

INTRO TO IMMERSION
IN DECLARATION OF A DREAM – DEREK LUPTAK & JOEL BIDDERMAN

PRELUDE:

“In Declaration of a Dream”

Caedmon (?-680)

I cannot speak
unless You loose my tongue
I only stammer
and I speak uncertainly;
but if You touch my mouth,
my Lord,
then I will sing the story
of Your wonders!
Teach me to hear that story,
through each person,
to cradle a sense of wonder
in their life,
to honor the hard-earned wisdom
of their sufferings,
to waken their joy
that the King of all kings
stoops down
to wash their feet,
and looking up
into their face
says,
“I know - I understand.”
This world has become
a world of broken dreams
where dreamers are hard to find
and friends are few.
Lord, be the gatherer of our dreams.
You set the countless stars in place,
and found room for each of them to shine.
You listen for us in your Heaven-bright hall.
Open our mouths to tell our tales of wonder.
Teach us again the greatest story ever;
the One who made the worlds
became a little, helpless child,
then grew to be a carpenter
with deep, far-seeing eyes
In time, the Carpenter began to travel,
in every village challenging the people
to leave behind their selfish ways,
be washed in living water,

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and let God be their King.
The ordinary people crowded round Him,
frightened to miss
a word that He was speaking,
bringing their friends, their children,
all the sick and tired,
so everyone could meet Him,
everyone be touched and given life.
Some religious people were embarrassed
- they did not like the company He kept,
and never knew just what He would do next.

He said,
“How dare you wrap God up
in good behavior,
and tell the poor that they
should be like you?
How can you live at ease
with riches and success,
while those I love go hungry
and are oppressed?

It is really for such a time as this
that I was given breath.”

His words were dangerous,
not safe or tidy.

In secret His opponents said:
“It surely would be better that
one person die.”

“I think it would be better,
if he could.”

Expediency became the very death of Him.
He died because THEY thought it might be good.

You died that we might be forgiven,
Lord; but that was not the end,
You plundered death,
and made its jail-house shudder
- strode into life
to meet Your startled friends.

I have a dream
that all the world will meet You,
and know You, Jesus,
in Your living power,
that someday soon

all people everywhere will hear Your story,
AND HEAR IT IN A WAY THEY UNDERSTAND.

I cannot speak unless you loose my tongue;

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I only stammer, and I speak uncertainly;
but if You touch my mouth, my Lord,
then I will sing the story of Your wonders!
So many who have heard
forget to tell the story.
Here I am, my Jesus;
teach me.

I. INTERACTION WITH THE SOVEREIGN GOD

- A. I cannot speak/unless You loose my tongue/I only stammer/and I speak uncertainly/but if You touch my mouth,/my Lord,/then I will sing the story of Your wonders!
1. It takes God to love God: we are drawn by God
 - a. We were created by a Creator that not only takes great interest in us, but desires for us to be intimately in relationship with Him. He has initiated this relationship with us, and us coming to Him is on the basis of Him enabling us to come.
 - b. **John 6:44-51** "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."
 - c. **John 12:31-33** "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, *when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*" He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.
 - d. **Hosea 2:14** "Therefore I am now going to *allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.*

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2. God does not only call us to eternal life, but a *transformed life*.
 - a. Even in times of chasing other lovers, passions and pain-killers, God's desire is to restore us to "a hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11) The act of God drawing us reflects not only His mercy, but His great desire for us to be in right relationship with Him. Many come to God with the mindset that God is angry and disappointed in us. Here we see that even in discipline, it is the Lord's desire to allure our hearts through His wondrous love.
 - b. Looking upon Christ and coming into contact with His love, we are not just pardoned from our fallen-ness and short-comings, but His love *compels us to a new way of living...alive in hope, joy, and learning how to live a new Way*. This new way is not based on a set of rules and regulations, but a vibrant relationship with Him
3. A life lived in relationship with the Sovereign God is a life engaged in mystery.
 - a. **Ephesians 3:14-21** For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp **how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 2:6-7** We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, *we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.*

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- c. **We are called to fascination, we are called to mystery.** So often we (especially in Western culture) run after things within our culture to fulfill our need to be fascinated. Our hearts are made to be wow-ed and fascinated. We are made to grapple with things that expand our boundaries of comprehension and excitement.

II. HUNGRY TO RESPECT AND LEARN HOW GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

- A. Teach me to hear that story/through each person/to cradle a sense of wonder in their life/to honor the hard-earned wisdom/of their sufferings,
- B. Unity without uniformity
 1. “How could a God who created a world with 300 different kinds of hummingbirds be the same god who requires religious conformity?” - Mark Labberton
 2. “The same breath is blown into the flute, cornet and bagpipe, but different music is produced according to the different instruments. In the same way the one Spirit works in us, God’s children, but different results are produced, and God is glorified through them according to each one’s temperament and personality.” - Sadhu Sundar Singh
 3. **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** - There are *different* kinds of gifts, but the *same Spirit* distributes them. There are *different* kinds of service, but the *same Lord*. There are *different* kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the *same God* at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

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- C. We are the symphony of Christ, drenching the world with songs of redemption and renewal. We are not all alike, and our differences flavor the music with a depth of range and creative exuberance that would not be possible otherwise. There is a type of music produced by uniformity: the dirge. But the music of Christ's symphony is not a funeral dirge; it is the unexpected chord that resounds with both laughter and weeping. It is the deep music that makes life colorful. And because Christ is so holy, so OTHER, and yet so near and so intimate, His music can only be played with a variety of instruments. In the Scriptures and church history we see His glory manifesting in a vast number of ways. Priests, prophets, kings, peasants, musicians, bricklayers, through abandoned orphans and spoiled brats, blue collar and white collar, ivy-league graduates and street-smart urchins, men, women, children...most of all children. The Most High was once a human embryo. And this embryo became a fetus and then an infant, who grew to be a carpenter-rabbi in the backwaters of the Roman Empire, who taught that in order to enter into what God was doing, one had to become like a child. One thing we know about children is that they rarely form committees or get into doctrinal disputes. And if they do, it's because they're imitating grown-ups. Children play. Children not only ask "Why" but "Why not?" As a kingdom of children, "why not" learn to play together in a way that values relationship over petty disagreements?

III. CALLED TO EMULATE THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

- A. to waken their joy/that the King of all kings/stoops down/to wash their feet,
- B. The humility of God is an attribute that begs an exchange.
1. **Philippians 2:3-11** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

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in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

2. The humility of God is not a purely spiritual quality, but is a bleeding-through of the love of God into every area of our personality. False humility may be outwardly thinking less of yourself (whether or not it is sincere). Actual humility contains a proper view of oneself and involves thinking less *ABOUT* yourself. Christ, Who, “**being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...**” showed us ultimate humility in His incarnation. His presence in human form became a Heavenly secret and divine joke as He “slipped underneath the radar”, and instead of high class robes opted for the rags of the least and the oppressed. This Good News declares something tremendous in the heart of God. That God is as humble as He is sovereign, and He *desires* the weak.
 3. “It is almost impossible to overestimate the value of true humility and its power in the spiritual life. For the beginning of humility is the beginning of blessedness and the consummation of humility is the perfection of all joy. Humility contains in itself the answer to all the great problems of the life of the soul. It is the only key to faith, with which the spiritual life begins: for faith and humility are inseparable. In perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself or in itself for God: and it is lost and submerged in Him and transformed into Him.” *Thomas Merton “New Seeds of Contemplation”*
 4. **Matthew 11:28-30** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
 - a. In following Christ we see perfect humility modeled.
 - b. There is rest in living a humble life. Putting others first frees us from pride, arrogance, and other things that can hold our hearts captive.
- C. The humility of God makes us want to reach out to others.
1. The humility of God is seen in the incarnational sacrifice.
 - a. “Anyone who does not fall in love with God by looking at Jesus dead upon the cross will never fall in love.” Giorgio Tiepolo

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- b. “But what could ever have led a God to die executed upon a cross between two villains—such a disgrace to his divine majesty? ‘Who did this?’ asks Saint Bernard. ‘It was love,’ he answers, ‘careless of its dignity.’ See how love, when it wants to make itself known, doesn’t go looking for what best befits the dignity of the lover, but what will serve best to show itself to the beloved.” *Saint Alphonsus Ligouri “The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ”*
2. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** *For Christ's love compels us*, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ***And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.***
3. **Psalm 63:3** Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

IV. MEDITATING ON THE EMPATHY AND COMPASSION OF GOD

- A. and looking up/into their face/says/“I know - I understand.”
- B. We don’t have a high priest who can’t empathize
 1. **Hebrews 4:14- 16:** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses*, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

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2. The Most High, who became embryo, fetus, was pulled out of the womb, struggled to breathe a first breath, and then cried out - his tiny scream of anguish piercing the pristine night. Born under the shadow of an insecure tyrant and soon the child of undocumented immigrants in Egypt. Thought to be an illegitimate child by those that knew the family. Still - played games, laughed, ate, learned the warmth of human embrace. Stayed up late, sat underneath a vast canopy of stars. We don't know how he felt about all of that, but we know he was human. The One who created humans with all of our painful limitations as well as our "spine-tingling freedoms" and horizons of hope - now he was subjected to them, as we are. Perhaps he experienced the pain of reaching out and being rejected. Actually, that is precisely what he experienced, in the long run. Did he ever get a crush on a girl? Did he ever pray and not feel anything...not even goose-bumps? Did he ever hide under the covers? Did he ever feel like running away and not being the messiah? Did he ever have days when he wanted to call the whole thing off? Was he human? REALLY human? Yes. In the early church days, there were a myriad of heresies making their rounds that had one thing in common: they stated that Jesus wasn't really human - he was just pretending. John, in his first epistle calls this mindset "the spirit of the antichrist." Jesus was not some half-human, half-divine hybrid; he was (and IS) fully each. And in order to be fully human, he made himself completely vulnerable to life. And even though there were probably days that he wanted to just go off somewhere and start over (a common human daydream) he remained faithful to the life that the Father gave him. We can't peer into this mystery too deeply without being carried off to silliness, but we can peer into it enough to know that there is nothing we experience today that Jesus didn't - and we have a high priest who can empathize.
- C. This world has become/a world of broken dreams/where dreamers are hard to find/and friends are few/Lord, be the gatherer of our dreams.
- D. **Matthew 9:36** - When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

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E. We see it everywhere: music, laughter, conversation. Fire, warmth, hot drinks on cold nights. Christmas carols with lyrics that vocalize a hope that seems absurd in the face of all that is broken and out of joint in the world. And we each have our moments...those moments of “peace that transcends all understanding.” In the grittiness of reality, the unpaid bills, the back-breaking debt, the uncertainty of tomorrow, the raw naked facts that seem to accumulate and snuff out the smoldering wick in the heart; into the midst of this despair comes a glint of a spark - a GLIMPSE into the heart of existence. Where the overflowing love that created us puts us back together. There is the warmth of embrace, even though we cannot quite make out who it is that embraces. This is the experience of the “Comforter” or “Strengthener” that Jesus spoke of who would teach us “all things.” The power of God is a creative power, not the brute force of destructive power - the kind humans wield to our own undoing. The power of God puts broken things back together, will not quench a smoldering wick or break a bruised reed. And this power is the supreme power. The destructive power of humans will eventually destroy any human that tries to possess it. But the power of God, displayed in the willing self-sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus and distributed by the Strengthener, is a remaking, renovating power. In our day to day existence, we all experience glimpses of each. Either in the feeling of being snubbed, ignored, lonely, far-away from the life we desire...or in the shalom of an unexplainable sense that wherever our journey takes us, unseen hands will guide, and even in the darkest valleys, we will be shepherded. Such faith is not easy to come by, unless it is a gift freely given.

V. CALLED TO UNDERSTAND THE GOD WHO MADE HIMSELF NOTHING FOR OUR SAKE

- A. Teach us again the greatest story ever/ the One who made the worlds/ became a little helpless child/ then grew to be a carpenter/ with deep, far-seeing eyes/ In time, the carpenter began to travel/ in every village challenging the people/ to leave behind their selfish ways/ be washed in living water/ and let God be their king.
- B. **John 1:14** - The Word became *flesh* and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- C. **1 John 4:1-3** - Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: *Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God*, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

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- D. **2 John 1:7** - Many deceivers, *who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.
- E. All of the attributes of God that we can try to focus on are great. Immutability, omniscience, omnipotence, sovereignty, etc. *The “list makers” of the attributes always seem to leave out “creativity” as an attribute, which tells us more about the list makers than about the God being described;* but a major attribute of God that seems to escape us completely is courage. We not only have a big, great, powerful God, but a God who would give all that up to become one of us - for something greater: love. In the incarnation of God in that dusty carpenter-rabbi from Nazareth, we see a courageous God. Any one of us can be human without much effort, because we were created human, and human existence is all we know. Yes, there is plenty of confusion and angst, even for us, created especially to inhabit the earth humanly. But imagine what it must have been like for the God the Son to empty himself of his “equality with God” which was not “something to be grasped at for his own sake” but HE MADE HIMSELF NOTHING, taking on human likeness. (Philippians 2:6-11) The seed falls from the sky and disappears into soil until it is “exalted” and “glorified” in the form of a fruit-giving tree. Or a vine. God was not satisfied with making rules or giving heavenly advice, there was something in him that thirsted to touch bare rock with the soles of human feet, to take a deep inhale of oxygen, to curl up in his mother’s arms and to SIGH the deepest sigh ever. And primarily, to show us who he really is. What did he give up to do that? And what does *that* show us about who he really is?

VI. CALLED TO MEDITATE ON THE INCARNATION OF JESUS

- A. Teach us again the greatest story ever;/the One who made the worlds/became a little, helpless child,/then grew to be a carpenter/with deep, far-seeing eyes/In time, the Carpenter began to travel,/in every village challenging the people/to leave behind their selfish ways,/be washed in living water,/and let God be their King.
- B. The incarnation declares the utter relationality of our Creator.
1. **John 1:1-5** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

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2. **vs. 14** The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

3. “Today we stand post-Crucifixion and post-Easter – forgiven and filled – but the manger beckons us to come look again. It is the place where we first hoped. Oh, that God in all of His kindness could stoop so low and cast His lot in with us! The manger is the first glimpse of His graciousness; it is the first time we believed that God could take us in, warts and all. The humility of it all causes us to bow in worship, but it is the tiny fingers of the King that allows our hearts to reach for Him. If He can become like us, then just maybe He will make a way for us to become like Him. Just maybe this will turn out to be good news after all.” *Allen Hood “The Excellencies of Christ”*

- C. C.S. Lewis called the incarnation "the Grand Miracle." He wrote: "The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation.... Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this.... It was the central event in the history of the Earth—the very thing that the whole story has been about" (*Miracles*, chapter 14).

- D. The incarnation is the punch-line of God’s love, mercy, forgiveness and sovereignty.
 1. “...the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8)

 2. The incarnation was God’s plan from the beginning. It was a glorious crescendo in the history of human existence; a crescendo that resonates now through those desiring to follow the Way of the incarnate One.

VII. CALLED TO MEDITATE ON PERSONALITY AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

- A. The ordinary people crowded round Him,/frightened to miss/a word that He was speaking,/bringing their friends, their children,/all the sick and tired,/so everyone could meet Him,/everyone be touched and given life./Some religious people were embarrassed/- they did not like the company He kept,/and never knew just what He would do next.

- B. Jesus walked with the poor, the outcasts, the blue collar workers, the unpopular white collar workers, and pretty much everyone who needed a touch of Heaven. The religious folk, who thought that they were closest to Heaven, ended up being furthest from the sovereign King of Heaven.

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- C. Through Jesus' ministry, he showed the world that He is approachable.
1. He not only accepted the outcasts, but He walked with them *as* one of them.
 2. Jesus did not only heal sickness; He forgave sins.

VIII. CALLED TO BREAK OUT OF THE PERFORMANCE BASED MINDSET INTO A LIFE THAT REFLECTS GOD'S RELATIONALITY

- A. He said, "How dare you wrap God up in good behavior,/ and tell the poor that they should be like you?/ How can you live at ease with riches and success,/ while those I love go hungry/ and are oppressed?/ It is really for such a time as this/ that I was given breath."/ His words were dangerous/ not safe or tidy.
1. **Mark 14:1** Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.
 2. **Luke 5:30** But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"
 3. **Luke 10:26** "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"
 4. **Luke 11:45** One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.
 5. **John 7:19** Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?
 6. **Romans 7:6** But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.
 7. **1 Timothy 1:8** We know that the law is good **IF** one uses it properly.

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- B. We humans are forever trying to reduce holy mysteries to manageable moralities. Jesus came to give us abundant life, not just a measly sliver. And really, an abundant life is a life with a lot of love in it. Jesus Himself said that loving God and other people with all your mind, strength and heart is what all the commandments are really all about anyway; and if they don't naturally lead to that, they're being misused. But see what Jesus did there; He didn't reduce the law and the prophets to that statement to make it smaller - he reframed the law and the prophets so that we could see the greater reality they lead us into. Abundant life is a large amount of life. It is not "the basics" or "the fundamentals." It is INTERACTION, first and foremost with God, and letting our God-Life overflow out of us into the lives of those around us. Following rules can't do that; if anything it drives people away and discourages relationships because you are afraid of being contaminated. Relationship with God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit involves being open to other people in the light of God's love for them. Hiding behind rules or "good behavior" will only distance you from others and warp your view of God. Jesus' words are dangerous because they are specifically designed to dismantle the "good behavior" facade.

IX. CALLED TO ABANDON OURSELVES TO CHRIST EVEN IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

- A. In secret His opponents said/"It surely would be better that/one person die."
"I think it would be better/if he could."/Expediency became the very death of Him/He died because THEY thought it might be good.
- B. Christ calls us to abandon ourselves to Him.
1. **Luke 9:23-27** Then he said to them all: "**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.** What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."
 2. "What is abandonment? It is forgetting your past; it is leaving the future in His hands; it is devoting the present fully and completely to your Lord. Abandonment is being satisfied with the present moment, no matter what that moment contains. You are satisfied because you know that whatever that moment has, it contains – in that instant – God's eternal plan for you." (Guyon: p. 35)

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- C. As followers of Christ, we can find peace even in the midst of suffering
1. **John 15:18-21** "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.
 2. **John 14:26-27** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**
 3. **I Peter 5:8-9** Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. **And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.**
 4. **Philippians 3:10-11** I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

X. CALLED UNDERSTAND THE CROSS

- A. You died that we might be forgiven/ Lord, but that was not the end/ You plundered death/ and made its jail-house shudder/ - strode into life/ to meet your startled friends
1. **Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
 2. **1 Corinthians 1:18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

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3. **Colossians 2:15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

- B. We are called as disciples of Jesus to “take up our cross” and follow Him. We know that He took up His cross and was crucified on it. We need to understand the significance of why a Roman instrument of torture is plastered on the back of SUV’s and on the front of houses of worship these days. What does it mean now? What did it mean then? Back in Jesus’ day, the cross was POWER. To take a stand against Caesar and the Roman Empire was to be crushed and crucified. It was inevitable. So the very sight of a cross (and Caesar made very sure that they were in plain view everywhere you went) reminded you that Big Brother was watching, and if you stepped out of line, you would be crushed just like any other insurgent. Jesus did something to the cross though. By willingly giving Himself up, and taking up HIS cross, He turned it into a symbol of hope. When Christ was resurrected, the powers of this world’s systems had no more power. A cross was the worst “the matrix” could do to you, and Jesus defeated every power and principality on the cross. Suddenly, Caesar had no more power and Christ had it all. All authority and power was given to Him, after He endured the cross. And we are to follow in His steps. The systems of the world should no longer scare us. Self-preservation becomes the way of the “old order.” In the “new world” (the one Christ rules over) we gain our lives by letting go. We give ourselves away. We find ourselves unafraid of the herd mentality of our culture and (sadly) churches. We follow Him. He makes us vulnerable. We keep going for the sake of the world we are called to serve. The cross is service TO the world, not retreating FROM the world. And we know that as we follow Christ in the Way of the Cross, we will find a much deeper and richer life than the life of self-preservation and slow destruction.

XI. CALLED TO COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL EFFECTIVELY

- A. I have a dream/that all the world will meet You/and know You, Jesus/in Your living power/that someday soon/all people everywhere will hear Your story/AND HEAR IT IN A WAY THEY UNDERSTAND.
 1. **1 Corinthians 9:22-23** To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.
 2. “It is right and inevitable that we should be much concerned about the salvation of those we love. But we must be careful not to expect or demand that their salvation should conform to some ready-made pattern of our own.” (C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 2 February 1955. p. 261)

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B. Living missionally

1. Often in the categories of Christendom one separates religious calling from secular calling, each having their place. We believe that a calling in the secular arena is as spiritual as a calling to full-time ministry.
2. “If you're a plumber and you become a Christian, you don't quit being a plumber to become a preacher. You become a great plumber because your work is infused by your faith.” *Rich Mullins*
3. "The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done....The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." *Frederick Buechner*
4. “Whatever may be our vocation we are called to be witnesses and ministers of the Divine Mercy.” *Thomas Merton*

XII. CALLED TO LIVE A PRAYER-FILLED LIFE

A. I cannot speak unless you loose my tongue;/ I only stammer and I speak uncertainly;/ but if You touch my mouth, Lord/ then I will sing the story of Your wonders!/ So many who have heard/ forget to tell the story/ Here I am, my Jesus/ teach me.

1. **Psalm 34:8a** Taste and see that the LORD is good
2. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** Pray without ceasing.

B. We are called to conversation and communion with our Creator.

1. Prayer is something we've got all wrong. We think there is only one way to pray. Bowing our heads, closing our eyes and asking for things. Maybe thanking God for things. And then asking for more stuff. Then we glance at our watch and only a minute and a half has gone by. What now? How can people pray for more than a minute? What else is there to say? In this way, “prayer” to us becomes a tiring exercise in trying to “keep up the conversation.” It feels forced. It feels fake. Maybe even boring. But that is because we've got the idea of prayer wrong. Prayer is a two-way dialogue. Prayer is primarily RESPONSE to God, not trying to force Him to do things we want Him to do. And it is a long conversation. Think of all of the long conversations you've had and who you had them with. You

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generally do not have deep soulful conversations with the bank teller or drive-through attendant. So when we try to make God into a divine bank-teller, we are not praying. God likes you. A lot. Fiercely. He wants to stay up all night talking with you. He doesn't want you to treat Him like a professional psychiatrist or heavenly waiter. He wants to be your LOVER. Yes, that word "lover" makes us think of candlelight dinners, long moonlit walks and sappy sentimentality. But think about what it's like to fall in love. You become more yourself by giving yourself to the one you love. You can't wait to tell the one you love about the little insignificant details of the day and hear theirs'. You sense now that you are no longer alone in the world, somebody truly KNOWS you. There is a joy and a lightness to being in love. But there is also the deep communion. Times you can be quiet together; not having to say anything. Intimacy is measured by the silence you can share without having to fill it with anything. Swinging on the porch swing on a summer night, sipping lemonade and listening to the cricket symphony. Listening to music together, lying underneath the stars together in a hushed sense of awe. Love consists of times you can't wait to talk about anything and everything and other times when just being quiet together and fully present to the one you love is enough. Prayer is the journey of the person who is falling in love with the God who loved him or her first. It may not be sappy, sentimental love - but it is a deep communion and enjoyment of each other. Prayer is a JOURNEY. We can move forward in prayer; make progress in prayer - become better and more receptive. There are all kinds of prayerful practices that help the journeyer find a path into the heartland of the Father. God will lead you to yours, the more you converse with Him. It's like any relationship; there's the awkwardness of getting to know each other, but that soon gives way to the naturalness of being together. Progressing in prayer is becoming more authentic and natural with God.

2. "I am hungry," said Digory. "Well, tuck in," said Fledge, taking a big mouthful of grass. Then he raised his head, still chewing and with bits of grass sticking out on each side of his mouth like whiskers, and said, "Come on, you two. Don't be shy. There's plenty for us all." "But we can't eat grass," said Digory. "H'm, h,m," said Fledge, speaking with his mouth full. "Well-h'm-don't know quite what you'll do then. Very good grass too." Polly and Digory stared at one another in dismay. "Well, I do think someone might have arranged about our meals," said Digory. "I'm sure Aslan would have, if you'd asked him," said Fledge. "Wouldn't he know without being asked?" said Polly. "I've no doubt he would," said the Horse (still with his mouth full). "But I've a sort of idea he likes to be asked."
C.S. Lewis "The Magicians Nephew"

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- C. Prayer is not a liturgical sacrament, but a relational reality. We use liturgy and we celebrate sacrament, but out of the reality that it is all a means that serves a greater purpose: interaction and relationship with God.
 - 1. lit-ur-gy: a collection of formularies for corporate worship
 - a. There is a rich depth in church history
 - b. Liturgy is helpful as long as it enhances worship. If it is done mindlessly or merely out of habit, it misses the point.
 - 2. sac-ra-ment: something regarded as possessing a sacred character or mysterious significance; a sign, token, or symbol; a visible sign of an inward grace.
 - a. A sacrament is synonymous with encounter. It is not intended as a mindless motion, but as a deep and meaningful display of devotion and relationship with God.
 - b. Sacraments point to the creativity in God's character. He chooses to relate to us in imagery, metaphor, and analogy.
- D. We are called to be a people of prayer, who do not let Christianity become a social status but an identifying mark of who we are as a people.
- E. In the furnace of prayer we are transformed inwardly as God speaks to us, and this transformation changes us outwardly. This does not make us people who know all, but people who are broken, poor in Spirit, hungry to learn all.
- F. We are called to live contemplatively and introspectively, in a way that manifests itself outwardly.
 - 1. "I believe that we ought to come back to the effort to walk and talk with God, to live in the presence of God. We have full-gospel Christianity down until it's been programmed. Gifted and talented people and men with personality have taken over the holy place, and we've forgotten that we are here to worship God. God is the source and center and foundation of all." (A.W.Tozer, *The Attributes of God: volume 2*, Wing Spread Publishers, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, 2001. p. 40)

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2. “...God, the Eternal, the Wholly Other, He who has no need whatsoever of creaturely love, Who owes this intimacy to none of His creatures, Who opens Himself and gives Himself to us. He gives Himself to us by inviting us, lifting us up and ennobling us so that we may participate in His own divine nature. It is easily said; we are used to the words; but through hearing and contemplating the words we should unaccustom ourselves to them so that we can once more become aware of the gigantic implications of God addressing us. The word which God addresses to us is a word of love: He utters it in a loud, manly voice in broad daylight, almost menacing, causing man to start out of his dreams and take notice of what he hears – yet it is also a word whispered in the night, soft and alluring, beyond comprehension, a mystery incredible even to the strongest faith, which no creature, however long he lives, will fathom. For this Voice from eternity whispers and breathes right through everything that exists in the world, all intra-mundane values; and, without depriving the things of this world of their meaning and value, it lends them a bottomless dimension, exploding whatever is closed, relativizing whatever seems ultimate, revealing hidden depths in what seems simple, sweetening pain and bringing reconciliation to what is tragic.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1986. p. 38-39)