

Dr. Jamie Mitchell

The Emotions of Easter

*Eight-Day
Passion Week
Devotional*



American
Pastors Network



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Dedication and Acknowledgement

I was thinking about all the different resources, studies, books and devotionals I have produced and realized that they all were reviewed and proofread by my dear wife, **KRIS MITCHELL**. She has agonized for hours reading manuscripts, fixing punctuations and misspellings, rewording sentences, questioning my theology (rightfully so) and suggesting better ways to say things. Each time it was a labor of love. On top of attempting to make sense of my writing, I usually saddle her with a time deadline. *“Honey, I need this by tomorrow!”* is my most burdensome request! Yet she prevails. I know that myself and anyone who has benefited from my resources owe her a debt of gratitude.

Yet beyond being my editorial staff, she has been my wife, friend, prayer warrior, cheerleader, defender, and exhorter for 40 years this coming December. We met each other in college and have walked hand in hand for four decades. Simply amazing! I would like to say every moment of the journey was easy, but it was not. Trials, suffering, disappointments, sadness, along with victories and celebrations have been the bricks of our walkway. So how did we make it?

I believe it is fitting that this year's devotional be dedicated to Kris. You see, she practices what this booklet will communicate. Emotions and feelings are a part of life, but they don't need to define or control you. If we renew our mind through God's Word and daily times of holy meditation on Him, our feelings will be properly controlled. Every morning, Kris sits with her well-worn, NASB Bible and meets with the Lord. That is her secret and the secret of our marriage. She has been the "gold standard" of wives because she has been anchored to the riches of Heaven. Thank you, honey for your faithfulness to Christ, thus being able to be my faithful life partner.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding Our Emotions

It's funny the things you remember. I was never really interested in counseling or psychology, yet for my master's degree I was required to take a counseling course. It was taught by the dean of the program, Bud Hopkins. Bud had been a pastor for years and was one of the most meek, thoughtful, insightful, and godly men I have ever known. I was taking the class at the graduate school's extension campus in Florida, which made concentrating very difficult, wondering if we were going to get time by the pool in the afternoon. Nevertheless, my focus became laser fixed as Bud began to teach. I will never forget that afternoon or his lecture. He began in this way....

"There are two dimensions in every human being that affects who they are and the struggles in their lives. Those dimensions are material and immaterial. The material aspect of a person is their flesh, bones, organs, blood, and bodily functions, including their brain. If something goes wrong with the material self, it can affect all other elements of our life and behavior. The immaterial elements are the things we can't see, but we know they are at work and are confirmed in the Scriptures. The immaterial, or as the Bible calls it, the "inner man", is our mind, will and emotions. The mind contains our thoughts, beliefs, and memories. The Scriptures tell us, "As the mind thinketh, so shall we be." The mind controls what we do and how we feel. The will contains our actions, decisions, and initiative to do anything. The mind

triggers the will. When we consciously KNOW danger, then our will responds and acts to remove us from the danger. Then there are the emotions. This is where our feelings live. When we think and know something and we act and respond in a certain way, it creates and produces a feeling or emotion. Sadness, happiness, sullenness, and euphoria do not produce themselves. Their source is first our mind and the actions we take.”

Now there was a whole lot that Bud waxed on for the week of that class, yet that opening lecture, and that amazingly simple explanation on how we work on the inside, revolutionized my thinking about people, myself, my ministry and how to grow as a believer. So many situations that I had dealt with in the past began to make sense. Just the insight that how I think affects what I do, and those two responses produces my feelings and emotions, changed me forever. I thought about how many times I have used as an excuse the phrase – *“I don’t FEEL like doing it!”* was just NOT true! My feelings should have no influence on what I do, how fast I do it or how fervent I am in completing the task! Yet most people allow their emotions to define who they are and what they have done.

The fact is that we can “master our moods” if we think on the correct ideas, or better, think upon truth. It is why the Bible speaks so often on the concept to “renew our mind,” or to “think on these things” when instructing about living godly or acting like Christ. It is why the Apostle Paul taught on having the “mind of Christ” to be found worthy of being a disciple. Having our minds properly informed and having Biblical beliefs saturating our thoughts is crucial to living as devoted followers of the Savior and the feelings that follow.

Also, when our minds are properly informed it will affect our behavior, choices, decisions, and actions. The flesh goes where the mind is directing it or if there is the absence of proper guidance. We do because we think. If that is true, and I know it to be, then coming from what is in my mind and out of my actions will come my feelings.

One of the simple definitions of the word **EMOTION** is this, *“instinctive or intuitive feeling as distinguished from reasoning or knowledge.”* In other words, our moods, sentiments, or disposition that we produce occur when we see something, are confronted by something or are consciously aware of something. Feelings and emotions do not determine if something is true or false, real or imagined. Emotions occur and we experience them. Emotions are mostly indicators or measurements of what you may be thinking or what you have just done. If you are feeling a certain way, you can probably go back and determine the source of that feeling in your thoughts or actions. There is always a source. Feelings are not independent in and of themselves.

Over the years, I have separated my thinking and action from my emotions by considering the difference between a THERMOSTAT and THERMOMETER. People get these two devices confused or they believe they are the same thing, but they are not! The thermometer measures the temperature. If you want to know how hot or cold a room, a car or even the inside of a piece of meat is, you use a thermometer.

A thermostat turns up and down the temperature. If a room is cold, then you turn the heat up with a thermostat. If you need the air conditioner turned on, then you adjust the thermostat. One is an

indicator, and the other is an instigator or initiator. One prescribes what should be and the other describes what is happening.

So, it is with our emotions. Feelings and emotions are our **THERMOMETER**. It gives us an indicator of how we are responding. Our mind and will are our **THERMOSTATS** and turn up the heat or cold in our lives. Our mind and will **control** and feelings and emotions **patrol** our lives.

Most believers have never taken time to fully understand how God has created our inner man, and it is the reason why we struggle in our walk with the Lord. It is also why we get stuck spiritually or never seem to grow. Primarily we rely on and allow our feelings to dictate and control us. Instead of anchoring our minds and will in God's Word and into the Spirit's influence, we fall prey to being twisted and turned by our emotions. The results can be devastating, but worse, hopeless. If we allow our lives to be mastered by our moods, we will never see how changes, conviction and courage can be produced through our mind being renewed and our will being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Like someone once said, we must "master our moods or they will master us!"

There is not a series of events that generate a vast array of emotions like the events surrounding EASTER. Let's insert ourselves into the story and imagine ourselves as one of the Disciples or maybe an onlooker to all of the happenings in the last week or two of Christ's life, just before His death and then His resurrection. Literally, it is an emotional rollercoaster. I could identify at least 30 different emotions from the American Psychological Association of human feelings that were experienced just from a quick read of the Easter passages. What

they all were FEELING, both those who loved Christ and those who hated Him, ran the spectrum, and would leave the most stable person exhausted and drained.

But even more crucial is that if these emotions were allowed to run rampant and never properly controlled with the TRUTH, they could personally and spiritually trainwreck many and probably did. Feelings are genuine. They occur in our lives. They reveal themselves and show up without notice and can be deceitful if not properly anchored in our minds. Some feelings are true and needed and quite beneficial. But it is those unsubstantiated and untethered emotions that can hurt and damage us.

This Easter and throughout the Holy Week, I want to guide you through a devotional study of a number of encounters that those who were around Jesus, during these last days on earth, would have experienced and the emotions that would have been produced. Again, emotions are not bad; they are necessary, natural and indicate what is happening inside a person. Yet emotions must flow from correct thinking and behavior. This week we will examine what I am calling the **EMOTIONS OF EASTER**. Each day I will remind you of a familiar story from God's Word that occurred around the final days, betrayal, trial, death, burial and then resurrection of Christ. I will try to look at the encounter through the eyes of those watching, but more importantly, attempt to capture what they might have been feeling. Some will be speculative, yet I believe the evidence and application will bear up. But most vital for us today is to recognize that we too experience these emotions and must make sure that we are handling them correctly or better yet, not allowing them to control us in a negative manner. The goal of the week – meet again with our MASTER

during the most important event in human history and MASTER OUR EMOTIONS so that we become like Him and are living for Him. Now join me as we consider the **EMOTIONS OF EASTER...**

DAY ONE:

SUNDAY

Confidence in Bethany

John 11:1-44

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11:41-44

Confidence is defined as this, "*a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities.*" I can't help to think that as the disciples left Bethany and headed towards Jerusalem, literally days before Jesus' arrest, that they had the emotion of confidence. Confidence is a good feeling. It is a needed feeling. As parents we long for and work to help our kids have confidence. We usually don't act without it. Certainly, my decisions are influenced greatly on whether I feel confident about something or not. We could say that confidence is the "seed for courage to grow". Yet as the

definition implies, this feeling is produced from evidence or proof of one's ability.

In our passage for this day, I want you to look at the very famous story of Lazarus, who was brought back from the dead. In your reading you can see that Jesus had heard about His friend's illness but chose not to go to him immediately. In that delay, Lazarus dies and then Jesus goes to Bethany, home of Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. The passages describe how both Martha and Mary believed that if Jesus had come sooner their brother would not have died. You can hear and sense their despair but also disappointment. One could conclude that these sisters along with the mourning town had lost confidence. The opportunity to save this brother was gone and all was lost. It was clear that any "assurance or hope" of a different outcome, except for death, had evaporated.

Nevertheless, Christ challenges them and wants them to THINK differently. Remember, our feelings are the product of our thinking. Their loss of hope and confidence was limited by their thinking. Interestingly, their mind believed that IF Jesus had come sooner, He had the power to HEAL their brother and spare him from death. Why could they not believe that this same power could bring him back from death? In verses 25-27 Jesus informs their thinking....

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Do you see it? He asks them – "Do you BELIEVE this?" He reminds them that the truth they allow to influence their mind is what should dictate their feelings. They were feeling disappointed, despair, hopelessness, and grief. They needed CONFIDENCE in God for a better outcome and He gave it to them.

The rest of the story is well known. Jesus goes to the tomb and cries out their brother's name. Moments later, the mummified body of Lazarus emerges into daylight with the burial cloth hanging off his once lifeless body. You can imagine the corporate gasp that came from all who were watching. Obviously, the emotions of joy, amazement, awe, and gladness swept over everyone. Yet it is the feeling of CONFIDENCE that I believe is so important. In a split second, what was believed hopeless and impossible was turned to certainty and possibility. What they said could never occur, now gave way to a resounding -- "Yes, Lord, You can!!"

There is one catch to this feeling of newfound confidence emanating from Bethany that day. In our original definition it stated that confidence was self-assurance in regard to YOUR abilities. If Mary, Martha, or any other citizen was relying on their abilities to invoke self-assurance, they would still come up empty. The fact is, this feeling of CONFIDENCE that was ignited wasn't based on them but on Christ; on His abilities and power. Remember, He declared, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE!" It is based on that ability and power that our confidence can resonate from.

This is exactly the truth that Paul was getting at when he wrote this:

“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God...”

2 Corinthians 3:4–5

We have little to no confidence in ourselves. Sure, we have capabilities, creativity, cleverness, and clout in the flesh, but it will be limited at best. No, the kind of confidence you and I need to face the struggles and challenges today is only found in the Savior and Master, Jesus Christ. It is through His resurrection power that we can and will live confidently. All of us need that amazing feeling of confidence. Look to Christ for your daily dose, as they did in the village of Bethany.

PRAYER:

Father, again I am reminded that “without You, through the work of Christ, I can do nothing!” In a world filled with uncertainty, impossibilities and insurmountable challenges, I need confidence for each step I take. Fill my heart with confidence to face whatever comes my way today. The confidence that comes from focusing on the resurrected Savior and Your Son our blessed Jesus Christ. AMEN

DAY TWO

MONDAY

Contempt in the Temple

Mark 11:15-19

And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city.

Mark 11:15–19

Bible teachers are united on this fact – when a story or event is written about in most of the gospels, there is great significance to that story and a spiritual lesson that God desires His people to get. When you consider which events in Christ’s life and ministry are only mentioned in one of the gospels, like Lazarus, and not in all four, you know that the occurrence is unique and something to give special attention to.

Thus is the case with today's story. Three gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell of an experience that occurred a day after the famous Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, at the start of His Passion week, known as the temple cleansing.

As you read the passage for the day, be aware of some key facts to help gain insights. Jews were expected to come to the temple and ask the priests to make sacrifice on their behalf to atone for their sins. There was a wide range of "acceptable" sacrifices based upon rabbinical law and for convenience a market was created in the temple court for worshippers to purchase the needed sacrifice. Much like overpriced food at a ballgame, those in the temple court had a captured consumer and they paid top dollar. Another factor unique to this setting that would be traditional, a cultural norm in the middle east and a standard practice, was bartering. Bickering, yelling, complaining and insults would fill the air and obviously take away from the aura of worship. So Jesus walks into this chaotic, loud and irreligious context. But those are not the emotions or feelings I want to focus on today.

It is what Jesus did that caused the emotion of today. Christ and His Disciples enter into this scene and without saying a word, Jesus starts flipping over tables and dispersing the crowd. The chaos of the purchasing of doves and goats seemed mild compared to Christ upending everything and anything in His path. Tables went flying. Doves took flight as their cage doors flew open. The sound of coins hitting the ground chimed like chapel bells mixed with the crashing sound of chairs breaking. People screamed as a stampede of disgruntled "worshippers" ran for the doors. What a scene!

Then came Jesus' proclamation – *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." But you have made it a den of robbers.* He really knew how to win friends! But that was not His objective. Their behavior and disrespect for the House of God was so offensive to the Son of God that holy anger flowed out of Him and He demonstrated the emotion of **CONTEMPT**.

Contempt is defined as "the feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn." Other words used to describe this emotion are disrespect, disdain, and disregard. In a court of law, if you act in a disrespectful manner towards the judge or others, or to the judicial process, you can be charged with **CONTEMPT** of court. At its core, this feeling of contempt comes out and is directed at others when you are unappreciated or mistreated in such a way and you need to be confronted, corrected and challenged to change!

In Jesus' case, you can fully understand the reason for this feeling of contempt that rose up in Him as He witnessed a place meant for the worship of His heavenly Father, and where worship and sacrifice were to be revered and done with humble righteousness, be mocked and belittled to a commercial operation akin to a street corner vendor in the seedy part of a city. And they deserved His contempt. The issue is the actions that occurred because of His contempt. He did not bury His feelings. He allowed His emotions to be translated into judgment and condemnation; not to mention the destruction of the very tools of their evil activity. Jesus did not hide His contempt. He let it out for all those in the Temple to see and because of the gospel writers we too have witnessed it through the Word.

Over the years, this encounter, which takes place just four days from His walk up to Golgotha, has been the subject of much debate. The biggest point of contention is “Did Jesus sin by demonstrating such anger towards the Temple moneychangers?” We use a phrase when discussing this encounter – “righteous indignation.” I am not sure if it was used prior to the Temple cleansing, yet it does capture what occurred. Let me answer the question. No, I know Jesus did not sin. His actions were justified because of the mockery that occurred in the House of the Lord. One of the facts that what was well known was that the priests of that day were profiting from this enterprise and using their ministerial position for personal gain. For the honor of God’s holiness and to restore worship in the Temple, what Jesus did was just and right. But also, what He did was loving. Obviously, these Jews had strayed off the path of their religion. They had drifted away from the worship and adoration of God alone. They needed to be confronted and awakened in their darkened hearts. Jesus, as contemptuous, abrupt, violent, and harsh as it appeared to be, probably rescued the souls of many that day.

Anyone who has had to go under the knife for evasive surgery will tell you that there is always pain, the need for rehab and sometimes a long recovery from the “violence” afflicted on them by a doctor. The removal of a tumor, the repairing of an ACL or even the extraction of a rotting wisdom tooth causes suffering, yet the end result is repair, restoration, health and wholeness. I guess you could say that when the doctor discovered whichever disease had invaded your body, they had **CONTEMPT** for it and were going to use their skill and scalpel to remove it! So, it was with Doctor Jesus on that Monday of Passion week.

But that was not the only contempt that occurred that day. The rest of the story tells us that because of Jesus’ turning the Temple upside down, the Pharisees, priests and scribes all sought to destroy Him! They had contempt for Christ. Yet their contempt was not the same as the Savior’s contempt. Theirs came from envy, jealousy, guilt, shame, loss of control and being exposed as hypocrites and fakes. You see, the feeling of **CONTEMPT** can have positive and negative outcomes and is all based on what is driving this emotion. Jesus’ contempt rose from love for the Father, honoring holiness, promoting true worship and pointing people’s hearts back to the true and living God. His enemies, not so much. Their contempt was self-centered, greedy, power-hungry bitterness and ambition. James in the New Testament wrote about this:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

James 3:13–16

There you have it. Contempt that rises from bitter jealousy and selfish ambition is demonic. Yet righteous indignation can be expressed and cause people to get right with God.

Now I am not advocating that all God’s people become ignited with Jesus’ contempt and start turning over tables. However, I do think we need to start getting upset and having righteous indignation towards some of the evil transpiring in our world today. God’s people should

have contempt towards the killing of babies, the confusing of children regarding gender and sexuality, the lawlessness across our country, the canceling and criminalization of Christians, the rise of persecution of believers throughout the world and the defaming of the Name of God. When we see it, we should say something, stand up against it and challenge those promoting evil or causing harm. We need some contempt for sin.

Contempt that comes from a righteous burden and a desire to hold up the truth of God's standards is proper contempt. It's an emotion we all could use in today's culture!

PRAYER:

Father, forgive me for seeing sin around me and saying nothing. For seeing others hurt and not coming to their aid. For watching people mock You and Your word and cowering instead of being filled with contempt because Your holiness was being disrespected and disregarded. Today help me rise up and be a voice for You and righteousness. May the same Spirit that Jesus demonstrated in the Temple overtake me. In His Name I commit to this, AMEN.

DAY THREE:

TUESDAY

Cold and Calculating Religious Leaders

Matthew 26:1-5; 14-16

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Matthew 26:1–5; 14–16

Have you ever heard the phrase – *"He has ice in his veins."* It's normally used to describe an athlete who is cool under pressure and when a game altering play needs to happen, he is the person who takes

the ball in his hands. They have the ability to not get rattled or crack at a crucial moment. Over the years, people like Tom Brady and more recently, Patrick Mahomes, would certainly be known as people who would wear that title well. In other applications, I have heard it used to point out people who do not allow their emotions to influence a decision or action. Bank officers who foreclose on a home; doctors who deliver the news of a fatality during surgery; a car mechanic who has determined that your engine or transmission is shot. All of them could be people who “have ice in their veins!” Now some of it is their profession and they are constantly in a place of delivering less than good news! Some of it may be because of their melancholy personality and/or stoic persona.

Yet sometimes this feeling of someone being cold and calculating comes because of an internal struggle churning in a person. If injustice has occurred, that could bring it out in a person. If a person feels cheated or taken advantage of, that coldness can be lit. Or it might be seen if you are threatened and sense you are losing control and you must respond before you are passed over and marginalized. The somewhat ugly emotion of being cold and calculating can rise to the surface for a number of reasons and God help the people at the other end of it.

Easter is one of those moments where the emotion of cold, calculating, devoid of feelings and lack of empathy and understanding is easily seen. The classic example of cold and calculating are the religious leaders. It is important to understand that Israel and the Jewish people were under the rule of Rome. Rome has no interest in engaging in any religious disputes. All they expected from the Jews was to keep the peace, pay their taxes and in turn Rome would let them kind of govern

themselves. Religious leaders seeing a vacuum of leadership, and being political animals of the day, asserted their authority in the lives of the Jews. Even though Rome was the authority, religious leaders presented themselves as being the ones whom “genuine Jews” should answer to.

Within this cadre of religious elites there were several prominent political parties. You know the term **PHARISEES**. These were the “holier than thou” ones who used their self-righteousness and adherence to the Law as a club. Their sidekicks were the **SCRIBES**. These were keepers and interpreters of the Law. After the Pharisees would make a claim, the Scribes would twist the Scriptures enough to cover for them. Then there were the **SADDUCCEES**. These folks had some unique beliefs about God, one being that they did not believe in the resurrection. Once you die, you are dead, *PERIOD*. Thus, leaving out any opportunity for God to work in supernatural ways. Then there was a **CHIEF PRIEST** and his entourage of priests. He controlled the synagogue and worship, and as we have already discussed, the profit making markets. Because Temple worship and being able to have your sins forgiven was important to the people, the priests had sway and influence. Now here is the deal - all of these different groups probably would not like being around each other and certainly would avoid all social gatherings, yet they had one unifying issue that bound them together – they hated Jesus.

He was not only the antithesis of who they were, He threatened each of their individual claims to fame. With the Pharisees, He proved that they were hypocrites. With the Scribes, He knew the Scriptures better and made powerful explanations, leaving them speechless. With the Sadducees, He spoke of the resurrection as if He knew it would happen, He predicted it and He healed many showing that God does

have power. And finally with the Priests, He turned the light on their greed, personal gain, and the perfunctory nature of the priesthood. They all hated Jesus.

These religious leaders had no idea of what was coming at the end of the week and that God would allow them to act in deceitful and destructive ways to put the Messiah to death and fulfill God's plan of redemption. All they knew was that Jesus was a threat. He had embarrassed them. He was pulling away the mindless, fear based following they had from their fellow Jews and He offered love, hope, forgiveness and an expanded vision of God's kingdom. He was making them irrelevant, not to mention poorer. Something needed to be done.

In our text for today, we see where they had all they could stand. As you read it, I envision these religious leaders listening to Christ teach and preach on subjects like His second coming, how to live a life worthy of praise in heaven and even the final judgment. It must have cut them to the core. They were seeing Jews no longer listening to them, instead gaining clarity of God's expectations for them. The people were now empowered, excited and getting focused on eternal things. It's as if the warm blood in all of their bodies was drained in an instant and replaced with icy water or maybe radiator coolant. Their hearts are fully hardened and they had one thing on their minds – kill Jesus!

Now comes the calculating. Matthew 26 tells us that they began to discuss among themselves what to do. They pooled their collective bitter cold hatred for the Son of God. And here is the calculation. They hear Jesus predict that in two days he would be crucified. Perfect! Let's help Him fulfill that desire. But they also did not want to do

it in the middle of Passover, knowing that Jerusalem's population could rise fivefold during those days. Nevertheless, that is exactly what happened. The fact is, Jesus and His Father in Heaven are the ones in charge. Yet it speaks of the religious leader's cunning, their scheming, and their thirst for power. In their mind, once they could rid themselves of this scrappy and pesky evangelist, the people would go back to the way things were.

It is important to note that this dissent to shutting off their emotions did not happen after one teaching or from this one encounter. This had been building- each unresolved resentment that occurred, each time someone mentioned how marvelous Jesus' teaching was or hearing a report of another miracle or healing. The fuse had been lit sometime previous, and the explosion of their soul finally happened.

I do not believe the emotions of coldness and calculating happen to a person instantaneously and without some context. You build up to it, like a seed in the ground that you can't see, and then a sprout shoots up and bears the unrighteous fruit of envy, bitterness and resentment and your heart is frozen.

By the way, let's not just point out the religious leaders' cold-hearted problem. In the passage prior to their plotting to kill Jesus, Christ allows a woman to use up her expensive perfume to anoint him. Judas, the one concerned with the disciples' finances, sees the waste of resources and its potential value, literally poured out on some feet! He too becomes cold and calculating and approaches the chief priest to turn on Jesus. But again, that disenchantment with Christ and how He was ministering had been eating at Judas' soul for a while. The

anointing at Bethany was the straw that broke the camel's back. His veins went to ice that day!

So here is what I want you to think about. The religious leaders and Judas got to a place that they were willing to plot to kill a person. I have to assure you that there was some assemblance of thoughtfulness and decency in them at some point in their past. Yet these collections of disappointments, threats to their power, loss of control and maybe a sense of being embarrassed, turned them into killers. Could that happen to you and me? Could it be that we have allowed certain situations and broken relationships with people that haven't been resolved, and resentment is growing ice in our veins?

The writer of Hebrews speaks to this reality. Listen to what he wrote:

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

Hebrews 12:14–17

Do you see it? There it is. If we let the "root" or seed of bitterness get planted in our souls, it will grow up into a greater and more intense sin problem. God's grace will be pushed away, it will affect others and hurt them, you will fall into other sins that you thought never possible. And it will all be too late.

Beloved, we never want to allow ourselves to get to the place where we express the emotions of being cold, indifferent, uncaring, unloving, and outright spiteful. And then combine that with feelings of calculation, cunning, scheming and plotting harm on people we think deserve it. May it never be! Today is a day to look deep in our hearts and ask, "What is it that I have allowed to fester?" What do I need to forgive? What do I need to forget and let go of? Who is it that I need to show grace and love to, even if I consider them an enemy? Guard your heart and do not go the route of cold and calculating. The results are painful and long-lasting.

PRAYER:

O God, I acknowledge that either now or in the past I have allowed small offences to be planted in my heart and to fester. I do not want that to happen. I do not want to become cold and hard-hearted and then worse, start to think of ways to get even or hurt those I blame. Forgive me God. I know I am weak. Yet with Your forgiveness, healing, and cleansing of my mind I can experience the warmth of Your grace today. I trust You to deal with any of my past and bring wholeness for Your glory. AMEN

DAY FOUR:

WEDNESDAY

Content in the Garden of Prayer

Luke 22:39-46

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Luke 22:39–46

As the week progressed for Jesus during His Passion, one of the nodal events, that is quite familiar, was when He took His disciples and went to what is known as the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Let's set the context. Jesus had just instituted the Lord's Supper and again predicted His death and Judas' betrayal. He also had predicted

Peter's future denial. And if the disciple's collective flaws were on parade, James and John caused a stir among the brethren by asking who would be the "greatest" in the kingdom. You could summarize all of that, leading up to the Garden, as discontent on display! Judas was discontented with money. Peter's discontent with proving his allegiance. And the Sons of Thunder's discontent with their seat at the table! With all of this swirling around, Jesus says – "Let's pray!"

They walk up the path to the Mount of Olives and there He separates some of the disciples and takes His most trusted with Him deeper into the garden. Once there He announces that He needs to go into prayer alone but commends them to also pray. With that Matthew, Mark and Luke all describe a similar account. Jesus prays and then returns to find these "most dedicated" disciples sleeping and not praying. He wakes them, rebukes them and goes back to prayer. This repeats two more times, thus highlighting their weakness of spirit and flesh and unawareness of the significance of all that would happen that evening.

We might say that Jesus certainly had the right to be disappointed with his friends that evening, but it is not the feeling I want you to grasp today. The gospel writer, even though Christ was alone when this occurred, had learned what Christ prayed when He was alone. In those intimate moments of mediation and agonizing petition of the Son to the Father, Jesus demonstrates an amazing emotion of **CONTENTMENT**. Contentment is defined this way, "*a feeling of quiet happiness and satisfaction.*" HAPPINESS? To be honest, that comes up short in my mind and not what I consider as being content, especially in light of Christ and what He was facing. I know that Hebrews 12 states that "*with the JOY set before Him, He endured the cross.*" But what Jesus was facing was not going to be "happy." Joyful in

the fact that His death and resurrection would save us – but happiness? Not so much!

Upon further research I found a better definition. This one was labeled – "**Biblical Contentment**". Here is what it says, "*Biblical contentment is an inward trust in God's sovereignty and goodness that produces the fruit of joy and peace and thanksgiving in the life of a believer, regardless of outward circumstances.*" Now we are talking! You can find all the aspects of that definition in what Jesus prayed in the garden that evening. Jesus acknowledged the Father's sovereignty and His submission to it. He humbly asked for a different path, not out of fear, but in recognition that what He was facing was going to be hard. Content people honestly assess situations. He surrendered to God's will to be done. But then He continued to cry out in prayer and depended on the Father. In a beautiful picture, we are told that the Father sent an angel to strengthen Him. God provided through the struggle and Christ received it. He was content with His asking, content with the Father's answer, content with the angel and even content when He discovered His sleeping friends.

I do like some of the synonyms related to the word contentment: satisfied, resolved, gratified, at ease, accepting, fulfilled and at peace. However, Jesus still poised the question to His Father – "Is there another way to save the world from their sins?" – does that mean He had regrets, doubts or discontent in the plan? None of that. Jesus confirms for us what true contentment means, acceptance of God's will for our lives.

The world is sorely in need of contentment. We live in a day where bigger is better and better is not enough. I think I have an Apple

iPhone 11 and I bought it a few years ago. I was told I am way behind in technology! And not being content is costly. Recently I got a bill for my TV and internet and I was shocked by the price. As I started to research the rise in pricing, I was told that 200 channels were not enough and so they added fifty more and the price reflects that. Really? 200 channels were not enough? I watch maybe five channels! Marketing companies make a small fortune playing on the fact that people are by nature discontented and never satisfied. We desperately need to learn contentment.

That was what Paul was getting at when he wrote the church at Philippi and said,

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:11–13

There are certainly things we must believe and think about to be content. And equally important, contentment must be acted upon. Yet in the end, contentment is an emotion that causes one, no matter the situation or struggle, to have a feeling of peace and satisfaction, and to surrender all into the hands of a Sovereign God. Jesus showed us contentment in the garden on the night He was betrayed. It is a feeling we all desperately need!

PRAYER:

Father, so many times in a given week my heart feels unsatisfied and unsettled. It is far from being content with who I am and what I have, but more importantly, what I have in You! Help me Lord to learn what it means to be content and then like my Savior exhibit that godly emotion for others to see. May my contentment be an example to others on how they can trust in You and You will meet their needs! Thank you, Lord, for all you do for me and in me to cause me to feel content. AMEN

DAY FIVE:

THURSDAY

Crushed by Betrayal and Fear

Matthew 26:47-56

Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.” While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of

the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Matthew 26:46–56

As you read through the different Easter narratives you may conclude that Jesus is emotionless. One could think that reading the opening verse of today’s passage. After spending time in the garden praying and pointing out His disciples’ failure by sleeping when they needed to be alertly praying, He announces – “Let’s go, I am about to be betrayed!” So, matter of fact. So, to the point. He states a fact He is fully aware of what is about to occur. With that Judas appears with a crowd of people, already stirred up and expecting trouble. Yet do not over analyze Jesus’ emotional state. He is resolved. He knows what is coming and He has accepted His role in God’s redemptive plan.

What occurs next is quite famous. Judas has arranged to finger Jesus and identify Him in the darkness by an embrace and kiss. This is the epitome of hypocrisy; an act of affection turned into a deed of betrayal. Again, Jesus’ response, knowing what Judas’ intentions were, He simply tells him to do what he came to do. He relinquished the inevitable. Do not be confused. Jesus is in complete control. He is not surprised. He is not fighting. He is not panicking. He has surrendered to the Father’s will and now He must just play this out. Judas is but an agent, controlled by the devil, but still under the authority of divine providence and sovereignty. But Jesus’ response and emotions at that moment are not what I want to focus on today. As a matter of fact, Christ is the antithesis of the emotions worth considering.

In contrast to Christ, I want us to step into this story and try to understand what His disciples were feeling. Catch the setting. They are tired, which we know from their inability to stay awake in the garden. It is dark and isolated. They were on a roller coaster, emotionally, the last day or so. Jesus has just cryptically said, “My betrayer is at hand,” causing their imagination to be ignited. To say that they were on edge would be an understatement. They then see one of their own, Judas, leading a pack of agitators and rioters with clubs in one hand and torches in the other. All of this created a tense, adversarial and confrontational moment.

Remember how I described Jesus: calm, in control, accepting, not rattled, trusting God, understanding what was happening and what would come next. Think the complete opposite of His disciples. It is probably why one, who we believe was Peter, impulsively grabbed a sword and wacked off the ear of one of the agitators. Even in grief, people act out violently. And only as the Savior could do, He calms the crowd, instructs the disciples and heals the man’s ear. As you read the various accounts, time seemed to stand still. Jesus is then arrested and led away.

The last verse in the passage, verse 56, says it all – “ALL the disciples left Him and fled.” Many commentators, over the centuries, have weighed in on what those words meant. “Left Him” – does that mean physically from the scene or His presence, or did they walk away from following Christ that day? How about the word “fled” – again, run out of this garden scene, run away from the guards in fear of being arrested as well, or run and hide and abandon their Lord and leader? In Mark’s gospel, the exit away from the entire account was so swift that a young boy lost his clothing and ran away naked (Mark 14:51-52).

One thing for sure that we can conclude from this text and the other gospel accounts, these disciples of the Lord Jesus were crushed by this encounter. When I use the word “**CRUSHED**” I mean *overwhelmed, burdened, downtrodden, flattened and lifeless*. It is akin to disappointment, shock, disillusionment, fear and upheaval. It leaves you paralyzed, confused and unsure of yourself.

There have been just a few times in life that I have had that “crushed” feeling. Each time Kris and I suffered a miscarriage, it was so heartbreaking and overwhelming. You have such high expectations and excitement and then in a moment you are “crushed.” The day my dad died, I had been talking with him and the next moment he looked at me, smiled and collapsed in my arms. As I watched his lifeless body leave by ambulance, I was certainly “crushed.” And then that same feeling again when I experienced betrayal by some fellow Christian leaders. You think they love you, want the best for you and will support you, and then whammo! They turn against you and you are “crushed.”

The two factors that I have seen over time contribute to this emotion, and I also see it in the arrest scene in the gospels, is the fact that betrayal and fear play a big role in experiencing a crushed emotional state. When we feel betrayed or let down; had expected one thing and another happens, usually with a negative outcome or a form of loss. Right next to betrayal is fear: the unknown, being endangered and all sorts of uncertainties. When these two actions are in play, someone usually ends up crushed in their soul. Being crushed emotionally takes time to recover from. Trust has been broken. You are not sure who to believe. You are waiting for the next shoe to drop. Optimism is gone and pessimism rules the day.

With all that said, it is pretty clear that as the disciples emerged from the garden and watched Jesus being led off to face His death, they were feeling crushed. Over the next hours and days, they would continue to experience a crushed feeling. What are they to do? The disciples would have known what the Psalmist wrote, “*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*” (Psalm 34:18) Their Lord was no longer around, yet what He taught them and how He prepared them would help in gaining perspective and digging out of their emotional pit. That is our same hope and consolation. God will get us through those moments, days, months, and seemingly endless periods of being crushed by betrayal, fear, disappointment and loss. Everything around us might be in upheaval, but God is steady and faithful and ultimately in control.

The calm that Jesus demonstrated will pass over us. He will bind up our brokenness and even make us stronger in Him. The time of crushing is just a foretaste of renewal, hope and healing. And then we become a testimony of His grace. We put on display how we were crushed, but more importantly, how God restored. I am reminded by what Paul wrote,

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death

for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you."

2 Corinthians 4:7–12

We might be cracked and shabby jars but inside is a “treasure” which is the power of Christ living in us. That is resurrection power! And it is on display for all to see. For it to have an impact it needs to be in comparison to our brokenness and weakness. Even though being crushed at different times in our lives, we can rest knowing that the resurrection power of Christ will be at work in us.

We saw that comparison and contrast on full display when Christ was arrested and when His beloved friends ran away, crushed. Jesus had full trust in His Father and knew that what was about to happen brought momentary trial but eternal life. So it is with us. Are you living with the effects of being crushed? Do you wonder if you can get through it? Fear not – the Lord is near and will save the crushed spirit!

PRAYER:

Father, I have been crushed at times and recognized that during my life I will probably experience those same feelings again. It is the curse of living in a depraved, sinful, and broken world. God, I know You see every hurt, disappointment and nothing is a shock to You, but it is to me. As the Bible promises: come close to me, rescue my crushed spirit, heal my broken heart and most importantly, use me as an example of Your resurrection power on display. I offer my broken jar as a trophy of Your grace and strength. Use me Lord through these struggles. In Jesus' powerful Name, AMEN

DAY SIX:

FRIDAY **Conflicted Pilate**

John 18:33-40

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

John 18:33–40

I just realized that I have used a number of catch phrases and axioms throughout this devotional, so here is one more – “**CATCH 22.**” There was a 1960’s movie by that name, but it is an idiom that basically says this: you are in an impossible situation where you are prevented from doing one thing until you have done another thing that you cannot do until you have done the first thing. In short, you are stuck! Depending upon the dilemma, ultimately you want to do the right thing, but to do it means someone might be hurt or it will cost you dearly. The origin of the phrase comes from a novel about World War II and having to bomb an area to defeat Nazi forces, but in doing so, innocent lives would be lost, thus a Catch 22 situation. Imagine what that Air Force bomber pilot was thinking as he approached his intended target: the turmoil, his stomach in knots and his mind picturing some of the “collateral” victims. Psychologists have labeled those emotions, “conflicted feelings.” It’s the tug of war of the soul. You know what is right and just, but you are pulled in the other direction for an assortment of reasons and pressures. In the end, you must decide, yet it is a decision where someone will lose and you will have to live with feelings of guilt.

The conflicted emotions are never more vivid than following Pilate’s role in the Easter story. I am not one to find sympathy for the likes of a brutal leader and Roman lackey like Pilate, but I do have sympathy for him having to face his Catch 22 dilemma.

Let’s understand who Pilate is. His full name is Pontius Pilatus and he was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judea, serving under Emperor Tiberius from approximately 26 to 37 AD. As mentioned, Roman officials did not want to get involved with Jewish politics. All they desired was taxes, timely paid and a peaceful existence. As the trial of Jesus progressed, it was clear that the Chief Priest was not

moving the needle to get rid of Jesus once and for all. Plus, he and the rest of the religious leaders had no authority to sentence a person to death. They had to get Jesus in front of Pilate and prove he was a danger to Rome.

In our passage, we are really considering Jesus’ second time before Pilate. There was an original time of questioning, and the evidence of guilt was non-existent. But Pilate sent Jesus over to Herod, who could see the political and publicity crisis looming and he in turn sent Christ back to Pilate. Jesus was a prosecutorial ping pong ball. There was never enough evidence to convict Him, but the Jews kept pushing for a guilty verdict.

Pilate has quite an insightful dialogue with the Son of God. Pilate asks if Jesus was the King of the Jews. As Jesus has done throughout His ministry, He responded with a clarifying question and leaves the answer wide open. Yet His answer does not trouble Pilate. From Pilate’s point of view, if Jesus wanted to claim to be a King of the Jews, as long as He was not attempting to overthrow Rome and there was no evidence of insurrection, Pilate did not care. However, the further the conversation goes you can detect that Pilate is becoming conflicted. There is nothing, absolutely nothing that Jesus has done against Roman law where He could be charged for any crime and most certainly, none deserving the death penalty. Yet Pilate knows that the Jewish community in Judea is becoming more agitated and unrelenting in their desire to see Jesus crucified.

As we know, Pilate will find that Jesus is innocent and has done nothing wrong. As a matter of fact, in the Matthew account, we read that Pilate knew their pursuit to kill Jesus was out of envy and that He had

violated no law. And then Pilate's own wife sent a message to him and said, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered much because of Him in a dream." Let's just say, Pilate knew what was right and the correct and just decision that he should make – free Jesus! Enter "Catch 22" and the suffocating conflict that Pilate will be feeling.

Pilate will allow the complaining, loud, stirred up voices of the crowd to turn him. He did not want any unrest, even if it were within one segment of Jerusalem. He could not afford having to explain how a city riot broke out and all he had to do to squelch it was to put some itinerate preacher to death. Conviction would say – "He is without guilt, let Him go and you Jews, head back to your temple." But conflict opens the door in his mind and heart to consider other options. In my introduction, I explained that it is the mind that should drive our emotions. Remember, "as a man thinketh so he will be!" However, there are times when we do allow our feelings and emotions to start to influence the way we think and it most certainly leads to problems. The Bible has a word for it. In the Greek it is "acaroma" and it means speculation or imaginations. When those lies and falsehoods capture your thinking the Bible calls it a "stronghold." Paul describes it,

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 Corinthians 10:3–6

Pilate's conflicted soul was because he allowed an "acaroma" or a stronghold to capture his thoughts. He imagined all kinds of trouble, loss of popularity, disapproval of Rome and personal embarrassment. But he knew the truth: Jesus was innocent. Yet his conflicted emotions got the best of him.

Then Pilate used a loophole by asking the people if they wanted to see Barabbas or Jesus released, as was a Passover custom. But that choice should never have been offered. He also indignantly washed his hands in front of the crowd and tried to exonerate himself from any guilt – too late! Pilate allowed his conflicted emotions to win the battle in his mind, and his actions sent an innocent man to a Roman cross.

What about you? Ever been in a Catch 22 situation, where every decision is a bad one and no matter what you decide it seems like someone will get hurt? Usually, if you prayerfully and carefully examine your options, you can find what is right. It is at that very moment "acaromas" tend to show up. Don't become captured by that internal stronghold. As Paul wrote, "bring everything under the knowledge of God and obedience to Christ." By God's Spirit we will navigate our conflicted souls and do God's will.

PRAYER:

Lord God, give me Your wisdom to know what is right and help me do it. Let me recognize lies and falsehoods and do not let me come under their influence. Let me take every stronghold that comes my way under the knowledge of Your truth and help me to obey and please the Savior. God, free me from those

times of conflict and inner turmoil and allow me to discover true peace that comes from You alone. I pray this in Your Holy Name, AMEN

DAY SEVEN:

SATURDAY

Contemplative in the Waiting

Luke 23:50-56

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Luke 23:50–56

We are very aware of the significance of Good Friday. Many churches will have a service focused on the Cross and the suffering Christ experienced. We will try to reconstruct in our mind the events of Calvary and the experience of witnessing the death of our Savior. And of course, we all know about Easter Sunday, which I like to call,

Resurrection Sunday. We usually start the service singing – “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” with great gusto and victory! The contrast of those two days cannot be any more different in tone and tenor. Yet have you ever thought about the day between and what Saturday was like?

We know that Jesus died around 3PM in the afternoon. By the time they removed His body from the cross, placed Him in the tomb and secured everything, it would be near sundown. In Jewish tradition that would be the beginning of the Sabbath. Over the years I have had the privilege to partake in Sabbath meals with Jewish friends and it has always been Friday evening. With that in mind, we can read our text for today and have greater understanding. We see that a righteous man named Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and got permission to take and bury Jesus. He also offered up a tomb as his resting place. Elsewhere we are told he was assisted by a man named Nicodemus, presumed to be the one who came and sought Jesus at night in John 3. There also were women watching, but it does not indicate that they went inside the tomb. The body was placed inside, and the tomb was shut in a bit of a rush. Why? Because it was the Sabbath. That meant no more work, even preparing a corpse. That is why the women returned after the Sabbath to fully care for Jesus body.

The Easter narratives tells us that everyone involved with the placing of the body left, went to their homes and waited. One text says that the women went home and prepared the burial spices. Because of the Sabbath, they were limited on what they could do, where they could go and what tasks they could participate in. It is why it is called “Sabbath Rest.” Even though there were little to no activities, the only thing for sure that was active was their minds. We have no specifics on what was said or what they were thinking. No proof that they fellowshiped with

each other, or they went into isolation. However, we can be pretty sure that all they were thinking about was the death of Christ. And if I were to guess, I think it would be safe to say that they were contemplative.

Being contemplative is a normal emotion and probably one that we experience more than we realize and something we should do more of. Sometimes we mistake being contemplative for being depressed, inward or sullen. But I would consider it to be more thoughtful, reflective, a quiet consideration and measured. I can remember the days that followed my dad’s death. After the initial shock, there were days of contemplation. Most of my family and friends thought I had plunged into depression, yet as I think back to what was happening in my mind, I realized I was experiencing feelings of contemplation.

How do you tell the difference from full on depression or maybe confusion and contemplation? I think the single issue which causes you to go into depression is that you are plagued with despair and hopelessness. When you fall under the emotion of being contemplative, you remember what was, words that were spoken, events and the significance that they had. You may ask yourself, “In light of what has just occurred, what can I learn, how will I be different or how should I respond?” Sadness, mourning and grief may be a part of your contemplative state, but it does not dominate.

Now, back to Saturday. The body is secure, the people involved go back to their homes, the women may take some time to gather up needed spices and minerals for embalmment, and then they all contemplate. Much like a post-game analysis of the Super Bowl, each person begins rerunning the video tape in their minds of their encounters with Christ. They labor to remember words spoken. If they are with other

followers, they might share some of their recollections of the Savior. Occasionally, someone will whimper out, “What are we going to do?” It is probably met with silence or weakly stated – “I don’t know!”

During that time of contemplation, they may recall more recent times with Christ and Him offering up signals of what was going to happen and what they might face. For sure, in the soul of each follower of the Messiah, is a time of re-evaluation. “Was it worth it?” Sure, there will be a sizeable amount of uncertainty and worry, yet amidst the quiet of sabbath rest, God will use the contemplative Saturday to resolve the hearts of these disappointed and broken friends of Jesus.

Personally, I believe that we do not appreciate or practice contemplativeness as we should. Quiet, silence, reflection and thoughtful evaluation is experienced few times, if any. After a major accomplishment or failure, we hardly ever stop and look at what just occurred and ask some probing and learning type questions. When I teach a grief workshop, I take time to consider how even the funeral experience has changed. When I was a kid and a family member died, we normally hung out at the funeral parlor for 2-3 days! Parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, high school and college friends, neighbors and church folk all stopped in and sat and.... you got it – contemplated the deceased loved ones. We told funny stories, how they helped others and what they would forever be remembered for. My personal belief is that genuine mourning took place and quickened the grief process. Today, we cremate the body, have no immediate funeral service but might have a memorial weeks later and it seems like little true contemplation occurs.

Beloved, let me say it clearly - the emotion of being contemplative is both normal and necessary. It allows for healthy mourning, evaluation and memories useful in healing and growing as a believer. The Apostle Paul was a contemplative person. Obviously, he was radically saved and then we are told was literally translated into the heavenlies and saw things too unimaginable to speak about. He was alone a lot, mostly in prisons, which allowed him a lot of contemplative time. But fortunately, for us, he wrote down some of what he was chewing over in his mind during those reflective times. One passage that is an example of Paul’s contemplativeness is found here,

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise,

God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Philippians 3:7–16

Paul is remembering what he used to have as a highly ranked Jewish leader, yet it all was lost when he came to Christ. From his contemplation he concluded that no matter the suffering he had experienced, it did not compare to what he now had in Christ. Most important was the resurrection power given through redemption. And his conclusion was that if he were to be mature in faith, he had to constantly think on that truth. What a powerful insight and transformational; all from a lonely prison cell! It's the value of being contemplative.

How about you? We are a day before celebrating Easter and we know the rest of the story, yet it is still so important to take time and thoughtfully and carefully contemplate all that we have received in Christ. Why not spend some moments considering where you were before you met Christ? What did He rescue you from? How has your life been changed? What kind of future is ahead? How about reflecting on heaven and what that will be like? All of a sudden, I am feeling contemplative! May God use this very significant emotion in your life today!

PRAYER:

Father, by Your Holy Spirit will You quiet my mind and heart. Allow me to recall all You have done for me, what You have given me and all the changes that occurred the day You poured

Your righteousness into my life. I can hardly wait till we have all of eternity to be together and reflect on Your amazing works. I am a grateful person today. Prepare me again today to enjoy the glorious celebration of a resurrected Savior and King. It's in Jesus' Name I pray, AMEN.

DAY EIGHT:

SUNDAY

Curious by an Empty Tomb

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Luke 24:1-12

I find the entire tomb scene, as described in every gospel, completely fascinating. As you read through the Harmony of the Gospels, which is a blending of all the gospels in a chronological order, you see one dominating emotion that is bleeding out of every person - the feeling of curiosity. To be **CURIOUS** means *to have a feeling that heightens your desire to investigate and learn*. With it comes an inquisitive response. You ask questions. You are driven to get answers and to find the person who has those answers. Curiosity may cause anxiety, concern, and impulsive behavior. Curiosity is one of those emotions that sparks action and demands an immediate response. And usually, all it takes is one thing, and like a domino effect, curiosity follows and dominates your mind until you are satisfied.

In the Easter story, the recognition of an empty tomb, where they all saw the lifeless body of Jesus Christ laid a few days prior, is that single event that sets curiosity aflame and becomes the common emotion that will affect many of the characters of the story.

Think about it. Mary and the other women go to the tomb, wondering who will move the stone so they can get to the body, and they find the tomb open and empty. Not to mention Mary mistakes an angel for a gardener and hears the announcement that Jesus is alive. You think they might be a little bit curious??

Then there is Peter and John and the rest of the disciples. Peter broke all land speed records attempting to get to the tomb once the women told them what they found. Usually, we make incredible efforts to satisfy our curiosity to see SOMETHING. But in Peter's case, it was to see NOTHING. An empty tomb.

Then there are the two men on the road to Emmaus. These guys were in deep conversation about Christ's apparent resurrection or speculating what exactly happened to Jesus and then a mystery man appears and walks with them into town. They were already asking questions and trying to figure this whole thing out. What do you think happened to them once they realized it was Jesus walking with them? Curiosity magnified!

And of course, a doubter named Thomas, whose curiosity demanded that Jesus show him His side and hands. Interestingly, Jesus was not offended by Thomas' request but graciously allowed his curiosity to be resolved. Curiosity never offends God. Keep that in mind!

Sadly, the only ones who were not stricken with curiosity were Caiaphas the High Priest and the rest of the plotters and schemers. Upon hearing what the guards reported regarding an empty tomb, it did not cause any curiosity to move them to the tomb. No, they just continued to plot, scheme and devise a new narrative to distract people from asking too many questions. Forget about looking into the possibility that Jesus did exactly what He said He would do, they needed to come up with a plausible, yet false report, to discredit the miracle. It was the complete opposite of what they needed to do, which was ASK QUESTIONS!

I know curiosity unchecked and dissatisfied with the answers found can create unhealthy obsessions. However, curiosity is an emotion that usually leads you to pursue truth and resolve the questions that are causing you not to act. Each year we go down to Florida near the city of Fort Myers. In that city are the famous historical landmarks of the Edison-Ford Mansions. Thomas Edison and his long-time friend

discovered this area in Florida because of Edison's failing health. While escaping the cold and damp New Jersey winters, Edison still could not sit still and so he developed a lab in his back yard. While visiting Edison, Ford shared that his new automobile was going to revolutionize America, except for the fact that replacement tires would cost too much, seeing that rubber had to be imported and was very expensive. To help his friend, Edison went to work. Curiosity overtook him and he spent a number of years trying out all kinds of domestic resources to produce rubber. On the 15,000th experiment, he discovered that the "Goldenrod" plant could make rubber. What if he had stopped and gave up at number 14,999? Aren't you glad Edison allowed the feeling of curiosity to motivate him?

We need more curiosity in Christianity. We need people ignited by an empty tomb to neither just except the story, nor discredit its possibility, but to start asking questions; start opening the Bible and study the truths of Scripture and walk away with convictions and deep held beliefs. As I said, God is NEVER offended by questions or even doubting, just as long as you are honest and diligent to seek out the truth. Curiosity is a great thing. And God's Word can stand the test of time and curiosity!

Paul was never threatened or worried about the veracity of God's Word and whether it could withstand any scrutiny. He was confident when anyone attacked it. That is why he made this declaration to young Timothy. It is almost like he is daring Timothy to test him and the claims about Christ that he had made. Listen to Paul,

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:10–17

Timothy had heard the truths from his grandmother, mother, and fellow believers in his hometown of Derbe and then from Paul. Yet he had some struggles in Ephesus where he was pastoring and probably even some doubts about his faith. Paul points him to the truth and basically tells Timothy – get curious! Don't take my word for it. Show yourself approved as a workman of the Word! In the end, that curiosity would produce conviction and commitment that no one could confuse or dissuade!

When we see an open tomb, we obviously are reminded of the victory over sin, death, and the grave. But it also tells us to keep studying. Keep looking. Keep asking questions. Get serious about God's Word and strengthen your understanding of the truth. Curiosity is a

wonderful emotion. Allow it to grow you in new ways in the days that follow Easter!

PRAYER:

Lord, Easter and the empty tomb is such a glorious vision of Your power and the new life You offer. Yet it is also an invitation to deepen my understanding of who You are and all that You have for me as Your child. God, I have many questions, but I am grateful that You allow me to come to You in childlike faith to ask and discover Your divine mysteries found in Christ and the Scriptures. May Your Holy Spirit be a lamp to my feet and illuminate my eyes. Keep me curious to know more about You! In our Risen Savior's Name, AMEN

POSTSCRIPT: Master Your Emotions

Easter certainly produces all kinds of emotions: sadness, happiness, anger, grief, disappointment, and inspiration. Mostly, Easter speaks of VICTORY and the power now available to us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. His redemption and renewal in our lives allows us the opportunity to be changed and transformed. His Holy Spirit dwells in us and brings us alive spiritually. Easter is the greatest single event in all of history!

Yet, we must admit that even though God's power unto salvation has been granted to His children, we still have the nagging old man present in us and there are glimpses of our depravity ever showing its ugly head. We struggle at times and our sanctification must never be just assumed or taken for granted. There are things that we must do to assure that God's power is fully being evidenced in our lives.

One of the Achilles heels of our lives is our feelings. I am always amazed by how potent our emotions are. If we are not mindful, our emotions can seize control of our lives and take us places that we do not want to go and will cost us more than we want to spend! As was mentioned throughout this devotional, we either must *master our emotions, or our emotions will master us.*

Thanks be to God, the truth of His Word, the power of the Spirit, the renewing of the mind and access to the Lord in prayer can bridle any emotion and use it for the divine intent for which God created that

emotion. Emotions are not bad. Again, God created emotions, as He did everything. They are placed in us for a purpose. Our inner man is our mind, will and EMOTIONS. It defines who we are.

My prayer is that this week you have been able to see the problem, possibility, and power of emotions. But also, you have been convinced that you need not be controlled by them but that you can master them. Our example is the One whom we celebrate again this season, our resurrected Savior! May He continue to sharpen you, form you and make you whole in every dimension of your life. Even your feelings!

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel....”

2 Timothy 2:8

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