

Greetings Student Pastor, Youth Pastor, & Youth Ministry Leader,

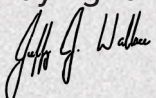
I pray all is well with you! I wanted to take a moment and personally thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be a part of this incredible weekend event. I'm incredibly grateful that you would allow us to partner with you this year to help facilitate a spiritual encounter between your students and Jesus. I honor you for dedicating your time and energy! Please know this weekend does not happen without you! Our team has been diligently praying for your students. It is our hope this weekend will change their lives forever.

In planning for our time together, The LIFT Tour team worked meticulously through the details to ensure your students will have the best experience. Our sole purpose this weekend is to intentionally create an environment where students can **Engage Scripture, Exalt Christ, and Be Equipped** with the necessary tools to pursue Christ passionately. To help generate flow and synergy, we feel it is vital that what happens in the large group environment carries over into the small group sessions. The Gospel will be presented in a clear, innovative, and applicable way during each large group session.

The small group sessions will include discussion questions to help you facilitate and cultivate a healthy dialog with your students. Please know these questions are **only a "guide"** for the weekend. You know your students; feel free to contextualize any of these questions as you deem necessary. We encourage you to take plenty of notes while listening to the sermons and ask God to give you a few points of discussion for each small group session. It is totally okay if you don't complete all the small group sessions because the conversation is rich and eventful. The goal is not to complete the questions for the sake of accomplishment; instead, the goal is to build connections that will lead to application. Be open and receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As you spend time with your students, pray that they will provide "God moments" where you can engage them in spiritual conversations that will lead to discussions concerning their salvation.

Significant: During one or two of the sessions, our communicators will extend a public invitation and give your students an opportunity to respond to the Gospel. We desire to inspire and encourage your students to experience a personal relationship with Jesus. We want every participant to fully understand what it means to be a citizen of heaven and to live redeemed. This invitation **will not** feel manipulative or come across as unauthentic. While the invitation is being presented, please be prepared to receive your students, and counsel them. We want to make sure every student understands the decision they are making. Our entire team is praying to see God move unimaginably this weekend! Thank you for allowing us to serve you and your students!

Praying for you always,



Jeff Wallace
Chief Strategic Officer



The LIFT Tour 23 Theme:

Awaken

The remarkable true story of friendship, grave clothes, and a normal Tuesday.

Jesus is not your typical rabbi. Throughout His earthly ministry, the Gospels record that He performed 37 miracles by touching, healing, and transforming countless lives. Like other events in His life, Jesus' miracles were documented by countless eyewitnesses. Each miracle was unique and significant. None were performed randomly or for amusement. They all served a specific purpose and had a profound meaning and impact. In John 11, a remarkable true story occurred on a seemingly ordinary day in the weeks leading up to Passover. It's the miraculous story of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. But when Lazarus rose from his grave, he was still bound by the same grave clothes he was buried in.

Our theme for **The LIFT Tour 23** is **AWAKEN**. This year, we are discovering what it means to step into the new life Jesus called us to. Like Lazarus, before we can step into a new life, we must first step out of the old grave clothes that are holding us back. Grave clothes that have us wrapped in sin, hurt, anger, pride, or unforgiveness. **AWAKEN** will document the true story of Lazarus...that not only demonstrates a present freedom but also foreshadows a future eternal freedom! It is a story of how, what was once dead, can now be awaked. It is a story that reminds us of the truth Paul declares in **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)**, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"*

Practical Instructions for Facilitating Discussion:

- Remember, you can never teach a person anything; you can only help them discover it. This is the purpose of the discussion questions. It is an opportunity for you to guide the students to discover the truths revealed in the passages. This is most effective when they are given the chance to answer the questions rather than being spoon-fed the answers.
- You can follow the curriculum just as it is laid out. 1) Read the passage [allow students to read as much as possible]. 2) Present the discussion questions. Allow time for students to come up with the answer. If it's quiet at first, they are likely thinking. This is what you want.
- After they have given their answers, you can share your own. Please don't get caught up or waste a lot of time on a question they may not understand. Just go on to the next question.
- There is not necessarily one right answer for each question; however, you want to listen to the answers. This will help you get an idea of the level of understanding of each student who participates.
- Don't ignore wrong answers but do your best to be diplomatic in pointing toward the truth. You can say something like, "Hmmm, that's an interesting thought, but what if we look at it this way...." You want to do your best not to embarrass anyone, because some in your group may not know the Lord as Savior just yet.

***“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”
Ephesians 5:14 (ESV)***

Get ready to experience a four-part **Docuseries-style** journey through John 11.

EPISODE 1

SALVATION:
not a normal Tuesday

EPISODE 3

COMMUNITY:
life in the company of
friendship

EPISODE 2

FREEDOM:
leaving grave clothes
behind

EPISODE 4

MISSION:
that others may be
set free

Introduction:

One of the cornerstones of the life and ministry of Jesus was the miracles He performed. The Gospels (*Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*) record 37 miracles Jesus performed during His earthly ministry. Walking on water, turning water into wine, healing people of their physical afflictions and infirmities, casting out demons. These are not stories of fantasy or fiction, but they are actual events meant to demonstrate God's power and confirm Jesus' claim to be God. And like other events in His life, Jesus' miracles were documented by countless eyewitnesses. Each miracle Jesus performed was unique and significant. None were performed randomly or for amusement. They all served a specific purpose and had a profound meaning and impact.

The Gospel of John, where our primary text comes from, is believed by many to be an eyewitness account by one of Jesus's disciples. He also happened to be one of Jesus's closest friends, which means we can be sure it is accurate and trustworthy when we read the words of John. Why? Because John was actually there. He saw these events with his very own eyes, and he wrote them down so that anyone who read his words might *"believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [they] may have life in his name"* **John 20:31**.

The stories in the Gospel of John all follow a similar pattern. Jesus performs a miracle or makes a claim about Himself, which results in misunderstanding or controversy. At the end of each story, people are forced to make a decision about who they believe Jesus is. In John 11, there is a remarkable true story that occurred on seemingly an ordinary day in the weeks leading up to Passover. It's the miraculous story of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead.

Overview of the Book of John:

John the Baptist was Jesus' eccentric cousin. Though his ministry lasted only one year, John the Baptist fully committed to accomplishing what God had called him to do. The book of John provides a treasure trove of Jesus' stories and teachings not found in the other gospels. It is also the simplest and most profound of the gospels. Rich in insight and application, this book is the greatest evangelistic tool ever written. Scholars believe what John records takes place between 6-4 BC to AD 33 in Perea, Galilee, Samaria, and Judea.

Overview of John 11:1-46:

Context matters! As we take a journey through John 11 and the incredible story of Lazarus, here is a big picture of what we are about to unpack:

1. The sickness of Lazarus (vv. 1-6)
2. Christ returns to Judea (vv. 7-10)
3. The death of Lazarus (vv. 11-16)
4. Christ arrives at Bethany (vv. 17-32)
5. Christ raises Lazarus (vv. 33-46)

What is the Backstory:

Jesus is the resurrection and the life (**John 11:25-26**) and the death of Lazarus allowed Jesus to reveal Himself as such. At this particular time, Jesus was being rejected by almost everyone. He was an unwelcome guest in most homes. He was walking about preaching and proclaiming that He was one with God and the Son of God Himself (**John 10:22-42**). Just imagine a man making such a claim. He was thought to be “mad” and demon-possessed (**Mark 3:20-21; Luke 4:25**). His own family was even having difficulty with Him at this time. They were apparently so embarrassed by His claims and the rumors of His insanity that on one occasion, they traveled a great distance to bring Him home, so He would not be harmed (**Matt. 12:46-50**).

However, there was one family, who always opened their home to Jesus when He was in and around Jerusalem, and that was the family of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, who were brother and sisters. They lived in Bethany, a suburb about two miles outside of Jerusalem. Their closeness to Jesus is why the sisters felt so free to interrupt Jesus’ evangelistic tour with the request to help their sick brother. Jesus’ great love for this family is shown throughout this passage. (Walvoord & Zuck, 1983)

Leadership Takeaway (**John 11:35**):

The shortest verse in the Bible reveals a man with iron strength demonstrating a velvet touch. Jesus knew He would soon raise Lazarus from the dead, yet *He wept*. The strongest leader is a man or woman who feels compassion for others and isn’t afraid to show it. (Buzzell et al., 2013)

Answer

SALVATION:

NOT A NORMAL TUESDAY

*“Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair.) So, the sisters sent word to Jesus. ‘Lord, the one you love is sick.’ When He heard this, Jesus said, ‘**This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.**’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was for two more days.”*

John 11:1-6 (NIV)

Text Commentary: In this passage, we see two things:

1. (vv. 1-3) A request is brought to Jesus.

A. Now a man named Lazarus was sick: This begins perhaps the most remarkable miracle Jesus performed. One might say it is foolish to think one miracle is more complicated than another, but this seventh sign of John’s gospel is unique.

B. He {Lazarus} was from Bethany: “Lazarus,’ the Greek form of Eleazar = God is my Help.”

C. Mary and her sister Martha (*This Mary, whose brother now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair*): Jesus had a close relationship with this family. When Lazarus was sick it was natural for them to bring their need to Jesus. It was expected that if He miraculously met the needs of so many others, He would meet their need, also.

D. Lord, the one you love is sick: Mary and Martha did not specifically ask Jesus to come and heal Lazarus. They felt they did not need to, that it was enough to simply tell Jesus what the problem was. (Wiersbe, 2007)

“The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men.” (Spurgeon, 1970)

2. (vv. 4-6) Jesus responds with a delay.

When Jesus heard that Lazarus had died, His response was a bit unexpected and unique. He said, *“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”* Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

Critical Question: Why would He (Jesus) do that? **Kingdom Answer:**

A. This sickness will not end in death: Lazarus was already dead when Jesus said this, but He knew the end result would ultimately bring glory to God, not death. Jesus also knew that the events recorded in this chapter would set the religious leaders determination to kill Jesus. This meant the end result would be that the Son of God may be glorified in His death and resurrection.

“We should have said that the sickness was unto death, but, ultimately, to the glory of God. But he who sees the end from the beginning streaks with a grandeur of style which could not be imitated by us. So, the Lord speaks of things, not as they seem to be, nor even as they are in the present moment, but as they shall be in the long run.” (Spurgeon, 1970)

B. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus: John reminds us that Jesus genuinely loved these sisters and their brother. It was an important reminder, showing that testing their faith was not a denial of His love.

C. He stayed two more days: It seems strange that Jesus did not immediately act upon this great need. The delay was probably mystifying to the disciples and agonizing to Mary and Martha. “Lightfoot quotes a remarkable belief of Rabbi Ben Kaphra: ‘Grief reaches its height on the third day. For three days the spirit hovers about the tomb, if perchance it may return to the body. But when it sees the fashion of the countenance changed, it retires and abandons the body.’” (Lightfoot, 2021)

NOTE: In John’s Gospel there are similar examples of times when someone dear to Jesus asked Him to do something (**John 2:1-11; 7:1-10**). In each of these moments, Jesus responded in the same way. Jesus first refused to grant their request, and then He fulfilled it after showing that He does things according to the timing and will of God, not man. Through His actions, Jesus demonstrated that His delays were not denials. They would bring greater glory to God.

What this story teaches us about Jesus and SALVATION:

1. JESUS IS NEVER SURPRISED.

“When He heard this, Jesus said, *‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.’* Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was for two more days.” **John 11:4-6 (NIV)**

Jesus [who is God in the flesh] is never caught off-guard. He is never unaware. He knows everything fully. The Bible and theology teach that God is “all-knowing” and “omniscient.” The word “omniscient” comes from two Latin words: *Omnis* (meaning “all”) and *Scientia* (meaning “knowledge”). These sisters, whether it was a first response or a last resort, present their problem to the all-knowing Jesus. Not because He was unaware of what was happening but because He wanted to have an interaction with them. (Walvoord & Zuck, 1983)

At this moment, Jesus was fully aware of what was going on. Likewise, God, the Father, is fully aware of your struggles. He is just waiting to hear from you! When these sisters presented their problem to Jesus, He responded with a promise – *“This sickness will not end in death.”* But sometimes Jesus’ promises look different than we imagine. As we see in this story, Lazarus’ sickness actually does end in death!

NOTE: Even though things in our life may look fatal, never forget it is never final until God has the last say! As we continue to read this story, we also see that:

2. JESUS IS NEVER LATE.

NOTE: Jesus’ timing is different than our timing. Jesus is the only person in the history of the world always to be 100% on time. Notice when Jesus gets word that His friend Lazarus is sick, He doesn’t drop everything and rush right to his side. He doesn’t tell the messenger to go back home and let Mary and Martha know, *“Their faith has made him well”* like He had done in the past:

- *“Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”* **Matthew 9:22 (ESV)**
- *“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”* **Mark 5:34 (ESV)**
- *“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”* **Luke 17:19 (ESV)**

Now when Jesus gets the news, this time, He waits...

“On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet Him, but Mary stayed home. ‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if You had only been here, my brother would not have died.’” **John 11:17-20 (NIV)**

You can tell that by the time Jesus gets there, Mary and Martha are frustrated, grieved, and maybe even angry. They felt like Jesus didn’t show up ... like He didn’t come through for them like they knew He could and should. They felt like all hope was lost. They feel like it is too late for Lazarus.

NOTE: Before Jesus’ time on earth, miracles were divided into two categories according to Jewish tradition:

- Those anyone could perform if empowered to do so.
- Those reserved only for the Messiah.

This was one of those **“Messiah Only”** miracles. Not simply because Jesus raised a man from the dead (**Luke 7:11-17**) but because it was the timing that made this miracle so significant. When did Jesus arrive? On the fourth day. Rabbis taught that it was possible for someone to return from the dead if done within three days. They believed that the spirit of a person would hover around the dead body for three days after death, but after those three days, the spirit would depart, and returning from the dead was no longer possible. When Jesus raised Lazarus on the fourth day, He was clearly demonstrating His power over death and the grave, but also over time and expectation.

TRUTH: Despite how we might sometimes feel, Jesus is never late and always has the power to change everything.

3. JESUS ALWAYS HAS COMPASSION.

“When Jesus saw her and the Jews who had come along with her weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ He asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept.” John 11:33-35 (NIV)

This moment is momentous! Why? Because at this moment, Jesus ... **God in the flesh** cried! The same God who:

- Breathed the stars into existence.
- Set the sun in its place and the earth on its axis.
- Formed man from the dust of the ground and put breath in your lungs

He cried! Jesus showed compassion by sharing in their sorrow. Why would He do this? We know how this story ends—just a few seconds later, He [Jesus] will raise Lazarus from the dead. In just a few moments, Mary and Martha will witness a miracle and be reunited with the one they love. Jesus was the only one who knew what was about to happen. It is significant that Jesus didn’t tell them to stop wailing, crying, and grieving. Instead, He sat down outside the grave of His friend and cried. It may be the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is arguably one of the most meaningful, *“Jesus wept.” John 11:35 (NIV)*

The Bible says, *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18 NIV).* *“Our God not only knows our pain, but He also feels our pain. He rejoices with those who rejoice, and He weeps with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15).* And in what Jesus does for Lazarus – we get a glimpse of what is possible for us. **While death may be a part of the story... It doesn’t have to be the END of the story.**

4. JESUS ALWAYS HAS THE FINAL WORD.

“The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25-26 (NIV)

“Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” John 11:43 (NIV)

FACT: When Jesus shows up, even the most tragic moments are an opportunity for a miracle. When Jesus shows up the ordinary can become extraordinary. When Jesus shows up there is no such thing as a normal Tuesday, or a regular Friday. Because every moment of every day is an opportunity for God's wonder-working, miraculous, life-giving power to be on display.



**BOTTOM
LINE:**

When Jesus SHOWS UP, dead things COME TO LIFE.

TESTIMONY OPTION: Consider telling your salvation story here

GOSPEL PRESENTATION:

In the same way, Jesus called Lazarus forth from the grave; He wants to do the same thing for you today. Ever since sin and death first entered the world (**Genesis 3**), every person has been born physically alive but spiritually dead from that point until now. Therefore, without being awakened by the power of God and the love of Jesus, we will remain in spiritual graves. We will die an eternal death and be separated from God from now until eternity. Students, here is the good news, the same God who knew you before you were formed in your mother's womb (**Jeremiah 1:4**), is the same God that stepped out of heaven and into history, in the person of Jesus.

Jesus lived a sinless life (which none of us can claim to have done). He was accused of crimes He never committed. He was wrongfully convicted of those crimes and sentenced to die a horrible, brutal death on the cross. Jesus, who is God, died a death He did not deserve so you and I can live a life we do not deserve. The story of Lazarus coming back from the dead simply foreshadows what is to come. Three days after being hung on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead, conquering sin, death, and the grave – once and for all. You, too, can experience that resurrection power by trusting Jesus Christ for your salvation. You can experience new, not just somewhere, someday, but right here, right now. How?

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10 CSB). Students, when you acknowledge your sin, believe in the power of the resurrection, and confess that Jesus is Lord, you too can experience this awakening.

EPISODE 1 | SALVATION: *Not a Normal Tuesday*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What are a few things that stuck out to you most from this first episode?
2. Go around the room/circle and share which of the three truths about Jesus connected to you most. Why did that truth impact you so much?
3. Read **John 11:17-23** again. What point do you think Jesus was trying to make to Martha and Mary at that moment?
4. Has there been a moment (or moments) in your life when God has transformed a situation that seemed fatal and turned it around for good? In other words, have you ever had some “not so normal” moments in your life where God stepped in, and it turned out better than you could ever think or imagine?
5. What did you hear about Jesus in this episode that you either forgot, didn’t know, or had to be reminded of?

AWAKEN: The remarkable true story of friendship, grave clothes, and a normal Tuesday.

EPISODE

2

FREEDOM:

LEAVING GRAVE CLOTHES BEHIND

*“When He said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘**Lazarus, come out!**’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘**Take off the grave clothes and let him go**’” John 11:43-44 (NIV)*

Text Commentary

1. (vv. 43-44) Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

Jesus simply called Lazarus out of the tomb. Others whom God used to raise dead bodies in the Scriptures often used far more elaborate procedures. Jesus did not have to use any elaborate procedures. His authority was enough.

A. Jesus called in a loud voice: John is referring to a loud decisive tone of authority. The loud voice was not, of course, because a loud voice was needed to make the dead hear. Probably it was, in part at least, so that the crowd could know that this was no work of magic but the very power of God. Wizards mutter their incantations and spells (ref. **Isaiah 8:19**). That was not necessary for the Son of God. (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003) Jesus said on a previous occasion that a time would come when all who were in their graves would hear His voice (**John 5:28**).

B. Lazarus, come out: Jesus spoke to a dead body as if Lazarus were alive because He is God... *“the who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist” (Romans 4:17 CSB).* **NOTE:** The word Jesus spoke was brief, direct, and imperative and can be paraphrased, ‘Lazarus! This way out!’ as if Jesus were directing someone lost in a gloomy dungeon.” (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003)

C. The dead man came out: Jesus fought death at Lazarus’ tomb and plundered the grave. Jesus told death that He would soon conquer it completely.

D. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen: Lazarus was not resurrected but revived. When he arose, he was still bound in grave clothes. He was a man that was wholly raised but not wholly freed. He was a “living man in the garments of death!” (Spurgeon, 1970)

“What a man can do for himself God will not do for him, and what Christian people can do for sinners they must not expect the Lord to do, they must work themselves according to the ability God has given them up to the point of possibility, and then they may look for divine interposition.” (Spurgeon, 1970)

Did You Know:

It is possible to be alive in Christ but still look and smell dead. What do I mean by that?

Jesus just called Lazarus FROM the grave. Lazarus was not resting or asleep; he was dead! Not only was he dead, but he had also been in the grave for FOUR DAYS. Then, Jesus shows up, speaks with a loud authoritative voice, and says... *“Lazarus, come out!”* Why is this important? Because that phrase in this miraculous story serves as a parallel for the Christian life! Here in John 11, the phrase is *“Lazarus, come out!”* However, maybe today, Jesus is saying.... “_ {Your Name}_, come out!”

These simple words in this text help us to understand why so many people are alive in Christ, but never truly find freedom. From this text, we can understand even though Lazarus was fully alive ... he still looked and smelled dead. Even though Jesus had given him new life, he was still wrapped up in old graveclothes, which symbolized an old life. Even though Jesus brought him back from death, he was still dressed like a dead man. Even after his resurrection, Lazarus was still bound by his graveclothes. **Is it possible that, like Lazarus, many Christians have found new life in Christ, but they have yet to lose their graveclothes and find freedom?** How many of us have been called out of the grave, never realizing we’ve brought our graveclothes out with us?

QUESTION: What do grave clothes represent? Modern-day grave clothes are ...

ANYTHING that holds you back from **EVERYTHING** that God has for you.

When Lazarus comes out of the grave, he doesn’t come out running, skipping, or yelling.... *“I was once dead but now I am alive!”* No, Lazarus came out of the grave shuffling. When Lazarus walked out of the grave, the text (vs. 44) says his *“hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.”*

Think about it, Lazarus was completely bound. Imagine...His **feet** were wrapped up. He probably couldn’t go where Jesus said to go. His **hands** were wrapped up. He probably couldn’t do what Jesus said to do. There was linen covering his **face**, which means he probably couldn’t hear all that Jesus needed him to hear... he couldn’t see what Jesus needed him to see, and he couldn’t say what Jesus needed him to say.

Jesus wanted him to be completely free! For Jesus, simply bringing Lazarus back from the dead, wasn’t enough. He wanted Lazarus to experience life AND freedom. He [Jesus] desired that he [Lazarus] would be both AWAKENED and FREE. Many of you in this room needs to hear that today. Why? Because a lot of you are alive in Christ. You’ve heard Jesus call you forth. You’ve crossed from death to life, but you still aren’t FREE. Free from guilt, self-sabotage, unforgiveness, shame, anger, frustration, insecurity, etc. Guess what ... God has more for you. He has freedom for you.

POINT: He wants to help you shed **ANYTHING** that holds you back from **EVERYTHING** He has for you.

WE EXPERIENCE FREEDOM WHEN WE:

1.) REALIZE WE ARE WEARING THE WRONG THING.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

FUN QUESTION: Have you ever shown up somewhere wearing the wrong clothing? It is so uncomfortable. You feel like everybody is staring at you.

ILLUSTRATION OPTION: *Tell a story about showing up somewhere in the wrong clothes. Talk specifically about how you were unable to enjoy that experience to the fullest because you had on the wrong clothes.*

NOTE: It would be bizarre for Lazarus to live the rest of his life wrapped up like a mummy. It wouldn't make much sense, and he would probably look weird to other people. In the same way – you can't live the life God has for you until you understand there are some things in your life (spiritually, mentally, and emotionally) that need to come off. There are some things on (about) you that look a lot more like your old life than the new one.

2.) ACKNOWLEDGE WE NEED NEW CLOTHES.

Allow me to be captain obvious for a moment. The idea of taking off the old stuff suggests a need to put on some new stuff! It's not enough to just take something off. You've got to put on new clothes. Until we choose to clothe ourselves in the new life that Christ has given us, we will pick back up the old life and put it right back on. Why? Because "we think" something is better than nothing. The old life is comfortable. The old life is easy. Who cares that it's rotting? Who cares that it smells like death? Some of us need some new clothes. If we are going to walk in the fullness and freedom that God has for us, we must put on HIS wardrobe (**Colossians 3**). We must be clothed in the things of God.

Extra Text Option: In **Zechariah 3:4** (CSB), "Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. So, the angel of the Lord spoke to those standing before him and said, 'Take off his filthy clothes!' Then he [the angel] said, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with festive robes.'" (Holman, 2017)

In contrast, you can't simply put the new life on over the old one. If you need a fresh bandage on the wound, you must take the old one off and clean out the wound before you put the new one on. If you don't deal with what's going on underneath, you aren't healing it; you are hiding it. You've been content to cover it up instead of doing the more complex work of acknowledging it, addressing it, and healing from it. Do you know what happens when you don't treat a wound? Infection. Do you know what infections do? They spread. You are wearing the wrong thing. And you need new clothes.

The apostle Paul talks about this idea a lot in scripture ... Romans 6, Ephesians 2, and Ephesians 4. However, in Colossians 3, after outlining all the evil things we need to cut out of our lives, Paul issues this challenge. He writes:

"Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." **Colossians 3:12-14 (NLT)**

FACT: In Christ Jesus, we get new clothes. Not only are we clothed in the righteousness of Christ, but the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives and empowers us to live a holy life ... one that is pleasing to God.

You can be clothed in mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness ... These things our world desperately needs! And above all else, Paul says ... Clothe yourselves in love. Here is the truth – if there is a uniform for a Christian, it is love. I think that is why Jesus says:

"By this, everyone will know that you are My disciples if you love one another." **John 13:35 (NIV)**

Here is the final truth you need to understand about graveclothes today...

3.) CONFESS WE CAN'T GET THEM OFF ON OUR OWN.

"Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'" John 11:44b (NIV)

Notice that Jesus doesn't tell Lazarus to take them off because he couldn't do it in his own power or strength. He needed help. Whether we realize it or not, the graveclothes that we are bound by, we can't get them off on our own. We need people to help us. Brothers and sisters in Christ ... pastors, small group leaders, parents, teachers, counselors, and loved ones. Sometimes, the biggest struggle in our life is likely the one we haven't confessed to yet. We all need people in our lives to help us lose our graveclothes. Students, the enemy will try to convince you to keep your graveclothes to yourself. He will tell you that you are the only one dealing with it, people won't understand, and they will judge you. But those are lies designed to keep you wrapped in your own life. God puts people in your life to come around you and to help you walk in the fullness and freedom of your new and everlasting life.

The most important thing about GRAVE CLOTHES...



BOTTOM LINE:

Freedom: Knowing that JESUS wore GRAVE CLOTHES, so that YOU wouldn't have to.

According to the Gospel of **John 10:10** (NIV), *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."*

Before we break, there are a few questions I need you to reflect on ... right now and later in your small group time:

- What are some graveclothes you need to take off?
- What are some spiritual things you need to put on?
- Who do you have in your life right now that can help you accomplish the two questions above?

EPISODE 2 | FREEDOM: *Leaving Grave Clothes Behind*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What part of this episode impacted you the most? Why?
2. In **John 11:43-44**, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but he was still bound in his grave clothes. What are some examples of how we live/look like that today?
3. If you are being honest, what are some modern-day grave clothes you are currently wearing? What's holding you back from taking those grave clothes off?
4. Look at point #3. Accountability is essential to freedom. Is it hard to admit your need for help with removing your grave clothes?
5. A prayer for freedom. Take a few moments (as a group), circle up, and pray for one another that God will give each person the courage and boldness to leave their grave clothes behind.

COMMUNITY:

LIFE IN THE COMPANY OF FRIENDSHIP

Introduction:

Let's reread **John 11:43-45 (NIV)** and focus on the last sentence:

*"When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. **Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'**"*

Notice, who did Jesus tell to take off the graveclothes? Not Lazarus. Right? He addresses *THEM* (Mary and Martha). Why? Because Lazarus could not get these graveclothes off on his own. He was dependent on the people around him (his community) to help him walk in freedom.

NOTE: Jesus did not miraculously remove the graveclothes from Lazarus, but He asked helpers to do so. Jesus did what only God could do (raise Lazarus from the dead), and then He looked for others' cooperation for the completion of Lazarus' deliverance. (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003)

So, let me ask you ... Who are your *"them?"* Who are the people God has placed in your life that will help you walk in your freedom? What does your community look like? Another way to ask this question ... Who are your friends? And what does that word even mean? A lot of people struggle to understand what **true friendship** is.

Question 1: How many of you have ever had a bad friend?

ILLUSTRATION OPTION: Tell a funny (appropriate) story of a "friend" who convinced you to do something incredibly stupid or crazy.

Question 2: How many of you have ever had a good friend?

ILLUSTRATION OPTION: Share a story of a friend who helped you to be better in some way.

Here is the truth: You were not meant to do life alone. You were created for community. In fact, you can't be everything God has called you to be absent from being a part of a faith community. We need each other. We all need "THEM." The key is living a faith-filled life is having the right "THEM" in your community!

The Bible describes this in so many ways...

- *"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble."* **Proverbs 13:20 (NLT)**
- *"Don't be fooled: 'bad company corrupts good character.'"* **1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV)**
- *"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."* **Proverbs 27:17 (NLT)**

What about your friends?

"We live in a world where the term friendship doesn't mean what it used to. So many of our 'friendships' are really just acquaintances or associations. We have things in common with that person, or we follow each other on Instagram ... But just because the term has been watered down a bit doesn't mean that there is no authentic notion of friendship that remains and is worth cultivating... Everyone journeys; no one should journey alone." (Brent Crowe, Moments 'til Midnight)

So, what does a real community look like? Well, for this session, we're going to answer that question by not only highlighting what Jesus said in **John 11:44** but also looking at a story in **Mark 2**. This story will help us get a glimpse of some qualities of a God-honoring friendship...

"When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news quickly spread that He was back home. Soon the house where He was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While He was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above His head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, 'My child, your sins are forgiven... Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!' And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were amazed and praised God, exclaiming, We've never seen anything like this before!" **Mark 2:1-5, 11-12 (NLT)**

What can we learn about Godly COMMUNITY from these friends?

1.) THEY KNEW WHERE THEY WERE GOING.

When Jesus returned... the news spread quickly... While He was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived... (**vv. 1 & 3a**)

They *arrived*. These men came from somewhere else. Perhaps, they were on their way to hear Jesus speak themselves. With amazing speed, the news spread that a miracle-working Teacher had come to Capernaum, and wherever our Jesus went, great crowds gathered. They wanted to see Him heal the sick and cast out demons. In **Mark 2**, Jesus came to bring three wonderful gifts: forgiveness, fulfillment, and freedom. (Wiersbe, 2007)

So, these men knew where they were going and carried this paralyzed man directly to Jesus. They were heading TO Jesus. *HE* [Jesus] was their destination. They weren't just wandering aimlessly. Their life had direction. They were on a mission. They were aiming for something. They were going TO JESUS. **Question** ... Where are your friends going? In what direction is their life headed? Are your friends headed toward Jesus? Or are they headed towards something else? Headed towards parties? Headed towards jail? Headed towards whatever...

Wherever your friends are headed is exactly where they will end up taking you. These were good friends because they knew where they were headed, and they were headed toward Jesus.

2.) THEY CARED ENOUGH TO CARRY HIM.

“... carrying a paralyzed man on a mat.” (vv. 3b)

Who knows how long and how far these four men had to carry this guy? It could have been miles. It could have been hours. Yet, they cared enough to go the distance and carry him to Jesus! They were willing to do whatever it took! You might not need friends to carry you physically, but we all need friends that can carry us when we are spiritually or emotionally weary. We all need people who can encourage us and lift us up when life gets hard. Scripture says this is a mark of someone who is obedient to Jesus:

“Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.” Galatians 6:2-3 (NLT)

In your current community ... Do they care enough to “carry” you? If you are going through something difficult, will they bail on you, or will they pray for you, pick you up, encourage you, and be present with you?

Imagine if these guys hadn’t been willing to carry this man. This amazing story, his miracle, none of it would have happened. What are we missing out on by not surrounding ourselves with people who care enough to carry us, even when it gets hard?

3.) THEY DIDN’T GIVE UP ON HIM.

“They couldn’t bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above His head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus.” (vv. 4)

There were so many opportunities for these four friends to give up along the way. Just picking up the man on the mat would have been physically exhausting. Every step they took was another reason to give up. Then, after all that, they get there and can’t even get in the door! They could have easily walked away. They could have easily given up. They could have just stayed outside and listened to Jesus, but they knew this guy needed an encounter with Jesus.

QUESTION: Are the people you hang with settling for hanging outside? Are they okay with going through the motions in their Christian faith? **Or** are they passionately pursuing Jesus, willing to do whatever hard work it takes to get closer to Him? There is also something you need to understand about these four friends. The roofs were primarily made of straw and mud mixture, meaning these guys had to dig through dirt and mud to ensure their friend had an opportunity for deliverance. These are the kinds of people we need to surround ourselves with, not people who quit on us when our lives start to stink, but people who are willing to dig through the dirt with us to get us closer to Jesus!

Here is the question you must ask yourself: Do you see these qualities in your friends (community)? If not, maybe it is time for a change. BECAUSE...



**BOTTOM
LINE:**

If you want to experience **GODLY COMMUNITY**, you are going to need some **FAITH-FILLED FRIENDS**.

What about your friends?

WE LIVE IN A WORLD where the term friendship doesn't mean what it used to. So much of our 'friendships' are really just acquaintances or associations. We have stuff in common with that person, or we follow each

other on Instagram... But just because the term has been watered down a bit doesn't mean that there is not an authentic notion of friendship that still remains and is worth cultivating... Everyone journeys, no one should journey alone.

Brent Crowe, *Moments 'til Midnight*

EPISODE 3 | COMMUNITY: *Life in the Company of Friendship*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What part of this story in **Mark 2** did you connect with most? Why?
2. Share with the group about some of the most positive and healthy friendships in your life. How have these friendships helped you along your faith journey?
3. How can you be intentional about putting yourself in a healthy, Godly community that will lift you rather than tear you down? Likewise, are you intentionally building up the people in your community, or have you found yourself lately tearing people down and not pointing them to Jesus?
4. Why is it so hard to find Godly community today?
5. Reread together the quote from Brent Crowe's book, *Moments 'til Midnight*, on friendship. What part of the quote stands out to you the most? Why?

Introduction:

The news about what Jesus had done for Lazarus spread quickly. Almost immediately after this miracle, the religious leaders who opposed Jesus started plotting against His life because they were concerned the messages He was preaching, and the miracles He was performing might cause them to lose their political status and power. One would imagine Lazarus never stopped proclaiming the good news of what Jesus had done for him and what He could do for others. But there are two verses that prove more specifically that this moment continued to be a topic of conversation for people.

“Therefore, many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what Jesus did, believed in Him.” John 11:45 (NIV)

A Quick Text Commentary: The people’s reaction is known as “the reaction of faith”:

- **The People** | *“Many of the Jews who came to Mary”*: Those who came to join in the sorrow of the grieving sisters did not expect that their reason for grief would be taken away.
- **The Response** | *“Saw what Jesus did, believed in Him”*: This was undeniably an impressive work of God, and for many, it helped them put their trust in who Jesus said He was by seeing what He did. (Walvoord, & Zuck, 1983)

First, in keeping with their custom, many Jews gathered around Mary and Martha to mourn the loss of their brother Lazarus. This would have meant that there was a great crowd of people present on the day that Lazarus was called back from death and out of the tomb. They watched him shuffle out of the grave, fully alive. They watched the graveclothes be removed. They watched Lazarus walking away from that gravesite. What was the result? They believed in Jesus. They believed He was the Son of God. They believed He was the Messiah. They also believed Jesus was the resurrection and the life.

Likewise, after this weekend, others will believe in Jesus because of what He has done in you. Jesus is going to use you to be salt and light (**Matthew 5:13-16**). There are going to be some witnesses to your life who cannot help but believe God is who He says He is because of what He has done in you. John, the author of this gospel, makes it clear why he even records the words and works of Jesus:

“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” John 20:31 (NIV)

The whole point is BELIEF. In a way, the same thing can be said about our lives. God wants to write such a beautiful, powerful, and extraordinary story with our lives. So that through our lives, people may believe in Jesus and, by believing, have abundant life in His name.

TRUTH: This miracle wasn't just for Lazarus but for all who witnessed it. And what did they do with their newfound belief in Jesus? They shared it! They told anyone and everyone who would listen to them about the resurrection power of Jesus, what He did for Lazarus, and what He could do for them. John affirms this truth in **John 12:17 (NIV)**: *"Now the crowd that was with Him when He called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word."* Basically, after they witnessed this miracle, they continued to testify. They continued to testify about the person and work of Jesus.

Now, what about you? Will you continue to testify about what you have seen? Will you continue to testify about what you have experienced? Will you continue to testify about Jesus so others might experience the same freedom you have experienced?

You are saved to be sent! Your AWAKENING is not just for you but also for those around you. Remember the words of the Great Commission... Some of the last instructions that Jesus gives to his followers before He ascends to heaven:

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" **Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)**

There are a lot of people who memorize these verses. Unfortunately, fewer people live them out. Jesus basically says to His followers, all that I have taught you, all that I have shown you, all that I have done for you has been for this purpose – so that you might do the same for others. That is YOUR MISSION.... that others might be set free! I think it's helpful to break down a bit of what Jesus says here...

This MISSION can become ours when we realize...

1. THE REALITY THAT IS ESTABLISHED.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me [Jesus]." (vv. 18)

2. THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT IS GIVEN.

"Go and make disciples of all nations..." (vv. 19)

3. THE REASSURANCE THAT IS PROVIDED.

"And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (vv. 20b)

Again... You've been saved to be sent! Your salvation is not just for you, but also for those around you. Collectively we have the potential to participate in what God is doing. The choice is entirely ours to make. If we choose to participate, we get to tell a different story with our lives. We get to see and celebrate the miracle of others' experience of freedom. We get to be a part of the work of God. We get to see other people brought from death to life. We get to see people walk in fullness and freedom. We get to see people understand their place in the body of Christ. We get to see people released to change the world.

"Paul stated, 'So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!'" 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT)

The MISSION Matters: Did you know...

- Every fire begins with a spark.
- Every revolution begins with a choice.
- Every awakening begins with an individual.

A Moment in History:

In the 1700s, an amazing revolution and revival swept across the 13 American colonies. That movement was known as **The Great Awakening**. It was led primarily by two men; one named George Whitfield and another named Jonathan Edwards. They lived in a time when religion was stale; people were inclined to dismiss the idea of God and faith, but those who did call themselves Christians longed for more. It is one of the most incredible things in American history, simply because of the change it brought from one town to the next. They would go into one place, begin to share Jesus, and, in a matter of days, the whole place would change. People were different. People were getting saved left and right, entire families were impacted by the word of God, and towns were literally being transformed from the inside out. (Tracy, 2019)

The powerful thing was that people were being changed. Their conversations were different; their thought life was different, their outlook, actions, passions, and desires. Everything was changed entirely. It spread like wildfire. Town to town to town. This movement was so powerful there was no such thing as a casual Christian ... You were a believer of Jesus, and you gave Him everything, or you didn't follow Him at all. One by one, people completely surrendered everything to Jesus. This wasn't just happening with older people. Every generation was impacted. Students your age were completely transformed and different than the world around them ... But, somewhere along the way, we lost it. Most of us have gone back to sleep...

Inspired by these events, a man named Lawrence Tribble penned these incredible words in a piece he entitled **AWAKEN, A 1700's Poem:**

One man awake...awakens another. The second awakens his next-door brother. The three awake can rouse a town by turning the whole place upside down. The many awake can cause such a fuss that it finally awakens the rest of us. One man up, with dawn in his eyes, surely then, multiplies.

Our prayer for this weekend is that God would begin to speak to every generation represented here today, and we collectively pray that we will be a part of seeing another great awakening! A move of God so powerful that it shakes us all to realize our desperate need for Him. Despite all that is happening in our world today, we must still believe a new great awakening is possible - an awakening here today. Don't let this experience be just another weekend. Let this start something that will later be recorded in the history books. This awakening could and will start with you!



**BOTTOM
LINE:**

God awakens YOU, so that you can
awaken OTHERS.

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:14 (ESV)

EPISODE 4 | MISSION: *That Others May be Set Free*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Take a few minutes individually and write down some of the ways God has gifted you. Here is another way to think about it: What are you good at? Now, answer the following question: How can you use the gifts that God has given you to help others experience the freedom we've been talking about this weekend?
2. Read as a group, **Matthew 5:13-16** (being salt and light). How does that apply to what you heard today in this final session?
3. How comfortable are you with sharing your faith/testimony with others? What do you struggle with most as it relates to sharing your faith/testimony with others?
4. Read **John 11:45**. Based on the topic of Episode 4, what is the significance of this moment? Meaning, what was Jesus wanting to accomplish from this moment?
5. How will you challenge yourself to AWAKEN to the "mission" God has for you?

What are Grave Clothes...Exactly?

This year, **The LIFT Tour 23** theme was the story of Lazarus in **John 11**. This story is complex and multi-layered. However, the main objective for walking through this text is to help every person in attendance discover what it means to step into the new life Jesus called us to. Like Lazarus, before we can step into a new life, we must first **step out of the old grave clothes** holding us back. **Grave clothes** that have us wrapped up in sin, hurt, anger, pride, or unforgiveness. **Let's go deeper!**

What are grave clothes exactly? Symbolically speaking, grave clothes are typically...

First, grave clothes are ... A SIN WE CAN NOT “SEEMINGLY” LEAVE

#BIGFACT: Just because you are alive in Christ does not mean you will never sin again. Have you ever said, “Every time I take two steps forward, I seem to take four steps backward!” Perhaps some of us have yet to experience “freedom” in our lives because there is a pattern of sin we seemingly cannot escape. Often, we inadvertently find ourselves returning to the same old destructive behaviors God once delivered us from. Honestly, so many Christians get caught up here. They say to themselves, “I love Jesus, but I just can't seem to break free from this sin.”

Well, guess what? Even the Apostle Paul talked about how he loved God, and still, he continually found himself doing the very things he did not want to do. In **Romans 7:19-21 (NIV)**, Paul states, “*For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*”

But here is YOUR TRUTH ... and Paul's follow-up to **Romans 7**. Two simple verses found in **Romans 8:1-2**, “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*” (NIV)

Second, grave clothes come from...A HURT WE ONCE HAVE RECEIVED

- **QUESTION:** Have you ever been hurt or wronged by someone in some way?
- **COMMON ANSWER:** YES! Most of us have been hurt differently and to varying degrees by others.

TRUTH: It is often helpful to know we are not alone in our pain. The hurts we have received from others can quickly become *something* that keeps us from *everything* God has for us. **How?** Maybe you've never shared how you have been hurt with anyone—keeping that a secret allows the pain and the hurt to grow. We need to bring it into the light. Maybe you carry guilt and shame because you feel you may have deserved what happened to you. Perhaps when you think of how you have been hurt, your only response is to be filled with anger, rage, or frustration.

If that's you, please highlight the following phrase: **MY FREEDOM lies on the other side of your forgiveness.** Now listen, some of you have been seriously hurt, mistreated, or abused. Please understand no one should ever downplay or trivialize the severity of what may have happened to you. The goal of this moment is to help you know that, regardless of what has been done to you, God wants you to experience life and freedom in Jesus's name. **Forgiveness is possible.**

Lastly, grave clothes tend to be ... A LIE WE BELIEVE:

There are some "lies" that are harmless. Believing in the tooth fairy or the easter bunny will never hurt anyone spiritually. However, there are other "lies" that are far more costly, far more significant, and have far more of an impact on our souls. If you have ever believed the lie... I am not good enough...I'm not smart enough, pretty enough, skinny enough...or fill in the blank, will you begin today to believe in THE TRUTH that's found in God's Word?

- *"I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." Psalm 139:14 (NIV)*
- *"You are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a royal priest, a holy nation, God's very own possession." 1 Peter 2:9 (NLT)*
- *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment."*

2 Timothy 1:7 (CSB)

You matter to God! And now that you know that it is no longer necessary for you to continue to wear the grave clothes you've had on for so long! As we see in **John 11**, with the story of Lazarus, once we have an actual encounter with Jesus, that is the moment when we begin to step into new life!

LET GO AND GIVE IT TO GOD

Sometimes, letting go of things that have held us back or that we have held onto for so long is the most challenging thing to do. Often, when we confess our struggles to others, we hear people tell us to “pray about it”. What does that mean?

Well, to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul writes: “*16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV). Here, Paul is not only encouraging unceasing prayer, but he also practiced it! Here are just a few examples:

- ▶ **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, he says to his community in Greece, “*We continually thank God for you.*”
- ▶ **2 Thessalonians 1:11**, he says, “*We also pray continually that our God will make you worthy of His call.*”
- ▶ **Romans 1:9**, he writes to the Romans, “*I continually mention you in my prayers.*”
- ▶ **2 Timothy 1:3**, he comforts his friend Timothy with the words... “I remember you in my prayers constantly, night and day.”

The two Greek terms that repeatedly appear in Paul’s letters are *pantote* and *adialeptos*, which mean “always” and “without interruption.” These words are evidence that, as far as Paul was concerned, prayer should not just be a part of our lives; it should be intertwined in every aspect of our lives. In the book *Spiritual Direction* (2006), Henri Nouwen once wrote:

*I suggest that unceasing prayer is a threefold process: we **first cry out to God** with all our needs and requests. Then we turn our unceasing thoughts into continual **conversations with God**. Finally, we learn to listen to God in our hearts through a daily discipline of **meditation and contemplative practice** (p. 58).*

Praying to God without ceasing is a great way to let go of things holding us back! Letting go and giving “IT” to God requires us to surrender our will and way to God totally and to depend on Him entirely! When we pray to God and depend on Him, we recognize He [God] is our safe place, no matter the situation or circumstance. He [God] is our refuge, shelter, and fortress (**Psalms 46:10**).

When we pray to God and depend on God, we also find a sense of peace as we rest in the truth in **Psalms 46:1 (NIV)**, which says, “*Be still, and know that I am God...*” The phrase “*Be still...*” comes from a Hebrew word meaning to “let go” or “release.” The statement “*be still*” is not just a saying; it is a state of being and a mindset. When we are “quiet” and “still,” we realize that we are incapable of controlling life. The best thing for us is to give it to God completely and holistically!

It’s that defining moment when we finally say, “**Yes, God, I will trust you!**” And when we get to this point, perspective, and posture, that’s when the windows of heaven will open up so that we may experience the fullness of all that God wants and has for us.

QUESTION: Do you struggle with trying to “be still”?

RESPONSE: If so, maybe you should consider spending consistent time praying with God.

NOW WHAT? If you are currently holding on to something you need to let go of, would you consider “praying about it”? If the answer is yes, here are three quick steps to help you.

A Practical Process of Praying Without Ceasing

1. **Be intentional** about setting aside time daily to spend with God.
2. **Be committed** to finding a special place to be alone with God.
3. **Be open** and honest with God about the things you are struggling with.