



March/April 2025

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

THE PEOPLE AROUND JESUS

ALSO: THINGS I WISH I KNEW WHEN I WAS YOUNGER

Dear Friends:

Have you ever said to yourself, “I wish I had known these things when I was younger?” It’s hard to understand life until you have experienced it and have gained some wisdom. Sometimes, though, mentors—experienced Christian brothers or sisters, pastors, and teachers—can help us with insight and guidance as we grow in our experience and faith.



In the month of March, Pastor Darrel Delaney, chaplain and *Groundwork* podcast host, serves as our mentor by sharing insights he has gained over the years in his walk with Jesus. His prayer is that sharing his walk with Jesus will help us to deepen our own relationship with Jesus and help us navigate life’s challenges as we discover and grow in the abundant life Jesus has promised.

Then, in April, Pastor Bret Lamsma guides us through the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, which we celebrate on Easter. Everyone loves a great story, and the story of Jesus—filled with tension, suspense, and a miraculous outcome—is the greatest story of all time! While Jesus himself is at the center of this story, we can learn much about him and how he calls us to live by observing some of his family members, his disciples and other followers, and his critics and enemies. Through Jesus we have been made right with God and called to share this story with the world.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

Today

March/April 2025

refresh, refocus, renew



**“Things I Wish I Knew
When I Was Younger”
Darrell Delaney**



**“The People
around Jesus”
Bret Lamsma**

Managing Editor: Jeff Bulthuis
Executive Editor: Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140), Volume 75, Number 2, published bimonthly by ReFrame Ministries, formerly Back to God Ministries International, at 300 E Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Today, 300 E Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208.

Copyright © 2025, Reframe Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this publication are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Photo: unsplash.com
(jonny gios)



**ReFrame
Ministries**

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

april

The People around Jesus

Bret Lamsma

Every good story includes many elements—settings, characters, action, suspense, and a conclusion. The amazing story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the greatest of all time. It involves all kinds of people: Jesus himself, his family members, his disciples, and his many other followers—as well as his opponents, detractors, and enemies. Jesus' story also involves emotion, suspense, and a miraculous conclusion that has changed the world.

Over the course of this month, which includes the Lenten season, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, we'll take a look at many of the people in the narrative of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The central focus of the story is Jesus, of course, but we can learn a lot about Jesus and about who he calls us to be through the people who surrounded him. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, the most important event in human history, let's consider together the people around Jesus.

Bret Lamsma is the director of faith formation at First Church in Denver, Colorado, and he has served churches in Michigan and California in youth, emerging adult, intergenerational, and educational ministries. Bret and his wife, Julie, have two children, and he enjoys hiking, disc golfing, and cheering for the Chicago Cubs.

THE SEVENTY-TWO

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him. . . .
—Luke 10:1

In my first job as a teenager, I picked raspberries at a farm in Washington State. I can't say it was my favorite job ever, but it gave me something to do for the summer and provided me with some money to buy baseball cards at the local gas station. More than keeping me busy and giving me a bit of money, though, that job helped to give me a sense of purpose for the summer.

Jesus sent out 72 of his followers with a task and a purpose. They went ahead of him to the towns and villages he was about to go to as he brought the good news of the kingdom of God.

As these followers went out, they shared the good news about Jesus, and they were even able to heal people and cast out demons. From their reaction it seems they were

also surprised that they could do these things in Jesus' name.

But that's what happens when Jesus gives us a job and sends us out with his blessing. Even if we don't feel fully equipped to do what we are called to do, Jesus goes with us and blesses our efforts.

The Lord has a task and a purpose for us to carry out. We are his followers on this earth, sent out to share his message with the world.

Jesus, thank you for sending us into this world to share your good news with everyone we meet. Amen.

NICODEMUS

He came to Jesus at night. . . .

—John 3:2

Many people have wondered and speculated about why Nicodemus went to Jesus at night. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling religious council, which was often opposed to Jesus. Was Nicodemus afraid of being seen by other council members? Did he go at night because Jesus would be less busy and have time for an in-depth conversation? Did John include that detail because it fit with his emphasis on light and darkness in his account of Jesus' life and work?

Whatever the reason, the fact that Nicodemus went to Jesus with questions and that Jesus engaged him in conversation has always intrigued me. Nicodemus had questions about spiritual matters, and Jesus was interested in discussing those with him, even at night.

This encounter prompts me to ask, "Are we ready and willing to come to Jesus with our questions about faith?" We all have questions, and Jesus is always ready to hear them.

What are your questions about faith? Did you know Jesus cares about you and wants you to have "life to the full" (John 10:10)? You can ask him questions anytime in prayer, and Jesus' followers can help with finding answers in the Bible and providing a community that supports you in faith. If you know some followers of Jesus, ask them for help with your questions. (You can also connect with ReFrame Ministries for more information).

Jesus, thank you for engaging with our questions and for providing people who can support and talk with us. Amen.

SAMARITANS

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. . . .

—John 4:39

The Samaritan woman who had met Jesus at the well (John 4:1-30) ran back to her town and informed everyone that Jesus had told her everything she had ever done. Her story wasn't a shining example of how to be a great person. But she shared how Jesus had talked with her and given her hope, despite her complicated past, and she invited others to come hear Jesus as well.

As a result, many Samaritans believed in Jesus both because of her testimony and because of his teaching.

It amazes me what can happen when we share our stories and we are able to spend time with Jesus and his followers. Jesus can use any story to help people put their faith in him.

How might Jesus use *your* story to bring others to learn about him and his great salvation?

The Samaritan woman shared her story about how Jesus had changed her. Can we do that too?

No one's life is beyond saving through the power of Jesus. The Lord can use all of our stories to bring others into his loving embrace.

How will you use your story and your encounter with Jesus to tell someone about his love today?

Jesus, help me to share my story with others so that more people may come to believe in you today. In your name, Amen.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
—John 10:11

In this passage Jesus refers to his upcoming death to save all who will believe in him. Here he is talking to the Pharisees and to others listening in. Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who knows and cares for his sheep so much that he will lay down his life for them.

But many of the people listening to him don't understand what he is talking about. Some think he is demon-possessed or insane. Others, however, realize that he has amazing power to heal and do good, and many people believe in him. This kind of thing happens often when Jesus does something amazing or teaches something new. Some people believe, and others don't.

We might think that these split reactions would make Jesus frustrated and want to quit, but he kept on going. He kept interacting with the crowds. He

kept talking to the Pharisees and teaching his disciples. He kept healing the sick. He kept heading toward the cross and his death for our sake.

As we reflect on these things, considering all that Jesus has done for us, surely our reactions will include thanksgiving, gratitude, awe, and more.

If you are facing hard times and struggling to maintain a sense of gratitude lately, take some time to remember all that Jesus has gone through for us. The good shepherd who laid down his life for you and for me truly is good.

Good Shepherd, thank you for laying down your life for us. Help us to live in gratitude each day and to share your love with others. Amen.

LAZARUS

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. . . .

—John 11:1

Losing someone close to you is never easy. Many of us have lost family members, friends, and people from our community who were very close to us. Loss brings tears and sadness and questions about “Why?”

When we read this Bible passage, we can't help thinking about Jesus' friendship with Lazarus and his sisters. This wasn't just any man who had fallen ill and died. This was someone whom Jesus knew and loved.

So why didn't Jesus come running to help Lazarus as soon as he heard about his illness? That's what we want him to do. But maybe we need to realize that Jesus doesn't always do what we think he should do. His agenda is not ours, and his time is not ours.

Jesus explained that his delay had to do with God's glory,

and he talked with his disciples and then with Lazarus's sisters about faith and belief. What's more, we soon learn that although Lazarus died and was buried for four days, Jesus was able to raise him from the dead!

This was actually just a small prelude to what would happen to Jesus himself. After he died to save us from the curse of sin, he was raised from the dead to show the whole world God's power over death for us all!

Heavenly Father, you have power over all things. Through your love for us, show us that power in our lives each day, and help us to trust in you. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

MARY

Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.

—John 12:3

Again we see Jesus interacting with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. They were giving a dinner in Jesus' honor. And as Jesus reclined at the table with everyone around, Mary poured an expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and then wiped his feet with her hair.

This was a very unusual act, and we might have reacted in a way like some of Jesus' disciples did, thinking it was a waste of money. But Jesus saw it for what it was—an act of sacrifice that pointed ahead to the preparation for his burial.

If we can picture for a moment being in that house after Mary poured out the perfume, we can imagine the fragrance filling the house. John even notes that the whole house is filled with the fragrance. But even if we take the perfume out of the picture, we can still imag-

ine the house being filled with the "aroma" of this act.

Selfless acts of service and sacrifice tend to spread. People talk about them, describing what they've seen or experienced. Their stories can even inspire others to do selfless acts as well. Through acts like this, love, compassion, caring, and kindness are spread.

Maybe you are being called, in honor of Jesus, to do some act of humble service today. And maybe that act will unleash a fragrance that spreads to others.

Loving God, help us to see where you are calling us to serve others. Use us to spread the aroma of your love. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

PETER

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

—Mark 9:5

Mountaintop experiences can come in many forms. Sometimes they occur on a literal mountain, like when our family rode the cog railroad to the top of Pikes Peak in Colorado. Other times they can be an experience or part of an event that leaves us feeling like we are on a mountaintop. Some of the students I work with have mountaintop experiences at a summer camp or on a mission trip, where everything goes well and they learn and grow in faith. We sometimes wish events like that could last forever, but mountaintop experiences rarely last.

Peter thought the experience of Jesus' transfiguration on a mountain would last a long time. He even suggested building shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But the top of this mountain wasn't where they needed to stay. The amazing,

spectacular transfiguration of Jesus was soon past.

Whatever your mountaintop experience is, it's probably not where you need to stay either. We are called to be in the world, living life, talking to the people around us, bringing about healing and peace, and walking the path that God has in store for us.

Mountaintop experiences are great. And we can use them to fill us up for the everyday challenges God has in store for us.

Holy God, thank you for filling us up with moments of your presence. Allow those times to carry us along on the path you have laid out for us. In Jesus, Amen.

THE FATHER

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

—Mark 9:7

From the cloud on the mount of transfiguration, God said, "This is my Son." Here God identifies Jesus so that his disciples will have no doubt about his identity. This is God's Son, whom God sent to earth for a purpose. And that purpose was about to become clearer in the coming weeks. Jesus' mission would soon lead to his death and resurrection for us all.

"Whom I love." God's feeling for his Son is also clear. God didn't send his Son to earth on some deadly mission because he didn't care about him. God loved his Son with every part of his being. This was a selfless act by a loving Father who hurt deeply because of what was about to happen.

"Listen to him!" This command was directed at Jesus' disciples who were with him that day, and it is directed at

you and me today. Jesus told his disciples why he had come and what he was about to do, but they didn't always listen or understand. It was very important, though, that they understand! Only when they understood what Jesus was doing could they share it with everyone else they came into contact with—as he would command them to do later (Matthew 28:18-20).

Similarly, only when we listen can we fulfill God's commands as well. So as we read God's Word, let's listen to what Jesus is saying!

Father God, thank you for loving Jesus and for sending him to us. Help us to listen to him faithfully each day. Amen.

A FATHER

A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech."

—Mark 9:17

My wife and I have two children, and I can't imagine them being sick with more than the flu. When I hear about kids who have cancer or other terrible diseases, my eyes tear up as I think about the burden of suffering in childhood and the load of concern weighing on parents in those situations.

I can't imagine what the father of the boy in Mark 9 was going through. Hearing about the healer named Jesus and what he and his disciples could do was probably that father's last hope. So when Jesus' disciples couldn't cast out the impure spirit from his son, the man must have been devastated. And when Jesus asked him if he believed, the man's heartfelt confession was as raw and true as they come: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

We often find ourselves in similar situations, even if they aren't as dire as this father's predicament. We want to believe. We know that we need to believe. And in the meantime we keep fighting against nagging feelings of unbelief.

Jesus has come to help in the way we need it most. Though he might not help us in the same way he helped the anguished father and his son in today's story, Jesus showed, by laying down his life, that he truly loves us. And by his resurrection he made it possible for us to live with him forever!

Lord, I believe you are God above all and in control of all things. Help me overcome my unbelief in every area of life! Amen.

A MOTHER

The mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. —Matthew 20:20

It's easy for us to be critical of the mother who approaches Jesus in this passage. Her request is really outlandish. We might wonder, "How important does she think she is? Or how important does she think her sons are?" Sure, they were two of Jesus' closest disciples. (They are identified earlier as James and John in Matthew 4:21-22.) But this request is over the top!

It's also easy for us to understand the indignation of the other disciples. They had all been together with Jesus for a few years now—learning, healing, traveling, and doing all sorts of things they probably never thought they would do together. And now James and John's mother comes to ask for her sons to be above all the rest? I wonder if James and John ever lived this down.

But before we criticize this mother or her sons, it's important to remember the lesson that this question prompted Jesus to teach. Jesus' community isn't about being first or best. It's about being last and least. It's about serving others and giving up everything, if necessary, for the good of everyone else.

This isn't normal, but it's what Jesus is all about. It's also what Jesus' followers—including us—need to be all about.

Humble God, help us to put others first. Help us to serve others. Help us to seek your kingdom for everyone and not just for ourselves. Help us to follow you, for your sake. Amen.

CHIEF PRIESTS AND TEACHERS

"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death. . . ."
—Matthew 20:18

Every good story includes interesting characters—including heroes and villains—as well as tensions and challenges. All of these elements serve a purpose. Even villains, who are typically disliked, serve an important purpose in the story. This is the case for the chief priests and teachers in the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus had set out for Jerusalem, even though he knew what would happen there. He knew there would be confrontations with the chief priests and teachers of the law, who were looking for a reason to arrest and kill him. If he stayed away from Jerusalem, he might have avoided that outcome, at least for a while. But he had come to follow his Father's plan, and that involved going to Jerusalem, facing the religious leaders, and submitting to his

eventual sentencing, torture, and death.

It may surprise us that the religious leaders opposed Jesus. In many ways, sadly, they were responsible for his death. They thought they were in the right, but they were not. The lesson for us here is to make sure we do what is right. At times when we think we are following God's will, we are not. We might think we are close to Jesus, but we can be far off.

Discernment is a difficult task, but it is one that we are called to every day. Let's pray for help in discerning what is right and who we are called to be.

Lord, help us discern right from wrong. Help us to truly follow you in all we do and say. Amen.

A DONKEY

“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.”
—Matthew 21:2

There is a little donkey named Rosey where my daughter rides horses. Rosey lives in a large enclosure with a herd of ponies. She loves to come to the fence to get scratches from all of the kids and adults who walk by. Every once in a while she cries out as only a donkey can. You can hear her from a distance. Once a year she is taken out and fitted with a pack to parade around with a man dressed up as an 1849 miner searching for gold. Sometimes she follows him well, and other times she stops and refuses to move. She *is* a donkey, after all.

Sometimes I imagine Jesus riding on her. It's not what people would have expected. They'd expect a king to ride majestically on a horse. And a donkey might go where it is directed, but it also might not.

The donkey in Jesus' story, however, played an important part in communicating Jesus' purpose and who he was. He came to be a humble servant, showing that as the true King over all things, he came to show his love and care for us by dying to save us.

We play important parts in the Lord's great story too. We don't need to be wealthy rulers or important leaders. We just need to be who God created us to be. God has a role and a plan for us in his story. And he will use us as he sees fit.

God, thank you for choosing me and giving me a role to play in your story for the world. Help me to know that role, and help me live into it more and more each day. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

THE CROWD

They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" . . .
—John 12:13

Today is Palm Sunday.

I remember someone telling me that the events of Palm Sunday always seemed contradictory to her. Some of the people who celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem were the same ones who shouted "Crucify him!" a few days later (Mark 15:13-14).

The contradictions of Palm Sunday have something to say, if we are ready to listen. For example, what kind of king enters a city on a donkey? A majestic horse would be more fitting, right? And what kind of people shout, "Hosanna!" and "Blessed is the king of Israel!" one day, and then cry "Crucify him!" later in the week? It doesn't make sense. But the contradictions don't stop there. They carry on all the way to you and me.

Physically Jesus was put on the cross by soldiers, officials,

priests, and regular people. But he hung on that cross because the sin of all humanity—including my sin and your sin—put him there. All of us are like the crowd waving branches as Jesus entered Jerusalem. We celebrate and worship him as Lord and King—and yet we sin, which required that Jesus die in our place to save us. We are no different from the crowds in Jerusalem all those years ago.

So today, as we celebrate Jesus arriving as King, let's remember that he came not "to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He died so that we can be forgiven and have new life in him!

Lord Jesus, help us to celebrate you and to give thanks for all you have done to save us. Amen.

PETER AGAIN

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
—John 13:6

Have you ever had your feet washed by someone else? Or have you ever washed someone else's feet? Years ago I was involved in a program where we trained student leaders. At the end of the training the adult leaders would wash the feet of the student leaders. I was always uneasy doing it, but it was always meaningful for me and the students.

When Jesus knelt down to wash his disciples' feet, I'm sure the room fell silent. This wasn't something that a teacher and master would do. But as he moved from person to person, I'm sure the disciples knew something meaningful was happening. And Peter's response is what all of us would say: "Not my feet, Jesus!" But then after Jesus explained that he had to do this, Peter went all in: "Then wash my hands and my head too!"

Jesus needed Peter and the rest of the disciples to know what it meant to be a servant to others. He needed them to know that no matter what position they held, no matter how important they were, they were still called to be servants to others.

The same is true for us. It doesn't matter what position you hold in life or how important you are. What matters is whether or not you will be a servant to others.

Are you willing to humble yourself for someone else in the name of Jesus?

Humble Lord, humble me in the presence of the people I meet today. Show me whom I need to serve in your name. Amen.

JUDAS

One of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests. . . .
—Matthew 26:14

Sometimes I like watching TV shows about police, lawyers, investigators, and criminals. It can be intriguing to try to figure out a person's motive for committing a crime. Sometimes, even long after you can tell who the villain is, the motive is unclear till the very end of the story.

I wonder sometimes what motivated Judas to betray Jesus. Was it greed? Was it power? Had he been hoping for an important place in Jesus' kingdom, then learned that Jesus wasn't about worldly power, and then decided to switch sides and join Jesus' enemies for a chance at power instead? Or was his motive maybe altruistic, as in knowing what Jesus had to do—go to the cross and die—and then trying to help that along? Or did Judas perhaps simply not like Jesus and the other disciples and decide

he was done with it all? We don't really know.

Sometimes I wonder about my own motivations too. Why do I follow Jesus? Why do I do anything that I do on a daily basis?

It's important for all of us to examine our motivations from time to time. We need to look at the things we do and make sure we are doing them for the right reasons. Being motivated by love, care, compassion, or purpose is good. Being motivated by greed, personal ambition, or hate is not.

What motivates you?

Dear God, help us to identify and understand our motives. Help us to act in line with your love in everything we do. Amen.

PILATE

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere . . . he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said.
—Matthew 27:24

Pilate is a puzzling character in the story of Jesus' death. He was the Roman governor of Judea, and he directly oversaw Jesus' trial and handed him over to be crucified. But it seems that he also tried to do what he could to avoid sentencing Jesus. He asked several times what crime Jesus was actually accused of, and he tried to make use of a custom in which the governor would release a prisoner of the people's choice during the Passover festival. But the people wanted another prisoner released and they wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate's wife even warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus because of a dream she had had. In the end Pilate tried symbolically to wash his hands of the whole thing and proclaim his own innocence in the matter.

Still, Pilate was responsible for his actions. He knew that

Jesus wasn't guilty and that he shouldn't be crucified, but he let it happen anyway. In the face of pressure, he did what the crowd wanted, not what he knew was right.

How often do we do the same thing? We know what we need to do, even if it isn't the popular thing. But we go along with the crowd, giving in to pressure, and we do what we know is wrong.

With God's help, though, and because of all that Jesus has done for us, we can change. We can stand up for what is right, even if it isn't the popular thing to do.

Lord, help us to do what we know is right. Help us to follow you wherever you lead. Amen.

MARY, JESUS' MOTHER

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother. . . .

—John 19:25

Jesus' entire ministry was characterized by selfless acts. Healing sick people, feeding hungry people, taking the role of a servant, and even raising the dead were major parts of his ministry of bringing the good news of God's love for us all. Jesus was always looking out for others and putting them and their needs ahead of his own. So we shouldn't be surprised that as he hung on the cross he was still thinking about others.

Jesus' mother, Mary, stood by helplessly, watching her son die on a cross. No doubt, she wept with the others who stood with her. And while Jesus neared death, he reached out to make sure that she would be taken care of. He told the disciple that he loved (John) that he should take Mary into his home and treat her as his own mother and that Mary

should treat John as her own son.

Of course, Jesus' death was the most selfless act of all. He gave up his own life and died for our sins so that you and I wouldn't have to. He took on all of God's wrath and punishment against sin so that we could be forgiven. Today and every day, let's remember our Savior who lived a selfless life, died a horrible death to take away our sins, and was raised from the dead to conquer sin and death "once for all" (Hebrews 9:26-10:10).

Jesus, we can't thank you enough for the selfless act of your death for our sake. Help us to live every day remembering your selfless love for us. In your name, Amen.

THE CENTURION AND THE GUARDS

"Surely he was the Son of God!"

—Matthew 27:54

Have you ever seen something that was so amazing you just couldn't stop talking about it? Maybe it was something incredible that happened at a special event. Or something you saw while hiking or traveling, or in a TV documentary. Whatever it was, it was so astonishing that you had to tell everyone around you about it.

That was the reaction of the centurion and the guards who watched over Jesus' execution. They saw everything that happened to him. And after everything had happened—after Jesus had given up his spirit—they couldn't help declaring exactly who Jesus was.

Encountering Jesus has that effect on people still today. When Jesus shows up in our lives and does something miraculous or we are able to see the work of his Spirit through an individual or a community,

we can't help sharing that good news with everyone we meet.

What amazing things has Jesus done in your life that you can't help sharing with others? In what ways have you encountered him when you didn't expect to?

Not all of us may be able to think of something right away, but on this Good Friday we can look again at the story of Jesus' death and remember that he died for us. Jesus died so that each one of us can live as a forgiven child of God. This is the foundational good news that we can share with everyone!

Jesus, thank you for showing up in our lives and helping us, by your Spirit, to grow in faith. Above all, thank you for dying for us. Amen.

JOSEPH

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.
—John 19:38

Sometimes it's easier to hide what we believe than to share it openly. This can happen especially when it comes to talking about our faith. In some situations we can be afraid of being ridiculed or of losing status or even of being harmed for our beliefs.

Joseph of Arimathea seems to have been in a position like that. He was a disciple of Jesus, but not openly. He probably kept his allegiance a secret because he, like Nicodemus, was a member of the ruling council of religious leaders that had condemned Jesus (see Luke 23:59; John 3:1-8; 7:45-52). These two men probably acted in secret to avoid being attacked by the ruling council. We might wonder if there were others like them in the council who preferred to remain hidden, but we are told only about Joseph and Nicodemus.

All of the secrecy, however, seemed to change after Jesus' death. Joseph boldly asked Pilate for Jesus' body so that he could honor the Lord and prepare his body for burial according to custom.

Maybe Jesus' death can change things for us too. Jesus wasn't afraid to go to the cross for us. How can we be afraid to do anything for him? We can step out with boldness and let the world know that we believe in Jesus. We believe that he died for us and that we are now forgiven as children of God. In the Lord's strength we can be bold in our faith!

Father, because of Jesus' sacrifice, help us live out our faith with boldness, wherever we are. Amen.

MARY MAGDALENE

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

—John 20:16

On the morning of Jesus' resurrection, Mary Magdalene went to visit his tomb early—and when she saw the stone rolled away, she quickly went to tell Jesus' disciples. They came and saw and then returned to where they were staying. But Mary couldn't leave. She was overcome with sorrow about Jesus' death and couldn't imagine life without him. So she lingered in the garden and wept.

Through her tears she saw two angels in the tomb. She explained why she was crying, and then she turned around and saw Jesus there but didn't recognize him. It's hard to know why she didn't recognize him. Maybe her vision was clouded by tears. Maybe Jesus' resurrected body was somehow different. Whatever the reason, she mistook him for the gardener and asked where Jesus' body had been

taken. And Jesus simply called her by name: "Mary."

How often do we encounter Jesus and not recognize him? Maybe we are talking with a person in need. Maybe someone is calling us to repentance. Maybe someone is showing us kindness or grace. Or maybe Jesus is present in a random event. Maybe our vision is clouded by busyness or worry, fear, or inattention. But then Jesus, who knows everything about us, gets our attention, and we immediately know he is there. We can tell that he loves us and is always with us. We know that his grace is for us, and that he calls us to follow him in everything we do.

Jesus, thank you for knowing us and calling us to enjoy new life with you. Amen.

PETER YET AGAIN

“Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

—Mark 16:7

We might not like to be singled out, but many of us know what that's like. It may be for a special honor, or it may be for doing something wrong. Either way, being singled out can be embarrassing and make us want to hide.

Peter was singled out by Jesus here. And while Peter may have gulped deeply when he heard about this, it wasn't a bad thing. Peter had denied Jesus three times, even after saying he would never leave Jesus' side (see Mark 14:27-31, 66-72). I can't imagine the guilt Peter must have felt. But Jesus needed Peter to know that he was still welcome among his followers. He was still invited to the reunion in Galilee that Jesus had mentioned. In fact, he was still part of the plan Jesus had for his disciples and the whole world.

We could all make a laundry list of the many things we do that should separate us from Jesus. There are times when we do what we shouldn't do and times when we don't do what we should do. But none of those things separates us from Jesus and his kingdom, because his death has covered all the sins of our lives—even the ones we haven't done yet. That's how vast the forgiveness of God is! And when the Lord singles us out, we can be sure he is calling us to join with him.

Can you sense the Lord calling you today?

Jesus, thank you for calling us to follow you, even though we have failed you in many ways. Help us to be faithful, we pray. Amen.

THE WOMEN

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

—Luke 24:1

When they went to Jesus' tomb on Sunday morning, the women expected to find Jesus' body there. They had prepared spices for his burial and a time of mourning. But when they got there, the stone was rolled away and Jesus' body was gone. Suddenly they saw two men in gleaming clothes who told them that Jesus wasn't there but had risen from the dead, just as he had told them.

All of that is amazing in itself, but I love what these women did when they left the tomb. They went and told the disciples and "all the others." They had seen something amazing, and that needed to be shared. So they told everyone they knew.

Other people did the same thing after encountering Jesus. They experienced his amazing power through healings, teach-

ings, forgiveness, and more—and they couldn't keep from sharing about it with everyone else.

Encountering the risen Lord should draw the same response from us. "Christ is risen" is the best news the world has ever heard. This isn't news that should be hoarded for ourselves or kept from others who need to hear it. This is good news for all the world to hear. So today, share the good news of Jesus with everyone you meet.

Christ has risen!

Jesus, let us boldly share the news of your resurrection through our words and actions with everyone we meet today. In your name, Amen.

THE DISCIPLES

On . . . that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

—John 20:19

The disciples were hiding together behind locked doors in the days after Jesus' death. They weren't just afraid of being recognized or ridiculed for following a teacher that had been sentenced and crucified. They feared for their lives. They were afraid of what the Jewish leaders might do to try to wipe out any remaining followers of their enemy Jesus.

Some of us might look down on the disciples for their fear, but I think most of us would have reacted the same way if we were in their position. In fact, we might also act out of fear in our everyday living as followers of Jesus today.

Most of us, if we live in a place of religious freedom, don't have to fear for our lives because of our faith—but there are many people who do.

And even if we don't fear for our lives, we might have fears about what our friends, classmates, coworkers, or even family members might think of us if we told them what we believe.

While these reactions may make sense, Jesus' greeting to his disciples should ring in our ears whenever we might be afraid. Jesus greeted his disciples with the words "Peace be with you!" And that same peace is offered to us if ever we are afraid.

Risen Lord, we don't want to be afraid. Help us always to have your peace in our lives—especially if we are afraid. In your name we pray. Amen.

THOMAS

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. —John 20:24

I can understand Thomas's doubt. For whatever reason, he wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus first visited them after his resurrection, so he hadn't seen Jesus firsthand. Maybe he should have taken the disciples' word for it when they told him they had seen Jesus. Maybe he should have had more faith. Or maybe he was just an untrusting sort of person. Whatever the case, Thomas said he just couldn't believe Jesus was alive until he saw Jesus for himself.

When Jesus came again and Thomas could see him, Jesus was patient with Thomas. Jesus even showed Thomas what he said he needed to see in order to believe. But Jesus also noted that all who believe without seeing him will be blessed.

Today that includes you and me. Belief without seeing is the nature of our faith most of

the time. We probably won't see Christ in person until we join him in eternity. Until then, though, we believe even though we have not seen.

We are called to have faith in Jesus for who he is, all he has done, and all he has promised. We believe because others have seen, because others have witnessed, and because their testimony is in God's Word to us, along with all of God's promises. We believe because the Spirit of God guides us into the truth of God's Word and gives us faith (see John 16:7-15; Ephesians 2:6-10). And in believing we are blessed.

Lord, help us to believe even though we have not seen. By your Spirit, lead us to know the truth that brings life in you. Amen.

THE TRAVELERS

That same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. —Luke 24:13

A friend of mine went to his kids' sports event, and he found a seat next to a random stranger in the stands. They started a conversation and talked for most of the game. It was only after people pointed out to him later that the person he was talking to during the game was a retired famous athlete. He had had no idea.

Cleopas and his fellow traveler had known Jesus and had interacted with him before his death and resurrection. They were closely connected with his ministry and even knew that the women had found his tomb empty earlier that day. But they didn't recognize Jesus as he walked and talked with them. I'm not sure why they didn't recognize him, but that also happened to others who knew him well. Only after he broke bread with them in their home did they realize that the

person they had been talking with was Jesus.

I wonder how often we find ourselves in Christ's presence and don't realize it. Though he isn't actually there in person, he can be present with us anywhere at any time because he promises, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Maybe a conversation with a friend ushers us into Jesus' presence. Or maybe a worship experience helps us connect with Christ in a new way. Or maybe someone shines the presence of Jesus in a selfless act of service. Whatever the case, let's keep our eyes open for Jesus in our everyday living. No doubt he is walking with us each day.

Lord, help us to know you are with us always, and to work with you in all we do and say. Amen.

THE FISHERMEN

Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.

—John 21:1

If you're an expert at something and have done it for a long time, it can be difficult to take advice from someone else. In our reading today, though, we find that even though Jesus' disciples are experienced fishermen, they take advice from a stranger who calls out to them from the shore.

Maybe they go along with this advice because they have been out all night and have caught nothing. Fishing on the Sea of Galilee could be unpredictable, and even experienced fishermen could get stumped. Or maybe this stranger spoke with enough authority to convince them to listen to him. This particular stranger, who was the Lord of heaven and earth, surely had abundant authority (see Matthew 28:18).

Whatever the case, it didn't take long for the disciples to realize who the stranger was.

Their catch of fish was so big that they couldn't haul it in. And John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Clearly they remembered a time when this had happened before (see Luke 5:1-11).

Back then, Jesus had called these fishermen to follow him, and they had joined him on an incredible journey. Now Jesus was meeting with them again to renew their call to follow him. And they followed.

Jesus calls us to follow him too. Will you join him again today?

Jesus, help us to say yes to your invitation, and guide us to follow you today and every day, wherever you call us to go. Amen.

PETER ONE MORE TIME

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time. . . .
—John 21:17

Jesus' questions parallel Peter's three denials. On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter was asked three times if he was associated with Jesus, and each time Peter said no (John 18:15-18, 25-27). Now Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And while Peter is obviously hurt by this, no doubt Jesus was hurt by Peter's denials as well.

The rebuilding of Peter's relationship with Jesus was important. Jesus needed to hear that Peter still loved him. Jesus still had a role for Peter to fill in his growing kingdom. And Peter needed to know he was forgiven and still welcome in Jesus' kingdom work. In fact, Peter might have thought he wasn't welcome to follow Jesus anymore after his denial—and that might have been at least partly why he went back to fishing so soon after Jesus' death and

resurrection. Whatever the case, Peter needed to know that he was still welcome.

Nothing Peter could do would separate him from Jesus' love. The same is true for us (Romans 8:38-39). We might deny Jesus and turn our backs on him in any number of ways. But Jesus never does that to us. He is always waiting for us, asking us if we love him, and giving us a continued purpose in his kingdom. Jesus' love never fails. This is a promise we can depend on every day.

Jesus, thank you for the gift of forgiveness and for continuing to call us to follow you. Thank you for providing us with salvation and a new life with you! Amen.

THE ELEVEN

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.
—Matthew 28:16

When our kids were old enough to look after themselves at home while Mom and Dad went out, we always had lots of instructions for them. Feed the dog, water the plants, vacuum the living room, load the dishwasher, and be in bed by 10 p.m. In our absence we wanted things to get done, and we needed our kids to know they had to get them done.

In some ways, it seems, Jesus had a similar plan when he was about to leave his disciples. He had spent years with them, training them and preparing them for this exact moment. He was about to return to the Father in heaven and leave them with the task of furthering his kingdom on the earth. So before he left, Jesus gave them these tasks: “Make disciples of all nations.” “Baptize people into my family.” “Teach them everything I

have commanded you.” And he promised, “I will always be with you.”

These were essential for the disciples, and they are essential for us today. We continue in this important work as Jesus’ followers even now. Jesus’ message to his disciples is his message to us.

We have our job description, and we have Jesus’ promise of his eternal presence with us. And these are things we can be sure of.

Jesus, thank you for your promise to be with us always and for the tasks you have given us. Help us to fulfill your kingdom purposes on the earth every day. In your name, Amen.

MATTHIAS

They cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.
—Acts 1:26

At a professional basketball game, have you looked at all of the players sitting on the bench? Most of them still have their warmups on and aren't sweating at all. They all have plenty of skills, or they wouldn't even be allowed to sit on that bench. They were probably stars at whatever previous level of basketball they played. But for now they sit on the bench and patiently wait for a turn to play.

I wonder if Matthias felt in a way like that. He had been following Jesus from the beginning. He had heard everything that Jesus had taught. He had seen all of the miracles Jesus had done. He may have been one of the 72 followers Jesus had sent out during his ministry. Matthias must have had many stories to share about what he had seen and done while following Jesus. Certainly he was

a qualified and loyal follower of Jesus. But he wasn't one of the 12 apostles until his name came up and was drawn by lot.

Sometimes the message we get from Jesus is "Wait." We may be ready to go where he sends us or to do what he wants us to do. But he tells us to wait. Wait for the opportunity and for the time to be right. Wait for Jesus to call on us.

I imagine Matthias was excited to become part of the leading group of Christ-followers who would go out and change the world. I hope you are excited to be a part of that movement as well.

Lord Jesus, when you call us to follow you, move us to say yes with excitement and joy for what you have in store for us. Amen.

THE MESSIAH

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
—John 20:31

This brief note at the end of John's gospel account sums up the purpose of Jesus' coming. Through all of the other characters we have met and learned about in the story of Jesus, and through all of the things that took place in connection with Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the main point has always been that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah (the Christ, meaning "Anointed One"), sent by God the Father to live among us for the purpose of delivering us from the curse of sin. On our own we would have no chance of paying the price for our sin or trying to make right everything that we have done wrong in this world. We could never earn our own forgiveness. Jesus was sent to take the punishment that we deserve onto himself and to reconcile us with God once and for all.

He lived, died, and was raised from the dead for you and for me—to bring us life at its fullest. Through Jesus, God offers each of us eternal life filled with forgiveness, love, grace, and purpose.

If you haven't accepted this gift of love from God, I invite you to do so today. It is offered freely—no strings attached. Take some time to reflect on this incredible gift and receive new life today!

Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us to live fully with gratitude for the amazing gift of salvation that you offer us today. Amen.

KIDS CORNER



EVERYTHING'S HERE!



KC Devotions
and Parent Blog



Online Intro
to the Bible



Liz & Friends
Podcast



Bible Stories
Podcast



Kids in Action
Video



Activities, Crafts,
and Songs

KIDSCORNER.NET

Periodicals postage paid at
Grand Rapids, Mich., and at
additional mailing offices.

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

300 E Beltline Ave NE
Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208
800-626-3060
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional



RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

3475 Mainway
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9
P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
905-336-2920
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional