  
*Deliver me, Jesus.*  
From the fear of being wronged...  
*Deliver me, Jesus.*  
From the fear of being suspected...  
*Deliver me, Jesus.*

That others may be loved more than I...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*  
That others may be esteemed more than I...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*  
That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*  
That others may be chosen and I set aside...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*  
That others may be praised and I unnoticed...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*  
That others may be preferred to me in everything...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*  
That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should...  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.*

— attributed to: *Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val (1865-1930)*