

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I've met with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through Matthew's perspective of Jesus as he wrote in his Gospel.

As I've gotten to know Matthew, I'm overwhelmed by how he was changed by knowing and walking with his Lord and how much he must have longed for us to know Jesus as he did.

These next six chapters of Matthew follow Jesus as He walks with His disciples and interacts with those He loves. Please take your time reading through each section and ask the Father how He wants you to respond to what you're seeing and learning.

Blessings on your time as we continue this walk with the Father,

Margie Martin



Israel in Jesus' Time

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 14:1-12

"Herod said, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'"

Did you know about this story of Herod giving the head of John the Baptist as a gift to his step-daughter? It certainly shows the callousness of that generation and the belief that one could get away with anything if he or she had enough power and influence. Can you think of any examples of that way of thinking today? I sure can – even in the United States where we're all supposed to be held accountable to the same set of laws.

Herod had probably thought that he had gotten away with allowing John's death to be the "highlight" of his birthday party. He may even have thought that he wasn't really responsible. Look at these statements:

- "Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison *because of* Herodias, his brother Philip's wife . . ." (emphasis added)
- "Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people *because they* considered him a prophet." (emphasis added)
- Herod so liked his step-daughter's dancing at his birthday party that he promised to give her whatever she wanted. At her mother's prompting, she asked for John's head on a platter. "The king was distressed, but *because of* his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted." (emphasis added)

Looks like Herod was intimidated by what others thought, even though he was the king. John had told him that it wasn't lawful for him to have his brother's wife (while the brother was still living), but John was controlled by what others thought rather than by the law that would stop him from indulging his lusts.

I wonder what Herod thought when it seemed like John had come back from the dead. Matthew doesn't give us any more information, and only Luke includes Herod's involvement in Jesus' death. I wonder if Herod started to rethink his choices.

Have you ever stopped to think about how much influence others' thinking affects the choices you make? I have to admit that I see a lot of myself in Herod. I know I'm the daughter of the King, but all too often I'm intimidated by others instead of looking to my heavenly Father and doing what He says to do. How about you?

We know of Herod because he was instrumental in both John's and Jesus' deaths. How will you be known? I sure wouldn't want Herod's reputation, and I'm sure you don't either. What we do now does affect who we'll be later on. *What simple choices do you have in front of you today that could affect who you'll be later on?*

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 14:13-21

"When Jesus heard [that John the Baptist had been beheaded], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place . . . The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children."

Have you been feeling the grief of John's disciples with me as they buried the body of their beloved leader? Did they get his head too, or was it put on display? We can only guess at their sorrow over this senseless act. Then these men went to Jesus and told Him of the death of His cousin. We don't hear of them again, so can assume that they joined those who were following Jesus. Where else would they go?

And then tomorrow we'll see Jesus sending His followers away so He could be by Himself and mourn. But his Father has His own plans for His Son.

Have you ever lost someone dear to you through a sudden tragedy? While I've had losses, I have walked through this kind of loss with friends. What I've found is that when we grieve, we normally pull ourselves away from those around us and stay in our emotions. I think this is what Jesus was wanting to do.

But Jesus. Those wonderful words. Jesus saw the crowd and had compassion on them and healed their sick. Eventually He fed them all with just a small amount of food because His Father provided what was needed.

I wonder if this miracle of overwhelming provision was actually for Jesus' sake, as well as for the crowd, His disciples, and John's disciples. In the beginning of today's section, Matthew tells us that Jesus withdrew, but in tomorrow's section, Matthew tells us that "Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray." (14:23)

What happened between the withdrawing in pain and going up to pray was Jesus seeing people with His heart and then seeing His Father feeding more than 5000 people with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. His Father provided so much that 12 baskets full of broken pieces were picked up by His disciples (some commentators think that these baskets represented the 12 tribes of Israel).

So, what do we learn from this day in Jesus' life? Here's what I see:

In the midst of pain, our Father doesn't want us to walk away but rather to look at others who are in need and choose compassion. We're to walk into whatever God brings along and see how He provides for others while He encourages us.

Are today's words just what you needed to hear because of some pain in your own life? I'm glad you've let Him speak to you. Now . . . who do you see around you?

But if you're not facing any emotional pain today, perhaps God is giving you a heads-up on how to respond to situations that may come along in the future so you'll be ready when they do show up – because they will. This type of training often happens for me. Perhaps this insight into Jesus' life will help us both.

But Jesus isn't done with His own grieving as we'll see tomorrow.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 14:22-27

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Have you ever been so overwhelmed by a painful circumstance that all you wanted to do was get away from the pain? This is where we found Jesus yesterday when He heard about John's death. But today we see Him have compassion on the crowds and heal their sick. He feeds them all with food that never seems to run out. He watches His Father provide for the thousands who were there and then sees the 12 baskets of broken pieces left over.

But Jesus is still hurting, even though He's done what was right at the moment. The serving doesn't take away the pain, but He has seen the Father at work. So He sends His men ahead of Him in a boat and sends the people home – healed and fed.

Now is the time for Jesus to be alone with His Father. Don't you wonder what each said? I'm sure Jesus cried out His pain, grief, aloneness, and lack of hope. I'm sure Jesus wanted to give up and just go home – to His real home. But once He cried out His heart to His Father, I think He stopped talking and started listening.

What did the Father say? I bet He put life into an eternal perspective like He did with Job in Job 28. I'm sure He reminded Jesus about the nature of man because of the Fall and that this was why Jesus' coming to earth was *our* only hope of having a different nature.

Whatever the Father said, they were together for a long time because it was after 3:00 a.m. (the fourth watch of the night was from 3:00-6:00 a.m.) when Jesus returned to the disciples. Jesus was strengthened during this time on the mountain, but the disciples were getting desperate after 9 hours of rowing in a storm that wouldn't stop.

I think His words to them were the words He was encouraged by on the mountain: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

Are you surprised that Jesus had to have a "faith check" just as we do? The writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 4:14-16 that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, but He never gave into sin. The writer then goes on to say in Hebrews 5:8-9 that Jesus had to learn obedience just as we do even though He was a son so He could become perfect because He never sinned, even from childhood, so he could be "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Are you thinking back to your own painful circumstance(s) as we walk with Jesus? I am. What have we learned from His example? Here are some ideas:

- He chose to have compassion for others and then serve them rather than isolate Himself.
- At the right time, He got away with the Father instead of ignoring (stuffing) the emotional pain.
- He poured out His heart to the One who really heard Him, and then He listened to what His Father had to say.
- He chose faith instead of fear when the Father spoke.
- He returned to strengthen others with what He had learned.

Where are you in the midst of what Jesus learned? Is it time to join Him in the next phase of grief and healing?

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 14:27-36

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

So, the fourth watch of the night was from 3:00-6:00 a.m. We've looked at why Jesus was on the mountainside, but how did this late hour affect His disciples?

Some of the men were experienced fishermen, and sailing the boat across the lake was in their comfort zone, even in a storm. But the storm kept on blowing, and they were getting tired. All of their experience and knowledge wasn't helping them. Their confidence was gone, and fear was starting to set in.

Isn't that true for us too during our hard times? We try to "power through" until we've tried everything, but then we find that nothing helps. We get tired and become discouraged.

I think the Father knows that we must get to the end of our ropes before we'll honestly turn to Him. I think it takes us getting to the "fourth watch" before we're ready to listen and obey.

So, Jesus comes to His disciples and tells them to look at Him and trust Him.

Peter does so and walks on the water in faith for a few steps. He then looks at his circumstances again, begins to sink, and calls out to Jesus, who reaches out and catches him by the hand.

Jesus asks the question we all need to face: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Fear or faith, circumstances or the face of Jesus, emotions or truth - we all have to face these choices in our relationships, our view of the future, and our pain. There's no middle ground between the choices. We have the choice of which thoughts stay in our minds. We can give in and sink, or we can stand firm.

Jesus and Peter climb into the boat, the wind dies down, and the men in the boat see Jesus in a new light and worship Him.

Our choosing to look at Jesus and believe in Him during our circumstances produces a sense of humility in us because we've realized that our best doesn't even come close to the power of God. Since He sent His Son for us to know and experience in ways that make sense to us, we begin to live and respect and honor Him – worship, the response to the power and love of God.

Is Jesus saying our three short sentences to you today?

Take courage! . . . It is I. . . . Don't be afraid.

Are you going to keep looking at what's coming at you, or listen to Him and do what He says? No middle ground, but we do have a choice.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 15:1-20

"Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard [that what goes into a man's mouth does not make him unclean but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean.]' He replied . . . 'Leave them; they are blind guides.'"

Who are the people in your world that you're afraid of offending, whose good opinion of you is so important that you are tempted to change your behavior around them, so you think you'll look good in their eyes? How about teachers or professors, bosses or top management, local church leadership, peers in your social group, the police officer driving behind you?

The disciples were afraid of the Pharisees because of their status and the power these religious rulers held over lives. But Jesus saw through the Pharisees and knew that selfishness and greed ruled them. The Pharisees were all too willing to twist the commands of God to meet their own needs.

Today we know that washing our hands before eating is a good idea for sanitary reasons, but for the Jews it was a symbolic act of cleansing oneself before eating the food that God provided. However, the Pharisees were only looking at hand washing; what they were missing was that the whole person was to be clean before coming to God, including hearts and minds. For example, their superficial thinking allowed them to hold onto their wealth instead of helping their parents who might be in need.

Jesus knew the intent of the commands in the Old Testament; they were meant to change our hearts from the inside out as we see how far we are from a holy God who loves us and reaches out to us. He knew how far the Pharisees were from representing His Father here on earth. In contrast to a holy and perfect God, these Pharisees had no real power so Jesus could say to His disciples, "Leave them." Because His Father hadn't "planted" them, their end is certain. It's like they will be pulled up by the roots and discarded. You may want to look back at the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13: 24-30, and 36-43.

Jesus then goes on to tell them (and us) about what can come out of hearts and mouths that can make them (and us) unclean: evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony (lying), and slander.

So, what does this mean for us? I think it means that we have a deadly tendency to put people on a pedestal, worrying so much about their opinion that we change how we act to earn their approval. I think that Jesus wants us to know that everyone needs a Savior, and no one is to be elevated in our eyes. While we're to respect those in authority, we're not to let them be lords over us.

Then I think Jesus wants us to look at our words and evaluate what they say about what's in our own hearts. If we see sin, we're to confess it and let Jesus be Lord instead of letting sin continue.

What is your heart saying about you today? If God is rich in love and slow to anger, then we should be too.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 15:21-28

"Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted.'"

Have you ever wondered what "great faith" looks like? Today we get to look at a person with faith from God's point of view. I know I want to be a woman of faith and feel God's pleasure.

In this section we see a woman whose daughter has a physical condition that no one seems to be able to heal. I'm sure the woman has gone to local healers without success. No husband is mentioned, so she must have been dealing with this situation on her own. Rumors of Jesus being able to heal would have reached Tyre so that when she heard He was in the area, she set out to find Him. He was her last hope.

Jesus' responses to her requests have always confused me since He seems so harsh. She's forced to get on her knees and beg. But then He says today's wonderful words about her faith and heals her daughter without even meeting her. What's happening?

Lord, can you help us understand what you're doing in this section?

One thought that came to me today while writing is that the Father already knew about this woman's faith and her need. He loved her so much that He had Jesus go to this city just for this one encounter, and He wanted to teach the disciples (and us) about faith.

But why did Jesus have this back and forth with the mother, just like He did with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4? Perhaps it's because Jesus wanted a relationship with each woman. He had to take them past their needs so they could see Him for who He is, not just for what He can do. They didn't have the Old Testament background in their experiences the way Jewish women would have. He knew that if He just met their immediate needs, they would still have this deep need of a Savior. So, He kept the discussion going until they realized that He was what they needed.

Maybe this is why Jesus doesn't respond to our requests as quickly as we would like Him to. Maybe He wants us to go deeper and see that He is what we need during our pain and confusion.

For those of us who are women, we can so easily get caught up in the needs of the moment that we don't take the time to think or reflect on what's going on behind the scenes and what the Father might be doing.

Are you in such a place today where you're crying out to Him with your immediate needs that are so real, but He seems to be silent, and His silence seems harsh? Perhaps He's waiting for you to come to Him and kneel in humility. Like with the Canaanite woman, He's wanting to have a close and loving relationship with you and not just make your life easier. I can hear your knees creaking as you kneel.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 15:29-39

"And they praised the God of Israel."

When I sat down to write yesterday, I realized that I had no idea why Jesus was feeding 4000 in this section when He had just fed 5000. Why feed two different groups of people? I figured that the differences had to be significant but had no idea of how to figure out *why*. So last night I started looking at some internet sites and found that all websites agreed that Jesus had fed 5000 *Jewish* men and women, but these 4000 men (plus additional women and children) were *Gentiles*. This difference made sense to me when I looked at Mark's account of the same miracle because he writes that when Jesus left Tyre, He went through Sidon down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31), made up of 10 *Gentile* cities.

So, we see Jesus again reaching out to those of us who are Gentiles, but what do we actually learn? Here are some ideas:

1. Jesus *came* to them; He made Himself available, but they had to respond and come to Him on the mountainside.
2. They had known of Him before, and He had healed many of them (Matthew 4:24-25).
3. Jesus spent time (3 days) living with them; He didn't hold Himself apart from their needs.
4. They were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking, and the blind seeing – and they recognized and praised the God of Israel who was responsible instead of just being grateful for being healed and then leaving.
5. Jesus involved His disciples in the crowd's lives by sharing His heart (His compassion) over their hunger and having the disciples distribute the food to feed the 4000.
6. The baskets used to collect the leftover broken pieces were large baskets rather than the smaller ones used with the 5000.

How is Jesus meeting you and me in this section? *Perhaps* He's made Himself available, but we need to come to Him with our needs. *Perhaps* He wants to spend time with us rather than just have a meet-and-greet. *Perhaps* he wants to get involved in our pain and loneliness. *Perhaps* He wants us to see Him as He meets our needs instead of having us take off when the pain is gone. *Perhaps* He wants other believers to get involved in our lives instead of us keeping ourselves isolated or just being around those we're comfortable with. *Perhaps* He wants us to see that He has so much more available to us than just meeting our immediate needs.

Which of these "perhaps" situations fits you today? The one that hits me is letting others into my life and needs. Whether it's pride that keeps me to myself or a lack of willingness to admit to my need or even think about it, I know He wants me to be willing and ready to let others – and Himself – in.

How about you? Maybe when we let Jesus be Jesus in our lives, others will "praise the God of Israel" too.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 16:1-4

"Jesus then left them and went away."

Did you notice that after Jesus fed the 5000+ (Matthew 14:13-21), Pharisees and teachers of the law came from Jerusalem and tried to undermine what He'd done? Their charge was that His disciples were breaking the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate. (Matthew 15:1-2)

Jesus pointed out the glaring inconsistencies in those traditions (not the Law) and then left to reach out to the Gentiles in Tyre and Sidon and by healing the feeding the 4000+.

After sending these people away healed, fed, and satisfied, He and His disciples get back into the boat and go to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee to the vicinity of Magadan.

And again, the Pharisees and Sadducees came with a goal of undermining Him. Instead of looking at the healing He'd done that fulfilled the promise of Isaiah 35:5-6, they ask for a sign from heaven that's just for them. Jesus' miracles helped people; the Jewish leaders want Jesus to perform a miracle in *their* time frame just to prove who He is. They certainly seem to think highly of themselves instead of caring for the people as they should be since they are the leaders of the Israelites.

But Jesus' answer seems short and abrupt to me. I decided to look back through His encounters with these religious leaders and came upon Matthew 12:38-45 where Jesus was asked the same question by the same group of men. While He responds with the same answer of the sign of Jonah, He goes into a lot more detail in the earlier section. Both times He describe the generation as wicked, but in today's section He adds "adulterous" – being married to one person (like Israel being married to God) but going after another lover (Israel leaving God). Now we know why Jesus' response is so short and to the point: they've already had this conversation!

Do you see yourself in the Pharisees' demands of asking for a special message from God to prove who He is rather than looking at all He's done and how what was promised about Him came true?

We can get caught up in the demands of the immediate and get overwhelmed. But isn't this what children do? They want what they want when they want it and stamp their feet and cry instead of remembering and being grateful for all that their parents have done and provided because of their love and dependability.

Jesus walked away from the Pharisees because of their lack of belief in the face of overwhelming knowledge. This is the saddest verse I think I've ever read in the Bible.

I think our encouragement for today is to stop, remember, and thank God for who He is and then choose to depend on Jesus' life in us because of the truth He proclaimed with His life when He was resurrected. Our choice is to see Jesus' face or look at His back. *Which are you looking at?*

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 16:5-12

"Be careful, 'Jesus said to [His disciples]. 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Have you ever noticed how often Jesus has used the word *bread* as He interacts with people? We've had the feedings of the multitudes and the crumbs of bread with the Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Now we see hungry disciples concerned about their next meal.

Bread is what has sustained life for thousands of years. In John's Gospel we learn that Jesus is the true bread of life from heaven that manna symbolized, and that Jesus is the bread of life. (John 6:25-59) At His final Passover dinner, He gives thanks, breaks bread, and tells His disciples to take and eat because it is His body (Matthew 26:226).

But today Jesus warns us to be careful of what's *in* the bread that we depend on, and as always, the physical example pictures the truth of the spiritual reality He wants us to depend on – then and now.

For the Jewish people, yeast played an important role in their spiritual lives because they knew that a little bit had a tremendous effect. Therefore, God used yeast to symbolize how a little bit of sin could end up growing and having a tremendous effect (affecting the whole batch of bread). At the first Passover dinner, God directed this new Jewish nation to make bread without yeast so nothing could slow them down when God freed them from Pharaoh and their Egyptian slavery.

Jesus also used the parable of the yeast and its destructiveness in Matthew 13:33-35 if you remember what we talked about in that parable.

So, Jesus' words of warning have both an historical and an immediate meaning to us. We're to be careful of the thinking that our religious leaders use when they explain truth to us. We're to look behind the words and how they present them to what's really being said. If our leaders are puffing themselves up, putting us under the bondage of man-made ought's and ought-not's, encouraging us to see ourselves as better than others and so erect artificial walls, Jesus offers us a way out through Him that we'll look at tomorrow.

But for today, what values are behind the words you're hearing from your teachers as well as the words you are saying to yourself and others? Jesus is warning us: "Be careful. Be on guard."

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 16:13-20

"Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ."

This section is so well known, but if it's the first time you've looked at these words — "Who do you say I am," you're in for a treat. I think we all get to a point in our spiritual lives that Jesus speaks these words to us, and we have to answer honestly about who Jesus is for us and what role we want Him to take as we continue on in this life: Lord and Savior and Friend and Brother, or someone we occasionally acknowledge and then put on the shelf to look at once in a while but really ignore?

But this morning I was struck by His final words in this section: *don't tell anyone who I am.*

Now we know that Jesus doesn't mean never to tell others about Him, because as He was leaving earth after His resurrection, He tells His disciples to go to all nations and make disciples. (Matthew 28:16-20) So why does He want them to keep quiet at this moment in time, and what could it mean for us? A few ideas have been popping into my head; you have some too?

1. Timing is critical: Jesus was still building His foundation of proof of being the Messiah, and the foundation wasn't ready to be built on just yet.
2. Knowledge is just the beginning: Just because the disciples now "knew" that Jesus was the Christ, this truth needed to get down deep in their hearts and minds so they'd have deep roots of faith that would carry them through the hard times that were coming. (Remember Peter and the cock crowing three times?)
3. Talk is cheap: It's easy to say truth, but Jesus knew that the disciples would be ignored or laughed at if they were out preaching now. Unless God is already working in someone's heart, our words just seem to make things worse.
4. The stakes are high: Jesus knew the opposition was going to be fierce because all of Hell would be against the truth that Peter has just proclaimed: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus knows they're not ready for this onslaught. Souls are at stake in this battle, and Jesus knows what it's going to take to win.

Phew. So what do we learn from this?

1. Since we don't know the future, we need to trust and depend on the One who sees the past, present, and future all at the same time. Then we speak when He says to speak and be quiet when He says to be quiet.
2. Saying Jesus is our Savior and Lord is just the beginning: He wants our relationship with Him to be deep, and that type of trust takes years and lots of hard times when we see His faithfulness.
3. We're never responsible for another person coming to faith or choosing to walk by faith. Jesus may want us to be involved in the process (for our sake as well as for another's), but only the Father in heaven can make Himself known. He's the only One who can deepen our walk of faith. We can't take credit or blame. We're only responsible for responding to Him in our circumstances and obeying Him when He says to speak or to do. He'll get us ready for whatever He has planned.

What is He saying to you today?

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 16:21-28

The things of God or the things of men

Perspective is so important. I remember struggling in 5th grade art class when my mom tried to teach me how to draw a chair using perspective. She had artistic ability like her mother and my sister, but I take after my dad. No matter how many times I tried to draw a chair that looked like the one in the middle of our kitchen, it never came close to looking like what she drew. But I did begin to understand the importance of perspective.

While Jesus may have understood what was to come, today He gives us His perspective, and the importance of what He's been saying and doing becomes clear. Let's look at the contrasts He uses:

Things of God

Deny self, take up cross, and follow Him

Lose your life to find it

Jesus comes back and rewards each according to what has been done

Things of Men

Be for yourself

Try to save your life? You'll only lose it.

Try to gain the world? You'll forfeit your soul.

It's so easy for us to think we have all the time in the world because we're going to live until a ripe old age, right? But why do we depend on our own thinking without looking at reality? Probably because we don't have the things of God in mind. We think it's okay to take shortcuts and put on fake faces, to speak critically of others, to deny responsibility and blame others, to worry instead of talking with the Father, to give into fear instead of walking by faith.

But Jesus tells us that we don't have all the time in the world to change and do what's right. We have no idea when an accident or an injury will happen that will end our lives. We can't count on tomorrows. He says He'll come in His Father's glory with the angels and reward each person according to what he or she has done – rewards based on actions, not intentions. How sad it would be for someone to make it into heaven because of a deathbed decision but miss out on Jesus' rewards when multitudes of others are getting them, knowing all the opportunities that were squandered because of trying to gain what the world had to offer.

What drives you day in and day out? Peter had his thinking rebuked by Jesus and was given a new perspective. He had to choose whether to keep going in his comfortable way of living or humble himself and accept Jesus' perspective. This isn't a one-time choice; it has to be one we make every day and many times a day; it requires dying to ourselves so we can really live.

What are you choosing today?

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 17:1-13

"Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will' While he was still speaking, . . . a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.'"

Have you ever had an experience with God where you felt you were overwhelmed by what He was saying to you – maybe during a Sunday service, at a retreat or a small group meeting, or while hiking in the woods and viewing an amazing vista, or having a conversation with someone? I think He often gives us these *ah ha* times in our spiritual lives. *But what do you (and most of us) do in response?*

I think, like Peter, we begin to talk about what we're going to do for Him next. (James and John were probably nodding their heads in agreement as Peter spoke.) But God doesn't let Peter get very far in his planning. Instead, He interrupts and basically says, "Listen up! It's better to listen and learn than to talk and act when my Son speaks."

So, what is God trying to teach us about how to respond when He opens our eyes and lets us see Him and what He's doing behind the scenes? Here are some ideas:

1. We're to take the time to acknowledge who God really is; His glory is a reflection of His perfect goodness and love.
2. We're to acknowledge His Son whom He loves immensely and with whom He is delighted.
3. We're to listen to His Son as we listen to the Father.
4. God's presence and power could cause us to be overwhelmed by fear, but Jesus tells us not to be.
5. We're to be quiet about our encounter with the presence of God until He says it's time to talk about it.

So why would God not want us to tell others about an encounter with Him? I think the answer goes back to what we talked about a couple of days ago after Peter's amazing confession of who Jesus is. But let me get personal with this idea.

Several years ago, I had an amazing encounter with God that touched me in the depth of my being. He hasn't let me tell anyone about it. Since I've had to keep quiet about what happened, the experience has been unforgettable for me. If I had talked about it, I think its importance would have slipped away in the here and now. Recently I was in a group setting with some brothers and sisters in the Lord, and some of the women talked about their experiences with talking in tongues. It seemed like they were saying that no one could have a deep experience with God without this gift. All I could think was, "If you only knew." But God said to keep my mouth shut. In fact, I've said more about it right now with you than I ever have, but I still don't have the freedom to say more. I think God just wants me to know that what He showed me is between us, and for that I'm grateful.

Whether your experience is this significant or an insight into a problem you're having, your response is eternally important. Don't make common a heavenly encounter. Let Him go deep into your heart as you walk with Him.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 17:14-23

"I brought [my son with seizures] to your disciples, but they could not heal him . . ." Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive [the demon] out?"

This scene is of a grieving father bringing his son, who has been tormented by a demon, to the other nine disciples while Peter, James, and John were on the mountain with Jesus in God's presence. These nine disciples hadn't been able to heal the boy, so the father came directly to Jesus when He came back to town.

What intrigues me in this section are Jesus' harsh words that I assume are directed to the nine disciples: "unbelieving and perverse." He wonders how long he has to stay with them and put up with them. This doesn't sound kind and loving. Jesus upset? I think so, but why? These nine hadn't been with Him on the mountain, but they had seen Him feed 5000 and then 4000, heal many, and walk on water. They had seen and heard, but they hadn't taken in for themselves all they had seen Him do or heard Him say.

I wonder if this is another time when Jesus in His humanity was in the *learning* mode just as we saw Him when He fed the 5000. He had just been with His Father and encouraged by Moses and Elijah on the mountain. He had returned to glory for this time.

What do you think Jesus, Moses, and Elijah had talked about? I have a feeling the topic was Jesus' upcoming death for the sins of all. I imagine they put into context what was coming so Jesus could remember the purpose of the ordeal He was going to be facing and the promise of what would come afterwards: His resurrection gives us our freedom from the power of sin.

With this heady reminder, Jesus comes back to the here and now and comes face to face with how little His disciples have learned — these men who were to continue His work after He left earth. No wonder His words were harsh.

I think as Jesus spoke about the importance of true faith in Him and how little was really needed, He realized that mankind on its own has a hard time remembering truth and standing on it. This father had this kind of faith as did the Canaanite woman we looked at in Matthew 15:21-28. But these examples are rare.

So, Jesus knew we needed help with having faith; we needed His life in us so we could live the lives He wants for us. So He gathered His men together and told them what was to come: His betrayal, death, and resurrection. I think the disciples only heard about the betrayal and death and had no idea what His being raised to life would mean. But Jesus knew and was committed to the path in front of Him.

How's your faith these days? I would have said that mine was strong, but recently I've seen areas in my thinking where I'm hesitant, anxious, and fearful. It's time to count on Jesus' life in me in these areas specifically. *How about you?*

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 17:24-27

""But so that we may not offend them ""

What an interesting little section. Matthew gives us a peek into the inner workings of Jesus and His disciples. First, we have Matthew who is the one telling us about this interaction. As a former tax collector, he was knowledgeable about this tax and so would be interested in how Jesus would respond.

In Exodus 30:13-16, the Lord instructed the people to give an annual contribution "for the service of the tent of meeting." In Matthew's day, this was known as the temple tax that every Jew would pay every year for the upkeep of the temple, and everyone paid the same amount, regardless of their income.

So as Jesus and His disciples came to Capernaum, Peter's hometown, the tax collectors came to Peter and asked if Jesus paid this tax. I don't know about you, but when I get blindsided with a question, I often speak without thinking, and we know that Peter had this problem too. Instead of telling the tax collectors to go to Jesus directly, Peter answers with a "yes" so the tax collectors would go away.

As He always does, Jesus knows what is going on – maybe because the tax collectors had followed Peter home. Jesus knows He isn't required to pay a tax to the Lord because He is the Lord's Son, but He seems to want to keep communication open with the tax collectors. Jesus had no problem offending the Pharisees, the religious leaders, but He came for sinners, and the Jewish people considered tax collectors to be some of the worst sinners around because they took advantage of their position, collected more than required, and kept the extra for themselves.

Jesus loves this group of men so much that He gives them their own miracle. He tells Peter to go fishing and pick a coin out of the mouth of the first fish he catches to pay for His and Peter's taxes. You've got to believe that even if the tax collectors didn't see this happen, Peter would have told them about it when he paid the tax. If God provided this money for Jesus, maybe He was someone they should pay attention to!

I'm amazed at how Jesus could take an accusation and turn it into an opportunity to reach out with the Father's love. Instead of insisting that they approach Him as He was due, He was just glad that they came, and He let them see Him for who He is.

So, what do you do when someone accuses you of something or verbally attacks you? Me too. Maybe next time we can turn it around and let them see Jesus.

Or what if someone else's words or actions gets you into a tough situation like Peter's response set up Jesus? Instead of lecturing Peter, Jesus treated him with great respect and deals with the situation He's been given. At no time does Jesus turn to His friend and give him a "look," say a critical word, or hold it against him. What respect and love He showed His friend. An example for us to follow!

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 18:1-9

"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man [or woman] through whom they come!"

Today is my birthday, and I came to today's section anticipating what my Father was going to share with me since He gave me such a great gift last year (Matthew 13:45-46).

A little background first. A few months ago, I read a sentence in a novel where a character said, "Humility is a strength." That truth has resonated deep within me since then as I've seen how much harder it is to be humble when in a tough situation rather than rationalize, blame, or lash out.

So today Jesus underscores this idea by telling us that greatness in the kingdom comes from our becoming like children in our acceptance of Him and in our dependence on Him. He then takes us one step further in how to practically live out this acceptance and dependence.

We all have sin patterns, habits we habitually fall into when the pressure is on and life isn't easy. But what we often fail to do is see how our sin patterns negatively affect others, especially those we love and are close to. While I think Jesus is specifically talking about sin patterns that affect children and can cause them to sin (like abusing children or terrorists who use children to kill others), His words about dealing with sinning should be directed toward all sin because our sin (giving into anger, criticalness, being self-absorbed) can cause others to sin – men, women, and children.

Have you identified your sin patterns yet? I have, and they're not pretty. I've also seen how they affect others, and that's not pretty either. My sin patterns and their results take me to the foot of the cross each day so I can live by the strength of His resurrection life.

The saddest thing in the world for me is to see a fellow believer blame others for his or her responses or just rationalize them away. How much better it would be for us to agree with Jesus that woe will come to us if we let sin work through us. It's better for us to be so serious about sin that it's as though we've cut off a hand so we won't do what we normally do or plucked out an eye so we won't look at what we shouldn't be looking at.

Has an area of sin popped into your mind today as you've read through this section? I bet at least one has. What are you going to do about it (them)? Remember, humility is a strength, and humility is the entrance into the kingdom of heaven as we submit ourselves to Jesus' rule in our lives. How do you need to humble yourself today?

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 18:10-14

"For I tell you that [these little ones] angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

I've been looking at the section headings for the next few sections and wondering what was tying them together, because I figured they couldn't just be a random collection of Jesus' teachings. In the introduction to these sections in Matthew 18:1-4, Jesus states that "Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus knows that our usual way of living never leads to humility; we have to choose to think differently and humble ourselves. I think the next few sections provide us with examples of situations where we need to change by humbling ourselves and taking sin seriously.

The first situation involves our treatment of children. In Jesus' day, children were often ignored and taken advantage of. While the laws in the U.S. may encourage us to care more about our children, in reality the laws were made because they had to be to protect children from harmful and abusive treatment. In the meantime, child abuse and exploitation are on the rise around the world and are much worse than when I was a child. Often parents are afraid of saying "no" to their children — or too busy to be involved — and so children are growing up not learning to respect authority or other human beings.

So, what is Jesus saying to His disciples and us about how we treat children, especially the very young? He tells us that mistreatment *will* happen, but it better not happen through us (Matthew 18:7). He tells us that His Father and ours knows what is happening to each child because the angels for these children always see the face of God. Therefore, we're never to look down on one of these little ones, treat them badly, or ignore their needs.

How do you view children, and how do you treat them? If you're a parent, how short is your temper? Remember, our outbursts say much more about us than they do those who we claim have provoked us.

James tells us that our tongue can praise God and curse men [and women and children] but this shouldn't be if the spring of life — Jesus — is within us (James 3:9-12). *Do your words and actions reflect a person who has been changed 180 degrees and following Jesus or one who causes little ones to sin?* Going through my mind right now are flashes of interactions with my grandchildren when I should have humbled myself and treated them with more respect, and I feel pretty sick to my stomach about how I could have affected them. *How about you?* The angels are watching us, and the Father knows. We can't hide.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 18:15-20

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."

Today's section is another example of how important it is to understand the context of Jesus' words. Oh, the trouble we could get into if we just read today's verse and didn't understand what preceded it.

So, what have we seen in Jesus' interactions before we got to today's words?

1. His disciples came to Him asking who was the greatest in heaven.
2. Jesus tells them that humbling themselves – being like little children – is the way to enter heaven and become the greatest in heaven.
3. Jesus tells them that how they treat children – especially those in need – reflects their humility (or lack of it).
4. Jesus tells them that they need to be so serious about sin and the sin patterns in their own lives that it's as though they cut off a hand if it causes them to sin or gouge out an eye if they're prone to look at what is harmful – especially when it comes to children.

So today we have the situation of someone in the family of God who sins against someone else in the family of God – someone who broke one of the 10 Commandments that deals with how we treat each other: murder, adultery, theft, lying about another (Deuteronomy 5). For example, say a fellow believer spreads gossip about you to a mutual friend.

What Jesus is concerned about is the character and the response of the one who has been sinned against (you). Jesus wants you to have a humble heart and a walk of faith that quickly and completely deals with your own sin and sin patterns before you do anything else, because our anger can be just as harmful as what was done to us. Remember, the goal is to restore a broken relationship. The first action you take is to meet in private with this person who told the gossip to others.

If this first step doesn't resolve the situation, then others in the family of faith, especially the person who heard the gossip, can be involved, but they need to have dealt with their own hearts and actions toward the offender before they get involved.

This standard certainly flies in the face of normal human interaction, doesn't it? Probably because we don't deal with ourselves before we act. But then Jesus' way of living is learned behavior, not our normal reactions.

No wonder Jesus could say that if two agree, with humbled hearts and purified lifestyles, their Father in heaven hears them and honors their request because they've been able to hear His words and know His heart.

I've seen these steps and lifestyles in action by church leadership. I watched how they loved the men who had sinned just as they have loved and cared for nonbelievers, and I watched how they celebrated when the men's hearts were softened by the experience.

The Father always wants redemption, but sometimes it takes going through some really hard times before we're ready to humble ourselves and take Him seriously. *Where are you in this process?*

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 18:21-35

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

How interesting it is to read this section as it flows out of the previous one. Jesus had just told them what to do if someone sins against them, and Peter asks how many times does he (we) have to forgive a brother (or sister) even after going through all the steps for restoration? Peter wants to know when enough is enough. Sound familiar? It does to me.

So, in the parable, what is the servant's problem; why doesn't he forgive his fellow servant? Why doesn't Peter *want* to offer forgiveness? Why don't we?

I think the problem is that the man who has a huge debt and is treated graciously by his master never saw his true situation. Ten thousand talents are like millions of dollars today. He didn't get into this situation overnight, and he loved his lifestyle that he had gotten used to over the years. He never saw his debt as a problem for him and his family. He probably thought that his master owed him.

Because he never owned up to his bad choices or had to live with the consequences, he couldn't appreciate the depth of the forgiveness offered to him. So, when he tried to collect on a debt owed him for a few dollars and the other man couldn't pay, our ungrateful and unmerciful man got angry and had the man thrown into jail. The master heard of it and changed his mind about the original debt.

What is Jesus telling Peter (and us)? I think He wants us to understand the great debt of sin that we have, even if we're not having to experience the fullness of sin's consequences. I think He wants us to be so grateful for the gift of forgiveness that we've been offered that we willingly forgive those who sin against us. It's like their sin is a few dollars versus our debt of millions. How could we not keep on forgiving?

That doesn't mean we don't deal with the problem and perhaps even distance ourselves from the person if the relationship is toxic, but we're to forgive them *from our heart* and see the person as someone God is reaching out to with His love, like a pagan or a tax collector.

Is the Father speaking out to you through this section? He is to me about my unforgiving heart toward another. Time for a major change on my part because of my huge debt that's been forgiven. Time for humility for you too?

What kind of life have you been living? *Are you exhausted by trying to live up to God's standards, or have you been living the life Jesus intends for you?* The emotions you're feeling today will lead you to an honest answer. Is it the answer you were expecting?

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 19:1-12

"The disciples said to [Jesus], 'If this is the situation between a husband and a wife, it is better not to marry.'"

I've often wondered if those of us who marry – and remarry – really understood the Creator's purpose and design for marriage, would we have gone to the alter to be married? So many couples don't seem to create a new family unit; they think (feel?) that the urge to merge physically is what is all important – not two people becoming one as God said to Moses in the beginning (Genesis 3:24).

Humility has to be the foundation of a marriage that pleases God: doing what is best for another, listening to another's input.

Regardless of your marital status, how would you answer the following questions?

1. Do you have to have the last word in your conversations, emails, or text messages? Or do you let the other person have the last word.
2. Do you look for what's good, true, right, pure, and admirable, in another's words and actions? (Philippians 4:8)
3. Do you try to draw attention to yourself by how you look, what you wear, what you do, or what you say? Or do you concentrate on others?

Every day we have hundreds of opportunities to choose whether to elevate ourselves or bring honor to another, starting with our relationship with our Creator. If married, how we interact with our spouse exposes our level of humility. If not married, our thoughts and actions are on trial.

Moses gave the nation a work-around with divorce, but only because of our hard hearts. *How soft is your heart today?* The proof is in your thoughts, your words, and your actions.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 19:13-15

"When [Jesus] had placed his hands on [the little children], he went on from there."

Interesting how Matthew doesn't say that parents brought their own little children to Jesus but rather that people brought the children. Maybe the issue isn't who brought them but that any adult can bring a child to Jesus if he or she knows that He would welcome them, that they would be safe in His presence, and that they would be blessed for having been with Him.

My guess is that these adults wouldn't have known what Jesus had just said in Capernaum about children (18:1-4) since it was so far away, but from what they had heard about Him and the truth He had just given to the Pharisees about marriage – the safety net for children – these adults knew they had to get these little children they loved into His presence.

When I read the disciples' reaction, the phrase "listen but not hear" went through my mind. The disciples had traveled with Jesus and listened to Him day in and day out. They had listened to Him as He spoke about how much the Father loves little ones and has His angels looking out for them. They listened as Jesus described what would happen to those who take advantage of children.

But they didn't *hear* Jesus. They didn't take the time to let His words get into their hearts and change their minds. And so they assumed that those who came to Jesus were wrong for bothering Him with children – almost sounds like the Pharisees – and Jesus corrects their thinking too.

I guess our question is, which group of people are we like? Do we listen to truth but never think about it and let it change us, or do we get to know the heart of Jesus and bring those we love to Him for His touch, look, and love? The disciples thought they knew the truth and so were critical of those who were different. The adults looking out for the children knew Jesus and therefore knew the Father, and so they came in humility.

Which group do you want to be part of?

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 19:16-30

"Peter answered him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?'"

Don't Peter's words echo our own thoughts at times? We do, do, do for Jesus and give up so much in this life but still feel empty and incomplete. What else do we need to do? This way of thinking has given rise to legalism in the human heart and in the church because we feel like if we just *do* enough that we'll make Him happy. It also leads to extremism that shows itself in being separate from the world, lifestyles proving our spirituality, and martyrs. It's like He owes us for what we've done for Him.

On the other hand, a friend told me recently about a TV show about a Long Island medium who gives comfort to those who come to her. My friend wondered if God could be working through this woman.

I think both the one who wants to "do" to get eternal life and the one who seeks comfort from sources other than God Himself have the same need. What we really need is to come to the place where we get to know God in His fullness – His love, power, comfort, protection, and direction. All too often we stay distant from Him so we can hold onto our comfortable life of what we know instead of letting go of the trappings of this world.

I like urban life. I like my stores close by, my running water, my air conditioner in the summer and furnace in the winter. If God called me to a rural or third world location, I wonder what my spiritual life would look like. Hopefully He's loosened my hold on what I think is my "right" to be comfortable, but with today's section, I wonder.

We know that the only way Jesus could live as He did here on earth, especially facing death, was because He fixed His eyes on the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). He tells us today that if we stay faithful in following Him and give up our hold on what is, we'll receive a hundred times as much – and eternal life – when He returns with His kingdom.

Are you striving but feel frustrated, or are you looking for comfort in all the wrong places? Jesus says to have a life free from the chains of sin, we're to let go of wealth's allure, follow Him to the end of our lives, and trust God for eternal life – because only He can grant it.

*Are you striving or content,
bound up or free from,
holding onto what is,
or depending on what is to be?*

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 20:1-16

"Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Today's parable is for the sake of the disciples after Peter voiced what they all must have been thinking in 19:27: "What then will there be for us?" We have such a competitive nature and want all that we think is due to us after we've looked around and compared ourselves to others. Jesus tells the disciples what their role will be – judging the twelve tribes of Israel – but then warns them what will happen at the judgement if it doesn't go the way they think it should.

From a "fair" point of view, those in the parable who worked the longest should have gotten a higher wage; "It's only fair!" But God isn't fair, He's generous. Since the landowner is the player in the parable who represents the Father, let's look at what he does:

- He goes out 5 times during the day to look for those *willing* to work in his vineyard.
- He tells them how much he's willing to pay, and they agree.

Instead of being grateful for the work and the pay, those who worked the longest grumble because they did more but got paid the same as those who hired on at the end of the day.

This must be what it's going to be like at the judgement when those who have come to faith late in life or just before death get the same "perks" in heaven as those who worked for the kingdom of God for years. Wouldn't it be fairer for those who had walked by faith longer to get more rewards?

Instead of being grateful for the eternal life that Jesus made available by dying on the cross for us, we tend to make light of eternal life as though we deserved it, as well as accolades for walking by faith and what we've "done" for the kingdom.

I think Jesus wanted His disciples – and us – to be grateful for what He and the Father have provided, to let God be God since He has the right to operate as He wishes, and to put aside envy and look to God's generosity instead, especially toward us.

If someone else is honored, be glad for them, knowing how much God has given you.

Do you find yourself being envious of what others get or have, or are you so grateful for what the Father has done that His generosity colors all that happens around you? The difference is like night and day.

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 20:17-19

"Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them . . ."

It seems like since the last time Jesus told His disciples about what was to happen when He went to Jerusalem (Matthew 16:21-28) and the time on the mountain six days later when He spoke with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-13) that He's been preparing His men for kingdom life. Others have been around them, but His attention is focused on the twelve. Let's look back:

Matthew 17:14-23 - healing of a boy with a demon: "Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked" "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them"

Matthew 17:24-27 – Jesus and Peter and the temple tax: "When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak."

Matthew 18:1-9 – the greatest in the kingdom: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked"

Matthew 18:10-20 – parable of lost sheep and brother who sins against you: continuation of Jesus' response to the "greatest" questions

Matthew 18:21-35 – parable of unmerciful servant: "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked"

Matthew 19:1-12 – Pharisees' question about divorce: "The disciples said to him"

Matthew 19:13-15 – little children and Jesus: "But the disciples rebuked those who brought [the children]. Jesus said"

Matthew 19:16-30 – rich young man: "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked"

Matthew 20:1-16 – parable of workers in the vineyard: continuation of Jesus' response to disciples about their role in the kingdom

If Jesus cared so much about His disciples that He talked with them continually about what was important to Him and what was to come, I bet He's wanting to walk and talk with us so we're prepared for what's to come. That's what spending time in the scriptures with Him will do for us; we'll hear His voice and know His heart and so be prepared.

What's to come? Some horrible things are happening in the world today, and they could easily spill over into our own personal worlds.

But . . . at the time that I'm writing today's section, a new version of the *Left Behind* story is about to be released as a movie, reminding us that God has a plan that can't be thwarted. And Jesus finished His words in today's section by reminding His listeners – and us – that on the third day He will be raised! He told them that it *will* happen, that death won't win. And we know that death didn't win.

And since He didn't stay dead, He *will* return for us as He promised. We don't know when, so we'll always need to be ready. And we don't know what we'll have to face between then and now, so we need to prepare ourselves. But how do we get ready for His return? The answer is easy to say but hard to do! We need to deal daily with our sins and sin patterns; we need to depend on His life within us through the Holy Spirit, and we need to let His love for those around us come through.

Peter says in his letter, "The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply . . . offer hospitality without grumbling . . . use whatever gift received to serve others . . ." (1 Peter 4:7-11) *What do you need to do to get ready?*

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 20:20-28

"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

Can you believe that this mother and her two sons would be thinking about themselves just after Jesus told them about the death He's going to be facing? How could they be so focused on their own futures of glory and honor? Didn't they hear what he had just said?

I don't think they had heard Jesus. I think they heard Him say, "When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" and then started plotting how to get the best spots. Knowing Jesus' love of women, they got their mom to speak for them, and since moms want the best for their sons and love to take over and speak for them as if they're still children, she stepped up to the plate.

Interesting how Jesus doesn't rebuke her but turns His attention to James and John, so they have to speak for themselves. And since they probably hadn't heard Him describe what was in front of him – even though He had talked about it at least twice before (Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23) – all they could see was what was to come that would benefit them. I wonder if input from their father Zebedee, could have grounded them more. Where was Zebedee?

Before we (I) get too critical of these three, I have to remember that it's way too easy to seek a promise without counting the cost to get there. We want higher pay but won't get the training to warrant it; we want to be slim and trim but don't want to deny ourselves the snacks we crave or submit ourselves to regular workouts; we want great marriages but won't humble ourselves for the sake of another.

Jesus reminds them and the other ten disciples that in God's kingdom we're not to continue with what we've known. Our rulers love to tell us what to do but don't want to be held to these same standards. Jesus says we're to serve like a slave and not look to be served. Jesus says He's going to serve to the point of death so He can ransom us from the hold of sin and death; our serving means we have to die to ourselves over and over – maybe even to the point of death. James was the first of the disciples to die for his faith, while John outlived the others and models for us how to finish well through old age.

What about us? Do you skip over the hard words and hard work, or are you counting the cost and continuing on? It takes a lot of internal motivation that comes from daily hearing Jesus to continue the walk of faith, especially in the valleys and when others aren't around. Let's listen for His "Well done!"

Walking With the Father Through Matthew 14-20

Matthew 20:29-34

"What do you want me to do for you?"

Have you noticed that Jesus is never too busy when children are brought to Him, when people ask honest questions from their hearts, or when Pharisees try to trap Him in "legal" questions?

It's easy for us to so fill up our days and nights with activities and responsibilities that people around us can be a bother or a distraction. Since I'm a "doer" at heart, this is oh-so-true for me. But if we're to be like Jesus and love the way John calls us to in the three short letters he wrote toward the end of his life, our natural way of doing life needs to be replaced with the behavior that has to be learned to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

But back to our two blind men. Whether they've been blind since birth or blind because of an illness or injury, they're in a tough situation that they didn't bring on themselves. They've found each other, but they're dependent on others for getting around. They're probably sitting by the roadside asking for financial help since they're not able to work to support themselves. They're not able to go to the temple to worship because of their infirmities. They're isolated, lonely, and have lost hope. Have you ever felt this way?

And then they hear that Jesus is walking past them and without thinking, they cry from their hearts, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us." The crowd tried to hush them and isolate them, but they shouted even louder – because their last hope was walking by them.

Have you ever felt that Jesus was your last hope because you had tried everything else? This is the way I was when Jesus came to me in my desperate state, and this is the way I am whenever life or relationships seem like they're overwhelming me. You too?

But in this encounter, Jesus asked them point blank what they wanted Him to do for them. He also asks us the same question, and we're to identify our own point of need. For me initially it was peace and the power to make me into the person I wanted to be but was failing at miserably. In those times, Jesus has compassion on us and touches us in our place of need to heal us and restore us.

Immediately the two men could see what was real physically and spiritually, and they followed Him.

I think this encounter along the road is a picture of why Jesus was willing to go to the cross the next week. With His resurrection three days later, the Spirit could be sent out to you and me and all generations for life and healing.

Is He asking you what you need today? How are you answering Him?
