

The Very Next Thing

Key Passages: Galatians 5:16-26; John 4:1-26; Acts 8

- Christians often make grand declarations about God and their relationship with him.
 - *I want to give it all to God.*
 - *I want to be on fire for God.*
 - *I want to lay my life at his feet.*
 - *I want to surrender all.*
- Sometimes Monday looks a lot different than Sunday. Monday comes with the question of how: How do I do these things?
- What does following Jesus really look like?
- We can't give a year from now to God. That's a year away. But we can give our very next step to him.
- To follow Jesus is to say, "Jesus, I love you so much I'll do the very next thing you say."
- God most likely isn't going to audibly speak to you. But his Holy Spirit will:
 - Prick your heart with a thought.
 - Bend your desires and thoughts in a certain direction.
 - Speak to your heart through Scripture.
 - Arrange circumstances to make clear what to do next.
- This is what we mean by doing the very next thing God "says."
- All believers have heard his still small "voice" through his gentle but persistent tug to act or obey him.
- Doing the very next thing for Jesus means blooming right where he has planted you. The mission field isn't necessarily halfway around the world—although it's great if he leads you there someday. But your most pressing mission field is where your feet are right now.
- God indeed may be preparing us for something in the future, but while we're waiting on the future we're tripping over today.

- Doing big things for God is:
 - Loving on the person sitting right next to you.
 - Sharing God's truth to a hurting friend.
 - Helping the annoying relative who has fallen into a tough stretch.
 - Feeding the hungry.
 - Helping the elderly.
 - Visiting the sick.
 - Sharing the Gospel.
 - Giving the very next words of love to be spoken—to the very next heart, shattered and broken.

QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever made grand declarations about God or your relationship with him? What happened afterward?
- What is your definition of following God?
- Do you agree that following Jesus means just doing the very next thing he says?
- What is an example of a time when you know you obeyed Jesus and did the very next thing he said? What was the result? How did you feel afterward?
- Do you remember a time when you did not do what you felt God was leading you to do? What was the result? How did you feel afterward?
- Have you experienced a time when you assumed God was preparing you for something grand in the future only to realize you were missing out on endless possibilities to glorify him?
- Who had the bigger ministry—Billy Graham, or the bus driver who picked him up and drove him to church?
- The bus driver probably thought he wasn't doing big things for God. But do you see that there is no bigger thing than doing what God has for you to do right here, right now?

One Step Away

Key Passages: Luke 15:11-32; James 1:19-25

- Ever noticed how the disciples were a lot like us? They seemed to mess up all the time and say the wrong things all the time.
- Peter would make giant, bold statements and then fall on his face. They showed they were human just like us.
- All the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested. At his crucifixion, the Bible records that only John was present.
- So it would make perfect sense to us humans that as soon as Jesus rose from the dead he would go looking for better people who are more fit to be his closest followers.
- Instead, he stuck with his guys. He followed two of them all the way to Emmaus. He kept showing up when they were scared and hiding out. He chased Peter all the way to his boat, where he was fishing. That's what Jesus does. He sticks with us, warts and all.
- When we fail and find ourselves outside of God's will for our lives, we often respond not by believing that Jesus will take us back but that we must return to an earlier, holier version of ourselves.
- We think back to the "stuff" we used to do back when we were walking more closely with the Lord, and we try to repeat those things in hopes of recapturing our former fellowship with Jesus.
- Instead of looking to Jesus, we look back to a previous version of ourselves as the ideal model.
- We don't have to do stuff to get Jesus to love us. He loved us enough to save us when we were as filthy as we could be.
- We should remember that in Scripture Jesus took people right where they were. They didn't have to get cleaned up first.
- Jesus is always willing to start anew with you right where you are. You don't have to go back and undo things. You can't do that anyway.
- Look at the woman at the well. She had already been married five times and was living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus told her, "Let me be your living water."

- The man who asked Jesus to heal his son said, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). He was saying, “I’m struggling to trust you from here. I want to believe.” And Jesus said, “C’mon, follow me from here.”
- We’re not miles away from the person we used to be. We’re one step away from the Jesus who will take us just like we are.

QUESTIONS:

- Can you relate with the disciples who seemed to mess up all the time? Share an example of when you thought you were doing something right but you realized you either had wrong motives or wrong methods.
- Have you ever experienced someone giving up on you or abandoning you? How did it make you feel?
- Do you recall when you learned from someone who went through a tough time but still remained committed to Jesus? What did it teach you?
- What kind of “stuff” do Christians typically associate with walking closely with the Lord?
- This “stuff” often is proper and Godly when done with the right motives, but in what ways can we let it take the place of genuine fellowship with the Lord?
- Looking back to when you surrendered your life to Jesus, were you clean beforehand, or were you a sinner? Why do you think people struggle with starting over with Jesus right where they are?
- Describe a time when you felt you were not where you needed to be spiritually and you desired to get back to a previous, more holy version of yourself.
- What would you name the one step that keeps us from being fully devoted followers of Christ? ... Is it not called surrender?

Make Me A River

Key Passages: Romans 5:1-5; Colossians 3:1-17; James 2:14-26

- If you ever feel numbed out or feel like you have lost your spiritual passion, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

1. How is your time with Jesus? Are you in God's Word regularly?

- When you're not consistently reading Scripture, things can get a little grayer and lines can blur more easily between right and wrong, wise and unwise.
- If Satan can distract you and draw you away from God's Word, he will. Energy leaks, and passion can sometimes be a cup with a hole in it.

2. Who are you pouring into right now? Do you spiritually matter to anyone?

- Jesus told us to go make disciples. He knew it was not going to be your own personal faith until you were able to hand it off to somebody. It's just theory until you're able to grasp it and articulate what you believe.
- Jesus knows that when we're able to hand off our faith, to live our lives in such a way that we're a blessing to others, we fulfill his promise to be a river in which his living water refreshes other lives.
- The only reason any of us are saved is because someone allowed Jesus's living water to flow through him or her.
- The Sea of Galilee is living water. It is full of vibrant, fresh water.
- The Dead Sea receives the exact same fresh water. The same fresh water that is in the Sea of Galilee flows all the way down the Jordan River into the Dead Sea. But the Dead Sea is...dead.
- The Dead Sea is the lowest point on land in the world. Its water has one of the highest salt concentrations on earth. It is dead for one reason: The water that flows into it stops flowing. It has nowhere to go because the Dead Sea has no outlets. The water gets there and stops...and dies.
- You feel most alive when Jesus is pouring his love through you and into other people. You feel most dead when you take in God's blessings and keep them for yourself. It's like it dies and rots inside of you.
- The little nuggets that God gives us in his Word are not just for us. They're also intended for you to share with someone else.
- Some people at your school or in your lunchroom or on your team are probably never going to go to church. That's why God put you there—to love on them in his name right where you are.

- Living for Jesus doesn't mean quitting everything to follow him. Sometimes it means blooming where you are.
- Jesus put you right where you are for a reason.
- People around you are genuinely wondering what Jesus is like.
- You're made to be a river, not a pond.

QUESTIONS:

- Here are today's two big questions:
 - 1. How is your time with Jesus? Are you in God's Word regularly?**
 - 2. Who are you pouring into right now? Do you spiritually matter to anyone?**
- Can you recall a time when you wandered away from the Word of God and gradually the lines between black and white and right and wrong seemed blurrier? Did you find yourself making bad choices more easily?
- Describe a time when you allowed Jesus to pour his living water through you to refresh someone else?
- Do you recall who was most responsible for showing you Jesus on your way to your salvation? Who allowed themselves to be a river for you, and in what ways did they allow living water to flow through them?
- Have you experienced a time when you felt most alive because you were close to God and allowing him to use you? Please give details and describe the aftermath.
- Have you experienced a time when you felt dead because you were hoarding all of God's blessings for yourself? Please give details and describe the aftermath.
- Have you ever shared something you learned in God's Word with someone else? Describe the circumstances and the results.

God of All My Days

Key Passages: Psalm 102:25-27, 121:1-8, Hebrews 4:14-16

- Many of us find that our walk with Jesus really isn't ours. Instead, we only absorb the spillover from someone else's walk with Jesus.
- When we're not in God's Word consistently, we can make up our own pictures of who God is, what he's like, and how he views us. So we assume he views us and treats us as other people do. We assume that he'll leave us if we mess up too many times. We assume his acceptance of us is based on how we treat him.
- But when we read Scripture, we discover that the Bible is full of people who messed up all the time. The Bible is full of people worse than we are. Most of them, even Jesus' closest companions, were a bunch of knuckleheads who bumped their heads on life all the time.
- Yet God stuck with them every single time. He didn't treat them the way people treat each other. He didn't give up on them.
- God is constant and immutable. That's a big word that means he is unchanging. The Bible says that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. That means there is no variation or change in his truth and in his ways. His mood never changes. His Word is forever fixed and true.
- We, however, are always changing, always unstable. But God can handle our inconsistencies.
- The more we read God's Word, the more we realize he can handle the giant messes that we make of our lives and all the ups and downs we experience.
- God truly is the God of ALL of our days. He's the same God whether we are totally seeking him and drawing near to him or if we're numbed out and tuning out of his Word. Either way, he's faithful even when his children are not faithful, because he cannot deny himself. That's who he is. (2 Timothy 2:13)
- The good news is that when we mess up or feel a million miles away from God, we don't have to work to get back to where we were when we felt closer to him. He will meet us right where we are.
- God's love and patience for me gives me hope for the world. It reminds me that he is greater than my best or worst days, none of which influence or change him. God is complete and needs nothing. He reigns supreme over the universe he holds together regardless of the season of my life.
- God is not just the God of me when I'm rocking it for him. He's the God of all my days—my good days and my bad days, and he will always meet me at every point.

QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever experienced a time when you realized that you really weren't practicing your own walk with Jesus but were living off the leftovers of someone else's relationship with Christ? How did you respond? What did you learn?
- Can you share an example of when you've discovered that an assumption you made about God wasn't based on truth? What led you to make that errant assumption about God? How did you discover it was not true?
- Considering how people treat each other, what are some assumptions we may make about God and his character and reactions to us?
- In what ways have you discovered that God is unchanging and faithful? Can you share a story of a time when you thought all hope was lost but God showed himself faithful?
- What do you think the Apostle Paul meant in 2 Timothy 2:13, where he writes that God is forever faithful even when we're not because he cannot deny himself?
- How does God's love and patience with you reassure you about his plan for your life and for his creation?
- Can you share a story of when God met you right where you were at the time and either restored you or encouraged you in your fellowship with him?