

# MISSING

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# PREFACE

The word “missing” tends to be used in a negative connotation. When something is lost or out of place it can cause anxiety. When something is missing, it can stop us in our tracts. Pressing forward may become difficult.

*Missing* is designed as a book leading up to Easter. It addresses the concept of missing from different angles. Most people are out of sorts because they are missing a life characterized by peace. There is a void in their life. For others, they have missed out on some optimal opportunities. They flat out missed it. Finally, *Missing* shows how a missing body from the tomb offers eternal and abundant life. The void is filled as life has meaning, purpose, and value. You do not want to miss out on this opportunity.

*Missing* consists of three study guides for personal or group discussion and eighteen devotions to help you find the life God has for you.



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# MISSING PEACE

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CAROLE COMBS,  
WOMEN'S MINISTRY





**G**od is the Missing Piece that brings Peace.

One afternoon while I was watching my oldest son's five children at their home, Maverick (the only boy) asked me if I wanted to put together a puzzle with him. He and I cleared a spot on a table and went to putting pieces of the puzzle together. The beautiful picture of safari animals was coming together. When there were no more pieces available we discovered that we were missing one puzzle piece. The beautiful picture was incomplete. I questioned Maverick as to where he thought the missing piece might be. He was not sure where it could be. I was in a quandary. With just one piece missing, the puzzle that was supposed to be beautiful seemed so incomplete. Maverick did not seem too concerned that a piece was missing.

Do you like doing puzzles? If so, what kind?

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What thoughts do you have when you construct a puzzle only to find out in the end that it is missing a piece?

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What other activities are spoiled by missing a key piece?

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I thought our lives are like a puzzle. People are walking around with a missing piece, and they do not seem too concerned about it. The



pieces that make up our lives are shaped and sized so differently. Our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even caregivers have had a part in the shaping of our shapes. Our genetics, as well as our education, have also had a significant role in how the pieces of our life appear. I am afraid that many of us are like the puzzle with the missing piece. That missing piece is God. We have neglected to place the spiritual piece of the puzzle into our lives. You may have felt empty, anxious, and discontented. Until you place God where He belongs in your life, you will not have peace. God fills the void. God is the missing piece that brings peace.

With God's peace, you no longer have to live in the past, but you can relish in the future. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says, ***"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and to not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."*** God has a future for you, and He wants you to choose to place that piece (Him) in your life. God does not force His way into your life. He is a patient and loving God full of grace and mercy. He is waiting for you.

Does knowing that God knows your future bring you peace?

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You may have tried so many other things to fill that void in your life. Sometimes those ways seem to have worked only to end up as a temporary fix to your emptiness. Some things you may have placed in your life with the hopes of filling that void ended up being a disrupter even to all the other pieces of your life. Isaiah 57:20-21 says, ***"But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and it waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked."*** Will you put God in the void of your life? I assure you that He is the perfect piece to bring peace. Romans



10:13 adds, ***"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

Have you been trying to find peace in all the wrong places?

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Let me go on to assume that you have already placed God in the void of your life. You understand that your sin had separated you from a holy God. You then trusted God's Son, Jesus, as your Savior-Redeemer. You then should be living a perfectly peaceful life, correct? I am not sure what the statistics might be, but if you asked most Christians if they were living a peaceful life, I believe the majority would say that they were not.

Why do you think this might be that way?

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Satan is our enemy, and he wants to steal the peaceful life we were meant to have in Christ. He wants you to believe that God is a stingy God. Adam and Eve lived in a sinless, perfect environment. They basked in the unhindered presence of God every minute and moment of their lives. God provided everything that they needed. Did I say everything? Satan tricked Eve into believing that God was holding back something from them. On the contrary, He was protecting them. God is not holding back anything from you. The character of God cannot be stingy. 1 John 3:1a (NIV) says, ***"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God."*** If you could grasp even a small portion of the great love God has for you, you would be at peace in your



## MISSING PEACE LESSON 1

soul. This same God who calls you His child has created everything. Your Heavenly Father cares, protects, comforts, and brings you peace.

Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan that day.

Are you allowing him to deceive you?

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Who is your enemy that tries to steal the peace from your life? Are you giving him the victory? Why?

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Learn, believe, trust, and hold true to the truths of the Word of God.

Truth = peace

Lies = no peace.

In John 14:27, Jesus said, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*** You no longer have to live in the past, and you can have peace in the present. John 16:33 adds, ***"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world."*** It is your enemy again that wants you to focus on the past sins in your life. He wants you to feel defeated and helpless. These thoughts cause anxiety and unrest to your souls. Jesus is the overcomer! What does that make you? An overcomer! You are a victor through our Lord Jesus Christ. You are not helpless or defeated. You can stand on these truths and be at peace.



Peace is freely given. Are you a statistic? What is holding you back from freely receiving what has been given?

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Satan is great at throwing your past in your face. He wants you to think that you are unworthy of the forgiveness of God. He wants you to believe that God holds your past against you. Psalm 103:11-12 says, ***"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions."*** Bask in the forgiveness of God. Live at peace with God and live at peace with yourself. No sin is too big or unforgivable to God. However, to willfully continue in sin will make ineffective the peace of God in your life. Romans 6:6-7 says, ***"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."*** Romans 6:12 adds, ***"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions."*** Sin enslaves you, steals your joy and peace. Sin never has nor will it ever produce any good or any peace in your life. Sin begins to pile sin upon sin, and before long you have become a slave to its pleasures. There is no peace to a person chained to sin. Jesus has already died for your sins. Make the choice, by the power of God, to break free from the slavery of sin. Romans 5:1 says, ***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

Have you found yourself stuck in the past of your life? Have you allowed past sins to steal the peace of God right out of your life?

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## MISSING PEACE LESSON 1

You can live in total peace believing that even the winds and the waves obey the voice of the Lord. Jesus and His disciples get into a boat on the Sea of Galilee one evening to cross over to the land on the other side. A great storm arose while they were on the water. So great of a windstorm that the water began to fill the boat that Jesus and His disciples were sailing. Jesus remained sleeping in the boat while all these events were taking place. The disciples woke Him and chided Him for not caring. In their minds, they thought they were going to die, and Jesus would sleep right through it. The Bible tells us that Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea. He spoke these words, "Peace! Be still!" The winds ceased, and there was a great calm. Jesus asked the disciples why they were afraid and why they had no faith.

Have you ever been like the disciples in a storm of life and missed that the very presence of God was with you all the time?

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I believe Jesus would ask the very same questions to you and I. Why were you afraid? Why do you not have any faith? They missed that they had the very presence of God with them in the boat. Oh, wait, believers have the very presence of God with them in their lives every moment. Their outward circumstances were stormy. I know you have stormy circumstances as well because I do. We should not fear. We need to have faith and be at peace. Isaiah 26:3 says, ***"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you."***



When there are storms in your life, what or who has been your life boat?

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You can allow fear to rule your mind or you can allow God's peace to rule there. Jesus spoke to the wind and the water that evening to be at peace and to be still. He is saying the same words to you and me, "Peace! Be still!" You and I can get to the land on the other side of life knowing that Jesus is with us the entire time. ***"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts"*** (Colossians 3:15a). Storms will come and go in your life. Have faith and do not be afraid because our God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and is everywhere.

Is there a time in your life that you have placed God in the void of your life? Explain.

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***"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*** Philippians 4:7



## MISSING PEACE LESSON 1



# INFINITE ABYSS

## MISSING PEACE, DEVOTION 1

Wes McCullough | *Production Director*

In 1662 these words of Blaise Pascal were printed in the book *"Pensées"*:

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself."

I see it all over the world. People are searching for something. Perhaps a majority have no idea for what they are searching, yet they try to find fulfillment in this or that. The source of this void is a separation from God caused by sin and avoidance of His will.

Isaiah 59:1-2 says, ***"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."***

Isaiah 59:1-2 explains that the void caused by sin is due to our own poor choices. It is not God's unwillingness to save us, it is our refusal to accept His salvation. God's grace is amazing considering our repeated failures. ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning"*** (Lamentations 3:22-23).



## **MISSING PEACE DEVOTION 1**

God wishes that everyone comes to salvation and He made it possible when He sent His Son to take on the sins of all humanity and bring us to righteousness. Jesus took God's wrath for our sins so there would no longer be a void between God and us.

Some people spend their entire life looking for what has been knocking on the door of their heart the whole time. God created humanity for His purpose, and only by fulfilling His purpose can we find fulfillment.



# KNOW GOD, KNOW PEACE!

## MISSING PEACE, DEVOTION 2

Debbie Kerr | *Office Administrator*

No God, No Peace - Know God, Know Peace! I am pretty sure everyone has driven past a church sign and read this quote. While those signs are often corny and eye-roll worthy, the purpose is to catch our attention and make us think. There is no peace without God. Peace is pursued by everyone in many different ways. The world has tried to bottle and sell it, but what is offered will leave us empty and unsatisfied. So, how do we find true, lasting peace that exceeds our comprehension?

This week has been a very interesting week, one like I have never seen in my lifetime. Rev. Billy Graham passed from this earth to His eternal home in Heaven. The outpouring of love, respect, and honor was unparalleled for a man of God. He laid in honor in our nation's Capital building, and there were many tributes by our President, Vice President, and other national leaders. It was an awesome thing to hear the Gospel message presented over every secular media outlet. Many broadcasts and services aired on television and the internet the entire week, culminating with the funeral service in his hometown in North Carolina. He was lovingly referred to by everyone as the Nation's Pastor. While I watched with tears flowing, a web link would scroll across the screen which read, [peacewithgod.net](http://peacewithgod.net). It does not matter what your social class is or your status in life; everyone is born with the same void in their life and emptiness in their heart that only a loving, faithful God can satisfy. Even though Billy Graham is gone from this earth, his legacy and message will live on by his family, pastors, missionaries, and anyone else that shares the life-giving message of Jesus Christ. So, how does someone gain peace with God? First, we must acknowledge that we are a sinner in need of a Savior. It is by understanding that God



loves you and has a plan for your life. It does not matter who you are or what you have done; He sent His Son to die on the cross for your sins. All you have to do is receive the free gift of salvation and you will be given an abundance of peace that passes all understanding.

Interestingly, and somewhat ironically, that same week, in all of our gatherings we honored a dear man in our church named Sam. It is not every day someone celebrates their 100th birthday. He is an amazing man who has led a very interesting life and is still going strong, he even drives a car and plays golf. He is also a real American Hero, as he had served in WWII and was a POW! He survived one of the worst wars in our history, but as he shared, he focused more on what happened after he returned home from the war. It must have been so wonderful to get back to a place of peace after leaving the war-torn madness he had just experienced, but inwardly there was still no peace. He told us how one night he turned on his small black and white television and watched as Billy Graham shared the Gospel message of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. That message of love and forgiveness penetrated his heart, and right there in front of that small television, he knelt down and accepted Jesus as His Lord and Savior. For the first time, Sam experienced true, lasting peace. Right now, wherever you are, if you have not received Christ as your Savior and Lord, you can repent of your sin and accept His free gift of salvation and experience true peace with God.

***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Romans 5:1



# DO NOT MISS THE GIFT OF SALVATION

## MISSING PEACE, DEVOTION 3

Larry Gabbara | *Financial Bookkeeper*

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*** Ephesians 2:8-9

I was born a sinner. I was a lost sinner for most of my adult life. I believed in God, but I knew I was missing something. I was empty, living a worldly life. If it were not for my wife and her prayer partners, I would have never known the wonders of God. Today, I am a saved sinner, because I responded to the Holy Spirit. One day I will be able to fellowship with Jesus in Heaven for eternity.

Salvation is a gift from God. We cannot earn it. Our works here on earth will not reserve us a place in Heaven, only Jesus' blood does that. Without salvation, we are spiritually dead. God loves us all no matter who we are, and no matter what our past entails. God wants all of mankind to accept His gift of salvation.

Nothing can compare to this gift from God. It is, in Billy Graham's words, "Forgiveness, Justification, Adoption, Eternal Life. The Crowning glory of Salvation is promised when we enter into the presence of the King."

Have you ever thought about giving your life for a spouse, child, or loved one? That is what Jesus did for us on the Cross. He gave His life to save us, and give us the opportunity to spend eternity with our Father in Heaven.

In 1 John 1:9 it says, ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***



### MISSING PEACE DEVOTION 3

Accepting the gift of salvation is as simple as, opening our heart, mind, and life to Jesus Christ and giving Him control of our life.

Romans 10:13 adds, ***"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

All you have to do is open your mind and heart to Jesus. A simple prayer will do. Ask the Heavenly Father to forgive you of your sins, believe that Jesus died for you on the cross for your sins. Acknowledge that Jesus rose from the dead. Ask for Jesus' help to turn away from your sinful nature. Jesus wants to lead you to be the person He has planned for you to be.



# MASTER PUZZLER

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## MISSING PEACE, DEVOTION 4

Kenny Hovis | *Prison Ministry Director*

I had a friend of mine that was the son of a “master puzzler.” His mom did three or four puzzles a week. While his dad would sit and watch television, she would work her puzzles. She would finish a puzzle, admire it, then take it apart and put it back into the box. All this was in anticipation of putting it together again someday.

Well, my friend being quite the prankster, often thought it was funny to take a piece of the puzzle she was putting together (of course when she was not looking). This allowed him to be the hero when his mom was in a panic because she was missing a piece. He would dutifully present the missing piece, and place it into its final resting place. He would then attempt to steal the glory and say that he finished the puzzle. Every time he did this, I believe the result was the same. His mother was less than impressed with his attempts at being a glory stealer!

As we go through life, we do the same thing. We have something in our lives that we hang on to that is the missing piece that prevents God, The Master Puzzler, to put the puzzle, that is our lives, together. We desperately hang on to this piece thinking that we will surrender it when all the rest of the pieces are put into place. Then we can attempt to be the glory stealer when it comes to the control of our lives.

The problem is, the Master Puzzler is the only Person who can see the whole picture. We do not have any idea how the pieces (i.e., relationships, work, schooling, health concerns, family issues, etc.) go together to form the picture. If we have no idea what the picture is supposed to look like, why would we think we have the missing piece?



The only thing that will perfectly fit the void in our lives that gives us peace, is the Piece, Jesus. From the beginning, we were created to have a relationship with God. He even wants us to walk with Him and to share with Him. Micah 6:8 says, ***"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*** By walking with Him, we begin to know Him and understand that He gave us the Piece so that we can know peace. We do not have to see the whole picture because God does. We just have to trust that He is putting the pieces together perfectly, exactly where they belong. John 16:33 puts it this way, ***"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*** When we stop walking with God, we have tribulation. Surrendering our lives to Christ, walking with God, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can have peace. When we accept that The Piece is what completes the puzzle of our lives, The Great Puzzle Master can make a beautiful picture out of a scattered mess! To Him be all the glory!



# UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PEACE

## MISSING PEACE, DEVOTION 5

Pat Bedell | *Special Ops*

When asked to do a devotion on peace, there are so many different moments that were going through my head. It brought back an endless supply of memories that seem to haunt me to this day of how blatantly blind I was to God's offering of peace. I am eagerly happy to write about peace knowing that God is using me to tell my story of how I finally found "peace."

Back in my early teens, I was always unhappy with anything I possessed. There was always something better out there that I wanted. It could have been shoes, digital pianos, or headphones. This continued all the way through high school and into college. I was never happy with what I had, and it emotionally took a toll on me after several years. I was invited to an on-campus ministry and reluctantly, with a neighbor, I attended and am I glad I did. For the first time, I realized that there was a whole world that I had shut out of my life. For the first time I had opened up to God, but I still was not getting the message of "peace."

It took about six months of attending on-campus ministry and getting involved with the worship team to start learning in depth, what God's Word meant. I started to absorb the weekly sermons and putting them to work in my own life. I was having a particularly hard week with my struggle of discontentedness and sure enough, that week's sermon was based on God's peace and what it looks like. Colossians 3:15 (NIV) says, **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."** The Gospel of Jesus was made so clear to me, that He was the one to fill my unhappy void. He is the one who took away all of my sins, and with that news alone, I felt a



different type of happiness. I thought about it more and more, and it was not just a consistent state of happiness, it was an internal peace that I had never felt before. It was a type of peace that could never dwindle but only get exponentially better. The end of the verse says to be thankful. I came to terms with my surroundings and was realizing just how blessed I was. Since then, I have been thankful for everything that God blesses me.

Like everyone else, I have had my fair share of ups and downs in life since then, but now I can always turn to God to ask for His grace and give me peace. Philippians 4:7 (NIV) says, ***"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** With all of the brokenness and sin this world is filled with, I find it imperative to tell people about the need for salvation and that Jesus is the only One that can do that for us. Now I have more opportunity than ever to share the Gospel with others, and it has been an absolute blessing to see people come to Christ and finally feel the overwhelming sense of peace for the first time.



# GOT JESUS?

## MISSING PEACE, DEVOTION 6

Holly Boston | *Women's Ministry Director*

I love to hear people give their testimony, the story of their journey with Jesus. I have realized that each story begins with a need that seems to always fall in one of two categories: where they will spend eternal life or how they will bear the struggles of this life. The place, time, and circumstances vary greatly, but all are out of a need that only Jesus can fill.

***"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" John 14:6***

***"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19***

Note: Not some needs or most needs, but every need!

As a young adult in my "B.C." (before Christ) days, I was a self-sufficient perfectionist with a tendency to worry...a lot! To illustrate what I mean, I remember thinking that I needed to worry because "it works." I remember getting upset because I forgot to worry. I think this classifies as abnormal. Later, as a young wife and mom, I began to realize how little control I had and I had a lot more to consider. The normal struggles of marriage and raising a child while working full-time were tough enough, but watching my parents' marriage end made life unbearable. I shared with my sister that I was at the end of myself and could not handle this life on my own. That day Heidi led me to my Savior. She told me I could have peace with Jesus ***"...in me you may have peace"*** (John 16:33) through faith in Him ***"...since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Romans 5:1).



My journey came from a need for peace, calm in the chaos. As a new believer, I had little knowledge of the Bible and no understanding of how Jesus would work in my life. Thank goodness Jesus received me just as I was (John 6:37) with a child-like faith (Matthew 18:3). It turned out; I only knew half of what I needed to know. I did have peace with God and no longer under his wrath but forgiven of my sins because of Jesus' work on the cross. But I missed the second part of John 16:33, ***"In the world you will have tribulation."*** I spent the first few years of my walk with Christ feeling duped. A child diagnosed with Autism, unemployment, and losing our home left me with one question: Where is the peace? After declaring my decision to walk away from Christ, my brother-in-law challenged me with his observation, "You are ready to walk away from Jesus but you do not even know Him." It has taken the better part of 23 years to understand that the peace Jesus offered is different than I expected.

***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."*** John 14:27

It is not a peace without problems, but in spite of them. Once I understood struggles were a part of the journey, I had to learn how to get His peace.

***"Do not be anxious about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*** Philippians 4:6-7

In my "A.D." (after death to self) days, I have learned that the key to His peace is the complete dependence upon Jesus. Jesus is the calm before, during, and after the storm. Get Jesus; get peace!







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# MISSING IT

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NOBLE BAIRD,  
COMMUNITY CENTER DIRECTOR





**B**ack in 2011, an opportunity arose at Moody Bible Institute for students to study abroad. These trips would begin after winter break, and we would be gone for over two months. For the trip, students could pick various classes to take with the professors who would help chaperone and guide the students through the various sites. Some trips were to Germany, England, and various places around Europe. However, this trip was going to Israel. When I compared the cost to what I was paying for my room and board for one semester in Chicago, there was almost no difference. As the deadline got closer and the trip began filling up, I did not know what to do. I had never been on a trip for more than a week, I knew no one who was going on the trip, and, to top it all off, flying was not my idea of fun. Regretfully, I stayed behind, missing this amazing opportunity.

Have you ever had an opportunity to experience something special and missed it?

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What words describe how you felt after the missed opportunity?

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As we approach Easter Sunday, there is an event that can often be overlooked and forgotten in the excitement of the resurrection. That event was Christ's Triumphal Entry into the city. In Matthew chapter 21, Matthew gives an account of what happened the week before the crucifixion. Starting in Matthew 21:1-6 we read, ***"Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to***



***them, 'Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once.' This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them."***

How many animals do the disciples bring to Jesus?

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What would a king normally ride into the city when he was celebrating?

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What is the passage of Scripture where this prophecy is given?

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Jesus gave the disciples what seemed to be an odd task. Personally, if Pastor Jim told me he needed me to find him two animals for an event we were having here at the church, I would not be surprised at all! Regardless of the task at hand, the disciples were obedient, and they saw the Scriptures unfold before their very eyes. The story does not end there, what happens next is incredible. In Matthew 21:7-11 we read, ***"They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd***



***spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, 'Who is this?' And the crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.'"***

What were the people laying on the ground? What were they shouting?

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What does 'Hosanna' mean?

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Who do they think Jesus is?

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The crowd did several different things during Christ's entry into Jerusalem. First, they laid their cloaks on the ground. We have seen this done before back in 2 Kings 9:13, as it was an act of respect and reverence to the king. Secondly, they begin shouting 'Hosanna,' which means 'save now.' Again, we see a reference back to the Scriptures in the people's shouting as seen in Psalm 118:25-26. Thirdly, they call Jesus the 'Son of David,' which is one of the titles used specifically for the Messiah that was prophesied to come. Verse 11 is where some of the people in the crowd miss the



## MISSING IT LESSON 2

mark. This whole time of actions and shouts, they tell us they are grasping the concept that Jesus is the Messiah and the King that was prophesied to come. However, in verse 10 when some ask who this is, they reply that He is a prophet. You see, some still missed it.

Why is it important to distinguish the fact that Jesus was not just a prophet?

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To this day, I am still kicking myself for not taking that opportunity to study abroad in the Holy Land. To be able to see the sites that we would have been studying and experience, where Jesus walked and taught, would beat any book or lecture. If we fast forward to Luke 24:13-35, we meet two men who again missed the mark on who Jesus was. In verse 19, the men refer to Jesus again as a prophet from Nazareth. However, Jesus then spends the rest of the day walking with these two men explaining the Scriptures and how He is not just a prophet, but the One who fulfilled the prophecies.

This "Triumphal Entry" was truly that, triumphant. Jesus did not ride in on a warhorse ready for battle, as many believed and expected of Him. He did not come in a full suit of armor with chariots and an army of 100,000 strong. Instead, He fulfilled the Scriptures and rode peacefully in on a donkey. Christ rode into the city knowing His mission, knowing what was to come, and fully prepared to wage war on death and the grave. Some of those very people who were shouting, laying their cloaks, and seeing this amazing entrance still missed it.

I want to challenge you as you continue in this week and as you go back and read this passage of the Triumphal Entry, to take a step



back. Can you remember a time where you too missed Jesus? Can you remember a time where you thought that maybe He was just a prophet? Now, think back to the time where you got it. Remember the time when it all clicked, and you did not miss that amazing opportunity to call Jesus your Messiah and King. There are many in the crowds around us who get lost in the shouting and the noise. Look for that opportunity to share the love and the hope you have been given, so that those in the crowds around us do not miss our amazing King!



## MISSING IT LESSON 2



# EQUAL TIME

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## MISSING IT, DEVOTION 1

Isaiah & Leone Combs | *Worship Leader*

**H**ave you ever had a day where you were so busy your schedule was just stacked of things to do, and then God used someone or something to slow you down? Think about these moments and how they may have changed your life. One of my favorite moments was a time in our life when we were so busy. My husband, Isaiah, went to school full-time, worked at Walmart part-time, worked at the church as a janitor, we directed the outreach kids club, he volunteered in the music ministry, and I volunteered in the tech ministry. We had all this along with our marriage and kids. We were scrambling, going from one place to another when God placed someone in our path that “slowed” our schedule down. But the moment, timing, and words that were said to us will forever be remembered.

They said, “We all have the same amount of time in a day, it is just up to us what we do with the time we are given.”

That moment was a divine appointment from God revealing some truth in our lives. The truth included wisdom, timing, opportunity, and fulfilling the will of God.

Ephesians 5:15-17 says, ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”***

We were discontent, trying to keep up with the world and its standard. We were not wise in our scheduling. We missed out on opportunities because we invested our time in things that were not eternal when we had the opportunity to invest in things or



people that are eternal. We all need to look around wisely, carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully, examining certain circumstances and situations and see what kind of consequences will result. With the end in mind, it helps us evaluate things or people that would cause us to stumble, help us not stumble, or we could help not stumble. Going through our schedule and asking is it bringing us closer to Him, is vital. When we do, we will then make the best use of our time recognizing opportunities that are given to us. The will of God will stand with or without us, but He allows us to be part of what He is doing. That is so amazing. We have been offered the blessing of being used by God in opportunities to see people get saved. However, some of us miss those opportunities.

We all have the same amount of time in a day. We need to be wise, making the best use of our time. We need to look for the opportunities He has given us. Make the most of your time.



# MISS-SIGH-AH

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## MISSING IT, DEVOTION 2

Debbie Gabbara | *Assistant to the Gathering Pastor*

***"The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the king of Israel!'"*** John 12:12-13 (NIV)

Can you imagine with me? It was Passover; the city was crowded with people who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. Jesus was coming into the city. People all over the area had listened to His teaching. They witnessed the miracles He had done. There were lame people who now walked, blind who could see, people who had been healed of demon possession, and all kinds of diseases. Word would have spread through the city that Jesus had raised a man from the dead a few days earlier. Crowds of people walked along shouting and praising Him as Jesus made His triumphal entry into the city. He did not come on a powerful horse, but humbly on a donkey. Jesus came not as a king but as a servant. Crowds of people shouted, ***"Hosanna!"*** and ***"Blessed is the king of Israel!"*** Then, just days later, the fickle crowd shifted; Jesus would be condemned to go to the cross as the crowd cried "Crucify Him." The One who came in the name of the Lord was among them, and they missed it.

The Pharisees baffle me the most. They spent their lives studying the scriptures and looking for the Messiah. How could they miss all the signs they were constantly asking Jesus? He fulfilled every prophecy; Jesus spoke into their lives through His teachings and the parables. The people among them who had been healed gave them physical, tangible evidence that Jesus was the One for whom



they were watching and waiting. When you read the New Testament, the Pharisees were always around. They were constantly trying to test Jesus, trying to find ways that He was breaking the laws of Moses to which they clung so tightly. No matter what Jesus did or said, they argued with Him and demanded that He show them a sign from Heaven. How did they not see that He was their sign from Heaven? In the end, they plotted the death of Jesus. The King of Kings was among them, and they missed it.

***"But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace."*** Luke 19:41-42a (NLT)

Only Jesus offers the way to true peace, but so many missed it. They missed it then, and so very many miss it today. So many look but do not see, they hear but do not listen. Jesus wants to come into your life and bring you triumph over your sins. Do not miss Him!



# DON'T MISS IT!

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## MISSING IT, DEVOTION 3

Sierra Combs | *Women's Ministry Director*

Every year, The River Church puts on an amazing play showcasing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is something I look forward to participating in every Easter. Even though I am not an actual Jew living in Jerusalem in the first century, it is pretty easy to make believe a little bit once the costume is on and the sets are in place. It always gives me goosebumps thinking that the events that we are acting out happened! The Messiah had finally come! It is easy for me to act out in amazement when the actor playing Jesus is acting out His miracles. It is easy for me to worship and rejoice when we portray His resurrection. Even though it is just a play, Jesus did those things about 2000 years ago. He did come to Earth to heal the sick and raise the dead. He did die on a cross to pay the price for the sin of the world. My natural response is to worship Him - no acting required!

There has always been one part of our Passion Play that has been so unnatural and so hard for me to do - reject Him. Up until that point, all of us townspeople think Jesus is pretty cool. We are intrigued by Him and happy that He is benefiting us with His miraculous works. We even welcome Him with gladness, waving palm branches, and shouting, **"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"** (John 12:13). We lay the branches at His feet as a show of honor to a king. Things are good. However, ten minutes later, we are called back out on stage to demand that He be crucified. We scream for His blood and then laugh and cheer as He is whipped and nailed to a cross. It has always been unsettling to me. I mean, I know our cast is limited, but every year I am like, really? I just had a scene with the guy where He raised my friend from the dead, and



now you want me to turn my back on Him and pretend to be in the angry mob of Jesus-haters? It seems crazy, right?

The reality is that this probably is not too big of a stretch from how it all went down. There was a day when the real Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (which fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9). Great crowds came to welcome Him, waving palm branches, and laying their cloaks on the ground in an act of homage to royalty. They cheered for Him, yelling, ***"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"*** (John 12:13). He was the King. He was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He was the Messiah for which they had waited and longed. However, they missed it. Sure, they wanted a king, but on their terms. They expected Jesus to fulfill their political agenda and deliver them from the hands of the Romans and completely missed the fact that He came to deliver them from their sin. They wanted a king who would conquer their earthly enemies and missed the fact that He came to conquer death and the grave. Once Jesus failed to meet their expectations; how quickly they turned on Him! Their "Hosanna's!" would days later turn into screams of "Crucify Him!"

How heartbreaking that must have been for Jesus. Luke 19:41-44 (NLT) says, ***"But as He came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, He began to weep. 'How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will...encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you.'"*** Jesus wept, knowing that the people whom He loved so much, the people He came to save, completely missed it.



Jesus loves you so much that He left His throne in Heaven to die on a cross for you - to pay the price for your sin. He conquered death and the grave when He rose again three days later, and He offers you eternal life and a relationship with Him. It is the best gift you will ever be offered. Don't miss it!







# MISGUIDED EXPECTATIONS

MISSING IT, DEVOTION 4  
Jen Combs | *Women's Ministry*

**H**ave you ever believed in something so much before and it turned out to be not at all what you expected? These last few weeks, Josh and I did a 21-day detox. We lived on fruits and veggies for 11 days and then were able to add some meat to the mix. Can you imagine, me on just fruits and veggies? I am a coke drinker, butter user, and cheese slatherer. We were able to make smoothies, but the kicker was, we had to ingest two times more veggies than fruit. I was coming up with all sorts of stuff to try. I had this great recipe that involved pumpkin, cinnamon, and some spices. I mean, I like pumpkin pie, how bad could it be? I had high hopes for this smoothie. This one was going to be my life-saving smoothie for this 21-day venture. I got it all mixed up, it did not smell awful, so I took a nice big spoonful. It was awful. It was not at all what I expected. I wanted to chuck it across the room and run the other way.

You are probably thinking, "What in the world does a gross pumpkin smoothie have to do with the Triumphal Entry?" But this is exactly what was happening. The Jews believed that Jesus was a king. While He was entering the city, they were honoring Him. Matthew 21:9 says, ***"And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, 'Hosanna, to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'"*** They were throwing their cloaks on the ground, they were cutting palm branches, and they were lining the streets. This was something they did only for royalty. They believed Jesus was a King wholeheartedly.

John MacArthur does a great job describing what they were expecting, "The people wanted a conquering, reigning Messiah who



would come in great military power to throw off the brutal yoke of Rome and establish a kingdom of justice and righteousness where God's chosen people would have special favor." The crowd missed Him then, and they still miss Him now. They believed so much in Jesus being the conquering King over Rome that they missed why He was here; they were turning Him into something He was not. He wasn't at all what they expected. Can you imagine having the Savior of the world walking down the street and only expecting Him to be an earthly King? I love how MacArthur finishes it up as he says, "But Jesus did not come to conquer Rome but to conquer sin and death. He did not come to make war with Rome but to make peace with God for men."

Do not miss Jesus. He is right here. He died for you. He is willing to take your shame and guilt. The Bible says that you have to repent (turn) from your sin and make Him Lord of your life. Do you need to do that? What is stopping you? If you know Him, are you following the Lord? Or are you looking for Him to be something He is not?



# THE REAL DEAL

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## MISSING IT, DEVOTION 5

Philip Piasecki

I have seen these incredible YouTube videos recently. In them, a normal person hires bodyguards and a camera crew, gets dressed up all fancy, and starts walking around Times Square. This person puts on the appearance of being famous, and without fail, a crowd starts growing. People ask to take pictures with this person, cheer as he walks by, and even tell the camera crew their favorite movies in which this “actor” appeared. “Yeah, I loved him in the new *Spiderman*” multiple people tell the camera crew. The issue is that this person was not a movie star at all, has never been in a single movie, yet was able to completely fool the crowds. These people completely missed who that guy was. They thought he was one thing when he was the exact opposite.

I could not help but think of this video when I was studying the Triumphal Entry. Jesus makes His entry into the city of Jerusalem, and the crowds go crazy. They celebrate Him, thinking that He was there to overthrow the Roman government. The Jewish people thought that their new earthly King had finally arrived, but unfortunately, they completely missed who Jesus was. Jesus’ words in Luke 19:41-44 are so powerful:

***“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’”***



Jesus knew that the city was going to celebrate His arrival, and then in just one week they would crucify Him. He knew the truth, and it caused Him to weep over the city and those people. We look at the Triumphal Entry and think, "How could these people so badly miss who Jesus was?" It is easy to look at the story and judge them, but when we look at our own lives, we can see how we so easily do the same thing. Maybe some of you who are reading this today view Jesus as a good man, an incredible prophet, or "one" of the ways to Heaven. If this is your view, you are missing who He is. Jesus is the only Son of God and our only way to salvation. Maybe you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, but you are only putting your eternal life in His hands and not your day to day life. If that is you, then you are missing who Jesus is! He loves and cares for you today and for all eternity. Not only does He want to spend eternity with you, but He also wants to guide and direct you every day of your life. He wants you to cast all of your cares on Him because He loves you! The character of Christ is so vast, ask the Holy Spirit to continually reveal to you who He is. Read Scripture and seek the full understanding of Jesus, and I promise that you will learn new things every day.



# MORE THAN A PROPHET

## MISSING IT, DEVOTION 6

Jill Osmon | *Assistant to the Lead Pastor*

I had the privilege of going to Israel at the end of 2017, and in the simplest of words, it was life-changing. To see the places I had been taught, I had read about and studied, in person, was and still is a defining moment in my life. Riding into Jerusalem, one of the stories that stood out to me in my mind was the Triumphal Entry. The excitement that they must have felt had to have been powerful, a moment they would never forget. Matthew 21:9-11 records, ***“And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.’”*** But as we know, that moment was fleeting for most of them, and they missed the brevity, the true meaning of that moment. Look at verse 11, ***“Who is this?” And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.’”*** They refer to Jesus as a “prophet,” not the Son of Man, but a prophet. They liked the Jesus that healed people and helped with injustices of the world. However, when He asked for more (their life, sacrifice, and faith), they retreated and became critics of those that wanted to highlight that part of Jesus’ life.

If you take the teachings of Jesus out of the Bible and take them as a “nice” or “moral” way to live, you are missing it. You cannot take Jesus out of the context of the whole Bible. If you do, you will end up like the crowd at the Triumphal Entry, turning against the idea of Jesus, the Bible, and all that God asks of us. When it became difficult, deeper, and required something from them, they turned because they never truly accepted who Jesus is.



He is not just a prophet, good teacher, or moral man to be admired; He is God in human form, the Son of God. He loves us, and He is for helping those in need, being an advocate for social injustices; but we cannot miss the reason for that. That is not all He is; those things are a result of our faith, not our actual faith. Please do not misunderstand, God calls for us to help those in need, to be advocates for social injustices but that is not the whole of our faith, it is because of our faith in God that we embrace those things.

Do not be afraid to go deeper into your faith; do not be afraid of the sacrifices that He requires. In those moments of deepening our faith and those moments of sacrifice that we come to a deeper understanding of God and His love for us. Do not miss that for a shallow, empty view of who Jesus is. He is our Lord and Savior who gave His life for us. Do not miss it!







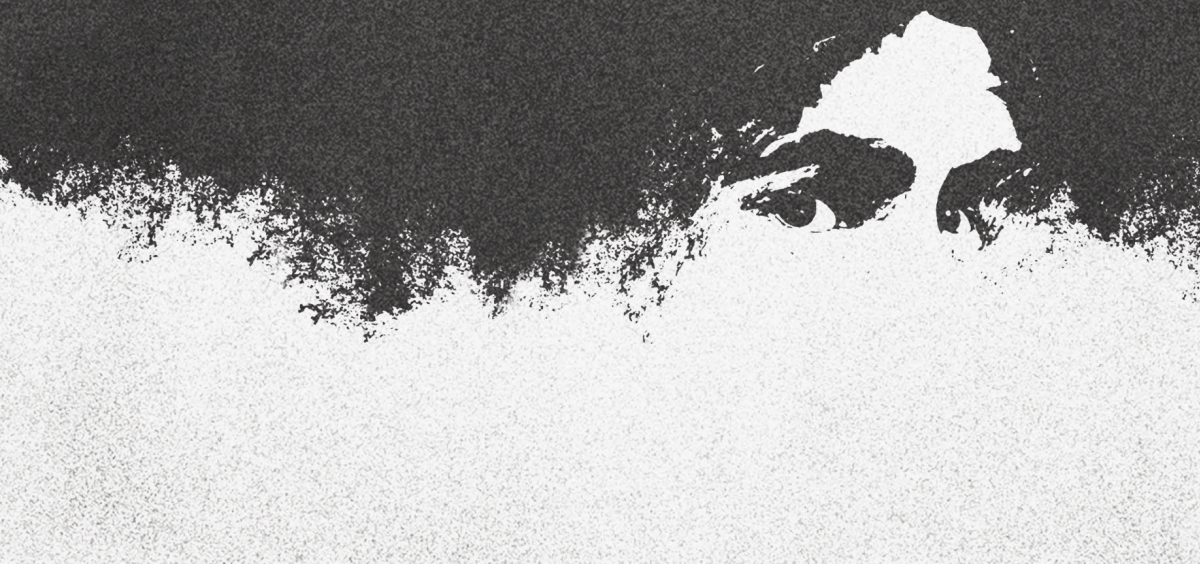
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# MISSING BODY

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DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON,  
GROWTH PASTOR





**M**y son was (and probably still is) excellent at LEGOs. He seldom looked at the instructions and could still envision the whole end product. I was regularly amazed at his perseverance and creativity. He was able to do way more than I could as a kid with my Lincoln Logs.

I recently found out that Billund, Denmark is the home to LEGO. They take great pride in this designation. The LEGO company has an international archive nicknamed, "Memory Lane." It is a secret vault deep below the Earth that contains a copy of every LEGO set ever designed. The fact that tickled me was that it is hidden, closed to visitors, and heavily guarded. The guards are even reported as carrying machine guns. I wonder if the guns are made out of LEGOs.

What is the most important or unique thing you ever had to watch or guard?

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In Acts 12:18-19, a body is missing. Several soldiers were told to keep custody of Peter. During the night, an angel led Peter out of prison. In the first century, when a soldier did not fulfill an assignment, it could cost him his life. The passage says, ***"Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there."***



What was the problem?

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What was the punishment?

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Matthew 27:62-66 gives another scenario when soldiers were commanded to keep watch over someone. This time it was a dead body. Matthew writes, ***"The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard."***

What was the concern of the chief priest and Pharisees?

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Why did they have this concern?

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What was done to handle the concern?

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Matthew 28:1-10 continues the story, ***"Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.'***

Who all saw the angel and what was their response?

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What was the angel's explanation for the empty tomb?

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### MISSING BODY LESSON 3

Did anyone see the empty tomb?

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What was the response when they saw the living Jesus?

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"The first thing that stuck in the minds of the disciples was not the empty tomb, but rather the empty grave clothes - undisturbed in form and position." Josh McDowell

Verses 11-15 add more insight into what happened, ***"While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."***

What loopholes do you see in their story?

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What could or should have been the punishment for these soldiers?

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"Both Jewish and Roman sources and traditions admit an empty tomb." Josh McDowell

Not everyone wanted to believe Jesus was the Christ, Messiah, and God. Most rejected Him. However, none of the early writers appear to have refuted His death, burial, or resurrection. An empty tomb or missing body is not the only evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; He was seen by many.

Acts 1:1-3 says, ***"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."*** Luke speaks of ***"many proofs."*** Jesus was seen and touched by them. He spoke with them and even "ate" with them. He was and is alive.

How long did Jesus stay on Earth after the resurrection before He ascended into Heaven?

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In addition, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 says, ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,***



***and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."***

Approximately how many people saw Jesus alive on Earth after the empty tomb was exposed?

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What else could Jesus have done to prove He was alive? Would it have made a difference?

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"I went to a psychologist friend and said if 500 people claimed to see Jesus after he died, it was just a hallucination. He said hallucinations are an individual event. If 500 people have the same hallucination, that's a bigger miracle than the resurrection." Lee Strobel

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead." Tim Keller







## MISSING BODY LESSON 3



# THE SEARCH

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## MISSING BODY, DEVOTION 1

Richie Henson | *Production Director*

I hate when something is missing. I mean, I really hate it, loathe it to my core. One of the worst things to go missing is a cell phone. I rarely misplace my phone, but my wife, on the other hand, makes it a regular habit to set her phone down somewhere in the house and forget about it. Then sometime later, she inevitably asks me, "Have you seen my phone?" Being that I am the most dramatic man in the world, I immediately burst into a fit of anxiety and rage, "What do you mean? You do not know where your phone is?" It then becomes my only focus in life to find this missing phone that often is simply on the dresser or stuck in a couch cushion. This feeling of great anxiety and stress over something being missing only becomes magnified as the missing item grows in value. If you misplace a pencil, you may not panic, but when it comes to your phone or wallet, that is a different story. So, I can only imagine the anxiety the followers of Jesus felt when they first realized Jesus' body was missing.

John chapter 20 gives a wonderful account of the resurrection of Jesus. At the start of the chapter, we see Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb only to find the stone removed. She immediately panics and runs to the disciples to tell them the body of Jesus has been taken. That is a horrible way to start the week. The reality of the death of Jesus was still fresh, and now the body of the Lord was taken. The stress Mary must have felt is unimaginable. If I would be concerned at a lost wallet, something of seeming importance and value, how much more deeply would Mary have felt as the body of her Lord was missing. The story continues in verse 11.



John 20:11-16 (NIV) says, ***"Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher')."***

As bad as it feels to have something of value go missing, it feels even better to find it. How spectacular to know that Jesus' body went missing not because of hatred, but because He conquered death and the grave by rising again.



# GO!

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## MISSING BODY, DEVOTION 2

Bryan Fox

**N**ow and then when I am in the area, I will stop by the cemetery where my parents are buried. I will spend some time cleaning off the headstones and think about their lives and our time together. As I stand there looking at the ground, I know that their bodies are just six feet below me.

Likewise, when Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb to anoint the body with spices and oils, they were expecting the body of Jesus would be exactly where it was buried, behind the stone. The empty tomb they found was a surprise and a huge concern as they thought the body had been taken. The resurrection had been predicted by Jesus, but no one expected it to really happen.

John 20:11-13 says, ***"But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'"***

Matthew 28:5-7 adds, ***"But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.'"*** The women were told what happened to Jesus and what to do with this information.



We too are given the same facts and given the same command in Matthew 28:19, ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** The command is clear, ***"Go!"***



# MISSING BODY = MINISTRY FULFILLED

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## MISSING BODY, DEVOTION 3

Holly Wells | *Assistant to Pastor Jim*

Celebrating Easter has taken on a deeper meaning as I have grown as a believer. As a little girl, Easter for me was the Americanized version of wearing a pretty new dress for our annual appearance at church, Easter baskets hidden by my mom for my older sister and me, coupled by family dinner. (Side note to parents: just because your kids “grow up,” does not mean they “grow out” of the joy of the basket. Every year, my sister and I would chase to find them and behold, it was filled with tons of glorious candy which I ate way too fast and usually as meal replacements. Then I begged my sister for hers. Those memories are dear to my heart.) Since giving my life to God as an adult, Easter is my favorite time of the year not because I still covet the Easter basket but because of Who and what that week and day represent.

I am a very visual person (which I blame on the “artsy” side of my brain), and I tend to interpret and understand most of life visually first. So, the resurrection account is an “in my face,” most powerful reminder of what only Jesus Christ could endure and accomplish for me, for you, for my sin, and for yours. Jesus took our place on the cross; He paid the debt of our sins that we could never pay (Isaiah 53:5). I visualize His crucifixion and who was there, how heart-wrenching it was (Matthew 27:32-56). I imagine Jesus being taken down from the cross, placed into the tomb where three days later the stone was rolled away; He was not there (Matthew 27:57-28:10). But it hurts to look at the scene for what it was, for all that Jesus willingly endured (Isaiah chapter 53). This year, it hurts a little more.



I love with all my heart that God allows me to serve full-time in ministry. It is a desire given by Him and a prayer answered by Him. There is no place I would rather be. Getting to serve and do life with a diverse community of believers and non-believers alike (the church and un-churched) encourages me as we accept all and love all. Sometimes that hurts, like right now. Just yesterday, I learned that a lady that was very special to me ended her life. She was a daughter, a wife, a mom, and a grandma. I met her at her youngest son's memorial almost a year ago. She was hurting, struggling, striving to stay sober, fighting her way through life, and it was a mess. I prayed for her, and the Lord allowed us to develop a friendship. We prayed together, cried together, stayed connected, and once in a while when she came to church, I would get to hug her. I loved her, and right now I am so, so sad. Through my tears though, I am reminded of the most important thing in life.

My two favorite words are "but God." The "but" implies a work unfinished and so it is of precious Sandy's life. You see, she may have battled to the very end, but God came into her life when she called out to Him years ago.

***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."***

John 3:16-17

Know this: Sandy is who Jesus went to the cross for, and so are you, and so am I. Jesus endured the pain, shame, suffering, and separation from God for our sins, overcame death and the grave and was resurrected from the tomb three days later! He took Sandy's place, your place, my place, despite the vastness of all sin, so that when we ***"confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and***



***believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"*** (Romans 10:9).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ points to His missing body indeed because it proves His ministry fulfilled! When I look at the finish work by Jesus, tears of gratitude and joy overshadow my temporary sadness. Remember the picture, the truth, and the unconditional love demonstrated and hope celebrated through the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! I look forward to seeing Sandy again in Heaven one day as we worship our Lord and Savior together.







# FUTILE?

## MISSING BODY, DEVOTION 4

Philip Piasecki

***"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (NIV)***

There is power in the Word of God. Every time I read this verse, it gives me a new sense of wonder for the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I feel like we often hear in Christian circles things like "remember the cross," "think about what Jesus did for us on that cross," and the like. While there is nothing wrong with these sayings, I feel like our focus is sometimes misdirected. It seems like believers sometimes miss how important the resurrection was. If Jesus had died on that cross and stayed in that grave, we would have no hope. Paul says that our faith is futile without the resurrection! Essentially Paul is saying that without the resurrection we are not forgiven of our sins, anyone who has died believing in Christ is lost, we have no hope, and everyone should pity us. Those are some strong words. The resurrection of Christ is the most important event in the history of humanity. This one event solidified that Jesus Christ was who He said that He was, and it sealed the offer of salvation to everyone who believes in Him.

The truth of the resurrection should stir up action in your life. I love thinking about the lives of the disciples after the resurrection. They saw the resurrected body of Jesus Christ, heard His command to go into all the world to preach the Good News, and many of them took that message up until they were killed for their message. They saw their Savior raised to life, and they knew that they needed to go and tell the world about it. We may have not physically seen Jesus



resurrected, but we have the historical accounts of it in Scripture, and we have our accounts of how the resurrected Christ has impacted our lives. Take Jesus' story and your story of salvation in Him and tell anyone who will listen. Do not be inhibited by fear of how the world will react to you; the disciples did not let threats of death keep them from sharing their message. We cannot miss the importance of the resurrection. When you fully grasp the significance of it, I promise it will radically change your life.



# BECAUSE HE LIVES

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**MISSING BODY, DEVOTION 5**  
Gareth Volz | *Senior (55+) Director*

**H**ave you heard the news? The body of Jesus is missing! What does this mean? To me, it means everything. Let me explain.

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. In Matthew 16:15-17, we read, ***"He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"*** Later in Matthew 20:17-19, we read, ***"And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way He said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day.'"***

The morning after the Sabbath following Jesus' crucifixion, a great earthquake occurred, an angel of the Lord descended and rolled away the stone from the entrance to the tomb. The soldiers, overtaken with fear, fell to the ground like dead men. Shortly after, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb and were surprised to see the stone rolled away. In Matthew 28:5-7, we read, ***"But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you.'"*** They ran and told the disciples what had happened, and Peter and John raced to the tomb to see for



themselves – the body was not there. Then they remembered what Jesus had told them and they knew Jesus had risen as He said He would.

Why do the empty tomb and missing body mean everything to me?  
The words of the hymn “*Because He Lives*” say it all:

*God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus,  
He came to love, heal and forgive.  
He lived and died to buy my pardon,  
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.  
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.  
Because He lives, all fear is gone.  
Because I know He holds the future,  
and life is worth the living just because He lives.*



# GRASPING AT STRAWS

## MISSING BODY, DEVOTION 6

Roger Allen | *Recovery Director*

***"And especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones."*** 2 Peter 2:10

I was raised in a family of skeptics. It can create a mindset where nothing was what it seemed. Rooted in cynicism, all claims were deemed false until proven different. Motivation was always based on money or some other self-interest. It was a way to protect yourself from someone taking advantage of you. The fear of being someone's pawn was real and embarrassing. This became my stumbling block. It was not until the day I received Christ that I would understand my error.

To many, the resurrection is shrouded in mystery and doubt and has become a stumbling block to them. The fact that His body was not present has brought many explanations. Sceptics have preached ideas from the swoon theory (Jesus was not dead, but unconscious) to the disciples taking the body themselves. These are just a few stories that satisfy the unbeliever. However, the closer you look into these theories the more you realize that it is a "grasping at straws" approach. In the swoon theory, it is hard to imagine the humanity of Christ having the strength to move the stone after the physical torture and crucifixion He endured. As far as the disciples stealing the body, would they have been willing to die for a lie? Would they be willing to be tortured and crucified in the same manner as Jesus? I wish the mindset of the unbeliever was an anomaly and that the Deity of Christ would be considered first. That instead of doubt, they would walk this through to completion. I wish that by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit they would arrive at the



#### MISSING BODY DEVOTION 6

truth. They could have replaced the cynicism with which they lived, with a life-renewing faith. The missing body speaks the whole truth. God raised Jesus from the grave!

He is alive!

***"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." 1 John 5:20***











# OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

## REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “We don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

## GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord’s Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher it’s bringing life-change.

## GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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# BOOKS BY THE RIVER CHURCH

