

Day 31
Commitment #1
God sees me

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." Hebrews 4:13

Who will "look out" for you today?

You will "look out" for yourself and others today. You will go to work so that you can provide food, shelter and clothing. You will do the daily things that life requires. You will care for family. You will care for co-workers. You will care for friends.

Is there anyone who will "look out" for you?

Sure . . . today there will be people who will watch for you to arrive. They care about you. You matter to them. They cannot give you their undivided attention, though. They have other matters to attend to.

"I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from?" Psalm 121:1

He was ascending the mountains that led to Jerusalem. He looked around. He knew that he would need help. He did not know where he would find it.

"Where does my help come from?"

Good question.

He looked around.

No one.

He looked up.

Eyes looking down at him.

"My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." He will not let your foot slip — he who *watches* over you will not slumber; indeed, he who *watches* over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD *watches* over you — the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm — he will *watch* over your life; the LORD will *watch* over your coming and going both now and forevermore." Psalm 121:2-8

Someone watching over him. Someone watching over you as well.

"He will watch over your life"

Someone is "looking out" for you today.

God sees you.

Day 32
Commitment #2

God sympathizes with me

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." Hebrews 4:15

"Jesus wept."

Close your eyes and say these two words.

No . . . really. Take a moment. Before you read on, close your eyes and say these two words to yourself.

Congratulations! You have just memorized a Bible verse . . .

. . . a key Bible verse. An important verse of the Bible is now in your mind.

What are the words again?

Let's meditate on the verse together.

"Jesus wept." John 11:35

Mary, Martha and Lazarus, two sisters and a brother, were particularly close friends of Jesus. Mary had once poured perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. They all loved Jesus . . . unashamedly. Lazarus had become seriously ill. Mary and Martha sent word to him. "Lord, the one you love is sick." John 11:3

Jesus told his disciples *what* would happen.

"This sickness will not end in death." John 11:4 He let them know in advance that a miracle was on the way. The sickness would "travel through" death, but not "end" there. Jesus knew that Lazarus would die. He also knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus told the disciples *why* it would happen.

"It is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it." John 11:4 Jesus knew that the love and power of God the Father and God the Son would come into clearer focus when Lazarus, bound in grave clothes, walked out of the darkness of the tomb into the light of day. For this reason, He did not immediately respond to the bad news of Lazarus illness. Rather, "he stayed where he was two more days." John 11:7 He waited until death had claimed Lazarus.

"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe." John 11:15

What would happen? Lazarus would be raised from the dead.

Why would it happen? So that "you may believe."

Jesus wants you to know that He has power over death. God has power to reach into death and pluck out life. Only He can do that.

As Jesus approached, Mary and Martha rushed to meet Him. Their relationship with Him was not polite and distinguished. It was passionate. They loved Him. In the time of their grief, His was the face they wanted to see . . . His was the shoulder they wanted to cry on. They rushed to Him. Mary collapsed at His feet. "Lord, if you had been there, my brother would not have died." John 11:33

"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept." John 11:33-35

Jesus wept?

Wait a minute!

Jesus already knew what would happen! He already knew why it would happen.

What is that streaming from His eyes?

What is that running down His cheek?

Sympathy!

Those are tears! That is sympathy!

Those tears tell us a lot. They are windows through which we can see God more clearly.

God knows what will happen.

God knows why it will happen.

However, He is not a dispassionate divine dictator. Not a distant, detached sovereign.

How do we know?

You know the answer. You've memorized the answer.

"Jesus wept." John 11:35

God sympathizes with you.

Day 33
Commitment #3

God deals gently with me

"He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray." Hebrews 5:2

"Gentle."

If asked to describe God's dealings with mankind, perhaps not the first word we would choose. A casual reading of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, reveals scenes we would not call "gentle dealings."

"Forceful."

Better word? A more realistic appraisal of God's dealings with mankind?

Jesus thought so.

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." Matthew 11:12

Prior to His own coming to earth, Jesus described God's kingdom as "forcefully advancing." According to Jesus, God historically revealed Himself through "forceful men." He used John the Baptist as a case in point.

John the Baptist's diet? Locusts and wild honey (definitely not quiche!). His clothing? A scratchy tunic made of camel's hair. His manner? Forceful. He rebuked a king and ended up being beheaded for it.

John the Baptist represented God's kingdom forcefully.

Jesus Christ represented God's kingdom gently.

"Jesus said . . . 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'" Matthew 11:27

Jesus made a clear distinction between Himself and all who preceded him as God's spokespersons . . . John the Baptist included. Jesus claimed to be God the Son. He claimed the exclusive rights to represent God the Father. As the Son of God, Jesus claimed to be the "Word" through whom God fully and finally reveals Himself to the world.

Jesus did not describe Himself as "forceful." With Jesus' arrival, the days of God revealing Himself through "forceful men" came to a close. A new word would be needed.

"Forceful" is out.

"Gentle" is in.

Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart." Matthew 11:29

Jesus' greatest critics were those who stubbornly held on to the notion that God still dealt with people forcefully. They could not accept that Jesus was God, no matter how many miracles He performed. Why? Because Jesus was gentle and their God was forceful. According to them, God would never tolerate a sinful person in His presence . . . and God would certainly never allow Himself to be beaten and executed.

What is God like?

God is like Jesus Christ.

Jesus issues this invitation to you, on behalf of His Father.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

He invites you to come to Him.

Relax. Breathe.

He deals gently with you.

Day 34
Commitment #4
God loves me

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need."
Hebrews 4:12

God. Allah. Jehovah.

A few of the names we mortals use for the One who is immortal. Searching recorded history to make a complete list reveals one absolutely unique entry. A completely original name. Unprecedented. Astonishing. If we were quickly scanning this list, we would go back to make sure we read it correctly.

Father.

Jesus worshiped the God who revealed Himself to the nation of Israel. The God who parted the Red Sea. The God who spoke from Mount Sinai. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Even though Jesus came into the world as one of the children of Israel, He referred to God using a name that no Israelite had ever used for God. In all the recorded prayers and writings of the Israelites no one had ever referred to God using this name. No one. Not ever.

Father.

The name Jesus used for God.

Jesus' image of God could not have been more different from that of His contemporaries. A devout Jew would not even say the name of God . . . it was that holy. Jesus called God "Abba." "Abba" (Daddy) and "Imma" (Mommy) were the first words a Jewish infant learned. Jesus called God "Daddy."

Jesus wants us to call God "Father."

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven.'" Matthew 6:9

Jesus wants us to call God "Abba."

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" Romans 8:15

God does not want us to be afraid of Him. It's true that we are to "fear God" but this doesn't mean that we are to be terrified of Him. It means that we are to respect and revere Him.

Go on . . . don't be afraid.

The God who reigns over the universe invites you to call Him "Father."

You can approach His throne with confidence.

Day 35
Commitment #5

God changes me

"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts."
Hebrews 8:10

There are sins . . .

. . . and then there are SINS!

How does God deal with us when we SIN?

"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.'" John 8:3-4

First century Israel dealt with adultery the way present day Islamic countries do . . . harshly. This woman had been "caught in the act." The religious leaders reminded Jesus of how stiff the penalty for adultery was, "In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women." John 8:5

They had Jesus where they wanted him.

If He said, "Release her," He would offend the lawmakers.

If He said, "Stone her," He would offend the lawbreakers.

"Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground." John 8:6-8

What did Jesus write on the ground?

We don't know. Maybe a passage like this one from the prophet Hosea. "I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes — a people without understanding will come to ruin!" Hosea 4:14

Whatever Jesus wrote, it made an impression. "At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there." John 8:9

Jesus.

An anxious woman.

A SIN between them.

"Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'" John 8:10-11

Jesus offered her connection, then correction.

"Neither do I condemn you."

Connection.

"Go now and leave your life of sin."

Correction.

Jesus cared about correcting her behavior. However, the first order of business was not correction. Jesus made quick work of her accusers. Then, standing alone with her, He gave her what she needed . . . first. He told her that he did not condemn her. He gave her connection.

What happened to the woman? Did she walk away from her life of sin? We don't know for sure. If she believed His commitment "I do not condemn you," her belief would have helped her to keep His commandment "Go and leave your life of sin." When we believe God can keep His commitments, we can keep His commandments.

God knows that we need correction.

God knows that we need connection . . . first.

Connection, then correction. *That* is how God changes us.

Day 36
Commitment #6

God chooses me

"They will be my people, and I will be their God." Jeremiah 32:38

Tax collectors.

"Sinners."

No self-respecting religious leader would even give them the time of day . . .

. . . until Jesus came.

He opened His heart to them. They opened their homes to Him.

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples." Matthew 9:10

They had not darkened the door of a religious meeting for a long time.

They were not invited.

They stopped caring about God.

They pursued wealth.

They collected taxes from their fellow Jews on behalf of Rome.

They pursued sin.

They abandoned themselves to the "lusts of the flesh."

And now they were having dinner with Him . . . with Jesus Christ. Warmth.

Invitation. Inclusion. Regard. No cold indifference in His manner. No hot contempt in His gaze.

And a flame flickered to life within them. A flame that had all but gone out, hope began to burn within them . . . spiritual hope. Hope that they could experience meaningful contact with God. Hope that they could matter to God.

Voices from the past approached. Critical tones. Harsh statements. Disgusted expressions.

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Matthew 9:11

The question was loud enough to be heard by all. It was intended to be heard. Instinctively, they retreated to the designated place for "sinners" . . . outside of God's care. The flame ebbed.

What Jesus did next . . . cemented their place in His care and His place in their hearts. "On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Matthew 9:12-13

I choose these "sinners" to be my guests . . .

. . . because God chooses them to be His children.

Jesus fought for them. He fought against those who would attempt to drive them out of God's care. He would have none of it. He would not allow the religious authorities to move them out of His circle of concern. He made sure there was . . .

. . . a place for them.

With this same righteous anger, "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there." Matthew 21:12 And when the dust cleared, "The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them." Matthew 21:14 He made sure there was . . .

. . . a place for them.

Don't forget what Jesus said. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick . . . I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus makes a place for people who are spiritually ill and need a Great Physician. He makes a place for people who struggle with sin and need a Savior. If this is you, Jesus makes . . .

. . . a place for *you*.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled." Jesus said. "Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." John 14:1-2

" . . . *a place for you.*" God chooses you.

Day 37
Commitment #7

Good is ahead of me

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them." Jeremiah 32:40

A tree. A serpent. A temptation.

It was over quickly.

No matter how much we have, our attention can be quickly drawn away to what we don't have.

No matter how good our life is, we can find ourselves longing for more.

Just ask Adam and Eve.

The seeds of discontent were able to take root and grow up in the soil of Paradise . . . in a perfect environment! They had everything they could ever want. And yet they could not resist wanting more.

It was the serpent who was able to make the forbidden fruit impossible to resist. "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:5

"You can't trust that God really cares about you."

"You can't trust that God really wants what is good for you."

"God is holding out on you."

She had no response.

You know the rest of the story. "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." Genesis 3:6

Does God really care about you?

Does God really want what is good for you?

Is God holding out on you?

There is an answer.

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32

God the Father gave up His Son, Jesus Christ, for you. If He did not care about you, He would not have sent His Son for your benefit.

God the Father gave up His Son, Jesus Christ, for you. If He did not want what is good for you, He would not have sent His Son for your benefit.

No matter how things may appear . . .

God does care about you.

God does want what is good for you.

He is not holding out on you.

. . . Good is ahead of you.

Day 38
Commitment #8

Good is guaranteed to me

***"I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."* Hebrews 8:12**

I know what I "should" do . . .

. . . I just can't seem to make myself do it!

Sound familiar?

If we kept a journal, these words could be found in many of our daily entries.

It might come as a surprise to learn that someone like Paul the apostle wrote the same thing. He had the same experience. "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." Romans 7:21-23

Even Paul shook his head in frustration at his inability to do what he knew he should do. He felt like a good person trapped in a body that had a "mind of its own." "What a wretched man I am!" he exclaimed. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Romans 7:24

He found an answer.

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the flesh a slave to the law of sin." Romans 7:25

Before . . .

"in my inner being I delight in God's law"

After . . .

"I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law"

Before . . .

"the law of sin at work within my members"

After . . .

"in the flesh a slave to the law of sin"

What kind of rescue is that? It certainly didn't remove ungodly desires. Paul was still plagued by them. He still had to manage competing sets of conflicting desires.

What exactly did the "Jesus' rescue" accomplish?

Jesus' rescue removed condemnation.

Paul wrote, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus " Romans 8:1 In the midst of being pulled apart by conflicting desires this is what God told Paul . . .

"I do not condemn you."

It is one thing to believe that God is okay with us when we are "doing the do's" and "not doing the don'ts." It is quite another thing to look up at God in the midst of being pulled by evil desires and have Him say . . .

"I DO NOT CONDEMN YOU."

The first stage of Jesus' rescue involves the removal of sin's condemnation. Jesus put it simply. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24

Jesus came to reveal the Father to us. He came to tell us that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 The one who "hears" Jesus and "believes him who sent" Him "has eternal life" and "will not be condemned."

God the Father sent His Son into the world to remove condemnation. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:17

This is what God asks us to believe.

Can you believe it?

If you can, God has something He wants to say to you . . .

"I DO NOT CONDEMN YOU."

The first stage of Jesus' rescue involves the removal of sin's condemnation.

The second stage of Jesus' rescue involves the removal of sin.

"But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." Romans 8:10-11

Knowing that we have "eternal life" and that we "will not be condemned" does not mean that we will cease to struggle with sinful desires. Our mortal bodies continue to have a "mind of their own."

We will still struggle with conflicting desires. We will continue to struggle until . . .
God moves us out of this present mortal body when we die and then moves us into
an immortal body.

Then sin will no longer be a problem.

Then sinful desires will no longer plague us.

Then the second and final stage of Jesus' rescue will be accomplished.

Sin will be removed . . . *then*.

Sin's condemnation is removed . . . *now*.

Good is guaranteed to you.

Day 39
Commitment #9

God gives me the power to persevere

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." Isaiah 40:30

Perseverance.

Pick any figure that God used in a significant way. This phrase captures their life.

Take Moses for example.

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." Hebrews 11:24-25

As an Egyptian, the road Moses would travel would be an "easy street." Money. Sex. Power. He could have it all. Sure, there was sin involved, but he could "enjoy the pleasures of sin" . . . at least "for a short time." He chose not to take this road. *It takes commitment and perseverance to take a road that leads away from pleasure.*

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. . ." Hebrews 11:26-27

As an Israelite, the road Moses would travel would be a "dead end." A king's anger. A persecuted people. He chose to take this road. *It takes commitment and perseverance to take a road that leads toward pain.*

The road Moses chose required commitment and perseverance. Where did he get the strength?

"He persevered because he saw him who is invisible." Hebrews 11:27

As Moses looked at God he received the power to persevere. God gave Moses the power to persevere as Moses focused on His commitments to Moses, not Moses' commitments to Him.

It is unnatural for us to focus on God's commitments to us.

It is natural for us to focus on our commitments to God.

We think of meaningful contact with God as the result of perseverance, rather than as the reason for it. Here's the problem . . . perseverance that is powered by our commitment ends up being laced with pride. It ends up being the basis for judging others who are not as committed.

When we are weary and in need of strength, it is hard to believe that any good will come from focusing on God and His commitments to us. This seems like an activity

that will take energy. Moses learned that looking at God didn't *take energy from* him. It *gave energy to* him.

Rough road ahead?

Keep focusing on God's commitments to you.

God gives you the power to persevere.

Day 40
Commitment #10

God gives me the power to be content

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philipians 4:12-13

Weaknesses

Insults

Hardships

Persecutions

Difficulties

You are taking an inventory of your life. Most things you list falls under one of these five categories.

This was the life of Paul the apostle.

A number of the letters Paul wrote are included in the Bible. Several were written from a prison cell. This is what we read in one of these prison letters: "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philipians 4:12-13

"I have learned the secret of being content."

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength" . . . even be content in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties.

Think about your life. There are circumstances that you do not like. You don't have what you want. You have what you don't want. Now reach down into your heart. What do you find? Resentment? Uh-huh! Self-pity? You bet! Discouragement? Absolutely! Contentment? Hardly!

When life is good, we feel content.

When life is not good, we feel discontent.

This is natural.

Being content in difficulties is supernatural.

Paul looked out from under a pile of hardships, difficulties and weaknesses. He asked Jesus to change his circumstances. The "perils of Paul" were being used as ammunition to discredit his ministry. His opponents pointed to him and said, "Does THAT look like someone God sent to proclaim His message?" Convincing argument!

Paul asked Jesus to take away the hardships in order to give people reason to believe.

Paul never forgot what Jesus said to him. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Jesus told Paul that His grace is sufficient in weakness. He denied Paul's request for changed circumstances. The reason? His grace catalyzes contentment in the midst of difficulties. Weaknesses, insults and persecutions provide the best backdrop for the display of Jesus' power.

It is common to hear Bible teachers equate God's power with health and wealth. You've heard the message. God shows His power to the world by blessing the lives of those who obey Him.

Paul would disagree. He wrote, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul understood that Christ's power did not guarantee an easy life. In fact, Jesus taught him that the opposite is true. His power is made perfect in weakness.

Life not going the way you want?

Discontentment is natural.

Contentment is *super*-natural.

God gives you the power to be content.