

In the
FOOTSTEPS
of the **SAVIOR**

**FOLLOWING JESUS THROUGH
THE HOLY LAND**

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

INTRODUCTION

Press me to select my favorite spot in Israel, and I will refuse. “It can’t be done,” I will tell you. “There are too many! The Garden Tomb. The Via Dolorosa. The Sea of Galilee. The Wailing Wall. How could a person select one over the others?”

Yet you insist. You want me to winnow the list down to one location. Finally I sigh and say, “Okay.” I open a map of Israel and lead you and your imagination some twenty-nine miles north of the Sea of Galilee. The site is called Caesarea Philippi, named for Philip II, the third son of Herod the Great. It sits on the northernmost border of Israel, literally on the boundary between Israel and the world.

The location is stunning and dramatic. It boasts a cliff and, at its base, a cave. Visitors gaze up at the cliff and down into the yawning mouth of the grotto. Water springs from the ground beneath the cave, resulting in a flowing river of fresh water.

While the area is radiantly beautiful, its history is shadowy.

INTRODUCTION

Caesarea Philippi has long been associated with idolatry. Fourteen temples dedicated to the worship of Baal have been identified in the vicinity. Herod the Great erected a temple in the front of the cave for worshipping Caesar Augustus. Neighboring temples were constructed for the worship of Zeus and other gods of the Greek and Roman cultures.

One god received more attention than any of the others—Pan, a Greek deity who was thought to have lived in the cave. Worship of Pan involved unspeakable sexual perversion.

It's no surprise, then, that an inscription designates the cave and the spring as the "Gate of Hell." Also, the chasm was deeper than any of the ancient peoples could plumb, so they assumed it was an entryway into the underworld, Hades or hell.

It was here, in this location, that Jesus asked his followers the watershed question: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). The followers were quick to answer. Apparently they were privy to the word on the street. They listed the common assumptions: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah.

Jesus then asked for their opinion.

"But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (v. 15).

It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself, a humble woodworker, against the religions of the world, in all their splendor, in all their glory, and asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

On one occasion while touring Israel, a dozen or so of our tour group were standing together on the grounds. I asked if each of them would be willing to receive and then reply to the question of Jesus. They agreed. So I asked each person: "Who do you say that Jesus is?" And each person, in his or her own words, affirmed the

confession made by Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16 NCV).

Jesus, upon hearing the words of Peter, declared, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (v. 18 NKJV).

Can we imagine Jesus gesturing toward the cave as if defying the devil himself? *Hell itself will collapse. All this falsehood, all this immorality, all this deceit and death—it shall not withstand the assault of the church.*

Two thousand years later his pronouncement still stands. The proclamation that echoed in the cavern has reverberated through the ages.

What a promise and what a place to make it.

This is the wonder of the land where Jesus walked. Each square mile seems to have a message. I pray that the pages of this book bring those messages to life in your life. This weary world is in desperate need of a Savior. Thank God we have one. We can walk where he walked and ponder the promises he made. May you hear him as he speaks to you. May you be changed as you journey in the footsteps of the Savior.



Jordan R.

Ramah

Micmash

W. Auja

Jericho (OT)

Jericho (NT)

W. Qilt

To Gaza

Bethel

Ai

Mizpah

Geba

Anathoth

Hyrkania

Upper Beth Horon

Gibeon

Waters of
Nephtoah

Jerusalem

Beth
Hakkerem

Bugeia

*Valley
of Aijalon*

Gezer

Kiriath
Jearim

Gibeah

Bethlehem

Herodium

Ekron

Beth Shemesh

Tekoa

S

Azekah

Hebron

*Hill
Country
of
Judah*

N. Arugot

Gath

Moresheth
Gath

Adoraim

Ziph

Mareshah

Carmel

Maon

Lachish

Debir

Arad

*S
h
e
b
e
r
a
h
v
a
l
l
e
y*

Easterm

Negev Bas

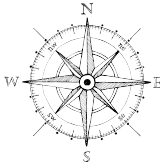
Kh. Ira

Tel Malhata

Tel Masos

Beersheba

*To
Gaza/Mediterranean Sea*



CHAPTER 6

TEACHING, TEACHING, TEACHING

The world can seem dark.

Downtown streets darkened with anger and hate. Innocents trafficked, innocence lost. Homeless, jobless. Pandemic and dread. A society worn out, worked up, and wondering what comes next.

I wonder what the world will hold for my grandchildren. Their greatest concerns today are finding lightning bugs on a summer night or learning to share with their siblings. Would that their world would always be so innocent. It won't. Forests shadow every trail, and cliffs edge every turn. Every life has its share of fear. My grandchildren are no exception.

Nor are your children and grandchildren. And as appealing as a desert island or a monastery might be, seclusion is simply not the answer for facing a scary tomorrow.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

Then what is? Does someone have a hand on the throttle of this train, or has the engineer bailed out just as we come in sight of dead man's curve?

I may have found part of the answer in, of all places, the first chapter of the New Testament. I've often thought it strange that Matthew would begin his book with a genealogy. Certainly not good journalism. A list of who sired whom wouldn't get past most editors.

But then again, Matthew wasn't a journalist, and the Holy Spirit wasn't trying to get our attention. He was making a point. God had promised he would give a Messiah through the bloodline of Abraham (Gen. 12:3), and he did.

"Having doubts about the future?" Matthew asks. "Just take a look at the past." And with that he opens the cedar chest of Jesus' lineage and begins pulling out the dirty laundry.

He begins with Abraham, the father of the nation, who more than once lied like Pinocchio just to save his neck (Gen. 12:10–20).

Abraham's grandson Jacob was deceitful. He cheated his brother, lied to his father, got swindled, and then swindled his uncle (Gen. 27, 30).

Jacob's son Judah was so blinded by testosterone that he engaged the services of a streetwalker, not knowing she was his daughter-in-law! When he learned her identity, he threatened to have her burned to death for solicitation (Gen. 38).

Special mention is made of Solomon's mother, Bathsheba (who bathed in questionable places), and Solomon's father, David, who watched her bathe (2 Sam. 11:2–3).

Rahab was a harlot (Josh. 2:1). Ruth was a foreigner (Ruth 1:4).

Manasseh made the list, even though he forced his son to walk through fire (2 Kings 21:6). His son Amon is on the list, even though he rejected God (2 Kings 21:22).

Seems that almost half the kings were crooks, half were embezzlers, and all but a handful worshiped an idol or two for good measure.

And so reads the list of Jesus' not-so-great great-grandparents. Seems like the only common bond among this lot was a promise. A promise from heaven that God would use them to send his Son.

Why did God use these people? Didn't have to. Could have just laid the Savior on a doorstep. Would have been simpler that way. And why does God tell us their stories? Why does God give us an entire testament of the blunders and stumbles of his people?

Simple. He knew what you and I watched on the news last night. He knew you would fret. He knew I would worry. And he wants us to know that when the world goes wild, he stays calm.

Want proof? Read the last name on the list. In spite of all the crooked halos and tasteless gambols of his people, the last name on the list is the first one promised—Jesus.

“Joseph was the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus. Jesus is called the Christ” (Matt. 1:16 NCV).

Period. No more names are listed. No more are needed. As if God is announcing to a doubting world, “See, I did it. Just as I said I would. The plan succeeded.”

The famine couldn't starve it.

Four hundred years of Egyptian slavery couldn't oppress it.

Wilderness wanderings couldn't lose it.

Babylonian captivity couldn't stop it.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

Clay-footed pilgrims couldn't spoil it.

The promise of the Messiah threads its way through forty-two generations of rough-cut stones, forming a necklace fit for the King who came. Just as promised.

And the promise remains.

"Those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved," Joseph's child assures (Matt. 24:13 NCV).

"In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world" (John 16:33 NCV).

God keeps his promise.

See for yourself. In the manger. He's there.

See for yourself. In the tomb. He's gone.

MULTITUDES DRAWN TO CHRIST

When we obey God, we naively believe that peace always follows obedience.

I always think about the disciples when I think about young missionaries. The disciples only did what they were told. Jesus told them to get into the boat, so they did. They didn't question the order; they simply obeyed it. They could have objected. After all, it was evening and darkness was only minutes away.

What was the result of their obedience? John's crisp description will tell you: "That evening Jesus' followers went down to Lake Galilee. It was dark now, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The

followers got into a boat and started across the lake to Capernaum. By now a strong wind was blowing, and the waves on the lake were getting bigger” (John 6:16–18 NCV).

What a chilling phrase—“Jesus had not yet come to them.” Caught in the storm of the “not yet.” They had done exactly what Jesus said, and look what it got them—a night on a storm-tossed sea with their Master somewhere on the shore.

It’s one thing to suffer for doing wrong. Something else entirely to suffer for doing right. But it happens. And when the storm bursts, it washes away the naive assumption that if I do right, I will never suffer.

And so the winds blow.

And so the boat bounces.

And so the disciples wonder, *Why the storm, and where is Jesus?* It’s bad enough to be in the storm, but to be in the storm alone?

The disciples had been on the sea for about nine hours.¹ John tells us they rowed three or four miles (John 6:19). That’s a long night. How many times did they search the darkness for their Master? How many times did they call out his name?

Why did he take so long?

Why does he take so long?

Mark tells us that during the storm Jesus “saw his followers struggling” (Mark 6:48 NCV). Through the night he saw them. Through the storm he saw them. And like a loving father he waited. He waited until the right time, until the right moment. He waited until he knew it was time to come, and then he came.

What made it the right time? I don’t know. Why was the ninth hour better than the fourth or fifth? I can’t answer that. Why does

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

God wait until the money is gone? Why does he wait until the sickness has lingered? Why does he choose to wait until the other side of the grave to answer the prayers for healing?

I don't know. I only know his timing is always right. I can only say he will do what is best. "God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them" (Luke 18:7 NCV).

Though you hear nothing, he is speaking. Though you see nothing, he is acting. With God there are no accidents. Every incident is intended to bring us closer to him.

Can I give a great example? The direct route from Egypt to Israel would take only eleven days by foot.² But God took the Israelites on the long road, which took forty years. Why did he do that? Read carefully the explanation.

Remember how the LORD your God has led you in the desert for these forty years, taking away your pride and testing you, because he wanted to know what was in your heart. . . . He took away your pride when he let you get hungry, and then he fed you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever seen. This was to teach you that a person does not live on bread alone, but by everything the LORD says. During these forty years, your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell. Know in your heart that the LORD your God corrects you as a parent corrects a child. (Deut. 8:2–5 NCV)

Look what God did in the desert. He took away the Israelites' pride. He tested their hearts. He proved that he would provide for

them. Did God want the children of Israel to reach the promised land? Of course. But he was more concerned that they arrive prepared than that they arrive soon.

So what does God do while we are enduring the pain? What does he do while we are in the storm? You'll love this. He prays for us. Jesus wasn't in the boat because he had gone to the hills to pray (Mark 6:46). Jesus prayed. That is remarkable. It is even more remarkable that Jesus didn't stop praying when his disciples were struggling. When he heard their cries, he remained in prayer.

Why? Two possible answers. Either he didn't care, or he believed in prayer. I think you know the correct choice.

And you know what? Jesus hasn't changed. He still prays for his disciples. "Because Jesus lives forever, he will never stop serving as priest. So he is able always to save those who come to God through him because he always lives, asking God to help them" (Heb. 7:24–25 NCV).

So where does that leave us? While Jesus is praying and we are in the storm, what are we to do? Simple. We do what the disciples did. We row. The disciples rowed most of the night. Mark says they were "struggling hard" to row the boat (Mark 6:48 NCV). The word *struggle* is elsewhere translated as "tormented." Wasn't easy. Wasn't glamorous.

Much of life is spent rowing. Getting out of bed. Fixing lunches. Turning in assignments. Changing diapers. Paying bills. Routine. Regular. More struggle than strut. More wrestling than resting.

Don't give up! Don't lay down the oars! He is too wise to forget you, too loving to hurt you. When you can't see him, trust him. He is praying a prayer that he himself will answer.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

Sometimes the trials and tribulations make retaliation seem appealing. But Jesus has a better idea.

John 13 records the events of the final night before Jesus' death. He and his followers had gathered in the upper room for Passover. John begins his narrative with a lofty statement: "Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God" (John 13:3 NLT).

Jesus knew the who and why of his life. Who was he? God's Son. Why was he on earth? To serve the Father. Jesus knew his identity and authority, "so he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him" (John 13:4–5 NLT).

Jesus—CEO, head coach, king of the world, sovereign of the seas—washed feet.

This was the job of a servant. When the master came home from a day spent walking the cobblestone streets, he expected a foot washing. The lowliest servant met him at the door with towel and water.

But in the upper room there was no servant.

Jesus didn't exclude a single follower, though we wouldn't have faulted him had he bypassed Philip. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the throng of five thousand hungry people, Philip, in effect, had retorted, "It's impossible!" (John 6:7). So what does Jesus do with someone who questions his commands? Apparently he washes the doubter's feet.

James and John lobbied for cabinet-level positions in Christ's

kingdom. So what does Jesus do when people use his kingdom for personal advancement? He slides a basin in their direction.

Peter quit trusting Christ in the storm. He tried to talk Christ out of going to the cross. Within hours Peter would curse the very name of Jesus and hightail his way into hiding. In fact, all twenty-four of Jesus' followers' feet would soon scoot, leaving Jesus to face his accusers alone. Do you ever wonder what God does with promise breakers? He washes their feet.

Most people won't do that. Most people keep a pot of anger on low boil.

But you aren't "most people." Grace has happened to you. Look at your feet. They are wet, grace soaked. Your toes and arches and heels have felt the cool basin of God's grace. Jesus has washed the grimeiest parts of your life. He didn't bypass you and carry the basin toward someone else. Can't you share your grace with others?

"Since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you" (John 13:14–15 NLT).

To accept grace is to accept the vow to give it.

Harbored grudges suck the joy out of life. Revenge won't paint the blue back in your sky or restore the spring in your step.

It will leave you bitter, bent, and angry. Give the grace you've been given.

You don't endorse the deeds of your offender when you do. Jesus didn't endorse your sins by forgiving you.

Grace is not blind. It sees the hurt full well. But grace chooses to see God's forgiveness even more. It refuses to let hurts poison the

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

heart. “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Heb. 12:15). Where grace is lacking, bitterness abounds. Where grace abounds, forgiveness grows.

Sequence matters. Jesus washes first; we wash next. He demonstrates; we follow. He uses the towel and then extends it to us, saying, “Now you do it. Walk across the floor of your upper room and wash the feet of your Judas.”

So go ahead. Get your feet wet. Remove your socks and shoes, and set your feet in the basin. First one, then the other. Let the hands of God wipe away every dirty part of your life.

Forgiveness may not happen all at once. But it can happen with you. After all, you have wet feet.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Jesus’ human story begins in Bethlehem, but his lineage, detailed in the first chapter of Matthew’s gospel, began long before that with ancestors such as Abraham in Ur, David in Jerusalem, and Rahab in Jericho—a long list of what Max called “not-so-great grandparents.”
 - What imperfections do you have in your family history? What effect has that had on you or your family?
 - What does Max say is the purpose of Matthew’s opening his gospel in this way?
 - How could this encourage you, considering your family’s imperfect history as well as your own?

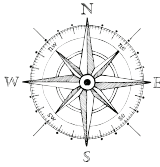
2. We revisited the storm on the Sea of Galilee in this chapter. Read the story again in John 6:16–21. The disciples had obeyed Jesus, who told them to cross the sea and go to the city of Capernaum. Yet, they found themselves in a storm.
 - Describe a time you obeyed God only to find yourself in a storm.
 - How did this affect your faith?
 - Where was Jesus when the disciples were rowing through the storm?
 - When did he eventually appear to them?
 - What does this tell you about where Jesus was in storms you’ve weathered in the past or where he is if you are weathering one today?

3. When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, where did God direct them to go?
 - Why did he take them this way?
 - When has God led you on an indirect route to a final destination he had planned for you?
 - How did he provide for you on this journey?
 - How did this journey prepare you for what you faced next?

4. As you wait for a storm in your life to subside or as you wait to arrive at a destination you know God has promised you, how can you keep “rowing”?

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

5. Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples the night before his crucifixion. They ate in what is traditionally called the upper room, a room in a home located in Jerusalem, where many people had come to celebrate Passover.
 - What did Jesus do for the disciples in the upper room?
 - Think about someone who has hurt or betrayed you. How would it feel to serve that person by washing his or her feet?
 - How would it feel to be in the upper room with Jesus that night and let him wash your feet, knowing you've sinned and betrayed him?
 - How could you show grace to the person you mentioned earlier or to another person who has hurt you?



CHAPTER 7

PERFORMING MIRACLES

Do you think he can?”
“Do you think he cares?”
“Do you think he’ll come?”

The questions emerge from the mother’s heart. Fear drapes her words and shadows her face.

Her husband stops at the door of their house and looks back into her tired, frightened eyes, then over her shoulder at the figure of his sick daughter lying on the pallet. The girl shivers from the fever. The mother shakes from the fear. The father shrugs in desperation and answers, “I don’t know what he’ll do, but I don’t know what else to do.”

The crowd outside the house parts to let the father pass. They would on any day. He is the city leader. But they do this today because his daughter is dying.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

“Bless you, Jairus,” one offers. But Jairus doesn’t stop. He hears only the questions of his wife.

“Do you think he can?”

“Do you think he cares?”

“Do you think he’ll come?”

Jairus steps quickly down the path through the fishing village of Capernaum. The size of the following crowd increases with every person he passes. They know where Jairus is going. They know whom he seeks. Jairus goes to the shore to seek Jesus. As they near the water’s edge, they spot the teacher encircled by a multitude. A citizen steps ahead to clear a trail, announcing the presence of the synagogue ruler. Villagers comply. The Red Sea of humanity parts, leaving a people-walled path. Jairus wastes no seconds. “When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees, beside himself as he begged, ‘My dear daughter is at death’s door. Come and lay hands on her so she will get well and live.’ Jesus went with him, the whole crowd tagging along, pushing and jostling him” (Mark 5:23–24 THE MESSAGE).

Jesus’ instant willingness moistens the eyes of Jairus. For the first time in a long time, a sunray lands on the father’s soul. He all but runs as he leads Jesus back to the path toward home. Jairus dares to believe he is moments from a miracle.

Jesus can help.

Jesus does care.

Jesus will come.

People scatter out of the way and step in behind. Servants rush ahead to inform Jairus’s wife. But then, just as suddenly as Jesus came, Jesus stops. Jairus, unaware, takes a dozen more steps before he realizes he’s walking alone. The people stopped when

Jesus did. And everyone is trying to make sense of Jesus' question: "Who touched my clothes?" (v. 30). The sentence triggers a rush of activity. Heads turn toward each other. Disciples respond to Christ. Someone moves back so someone else can come forward.

Jairus can't see who. And, quite frankly, he doesn't care who. Precious seconds are passing. His precious daughter is passing. Moments ago he grand marshaled the Hope Parade. Now he stands on the outside looking in and feels his fragile faith unravel. He looks toward his house and back at Christ and wonders afresh:

I wonder if he can.

I wonder if he cares.

I wonder if he'll come.

We know the questions of Jairus because we've faced the fear of Jairus. His Capernaum is our hospital, courthouse, or lonely highway. His dying daughter is our dying marriage, career, future, or friend. Jairus is not alone in asking Jesus for a miracle.

We've done the same. With belief weighing a feather more than unbelief, we've fallen at Jesus' feet and begged. He replies with hope. His answer couriers fresh light. The cloud parts. The sun shines . . . for a time.

But halfway to the miracle, Jesus stops. The illness returns, the heart hardens, the factory closes, the check bounces, the criticism resumes, and we find ourselves like Jairus, on the outside looking in, feeling like a low item on God's to-do list, wondering if Jesus remembers. Wondering if he can, cares, or comes.

Jairus feels a touch on his shoulder. He turns to look into the pale face of a sad servant who tells him, "Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?" (v. 35).

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

It's fallen to me on a few occasions to fulfill the task of this servant. To bear death tidings. I've informed a father of the death of his teenage son, my siblings of the death of our dad, more than one child of the death of a parent.

Each announcement is met with silence. Wailing or fainting may soon follow, but the first response is a shock-soaked silence. As if no heart can receive the words and no words can express the heart. No one knows what to say to death.

Was it into such a silence that Jesus urged, "Don't be afraid; just believe" (v. 36)?

Believe? Jairus might have thought, *Believe what? Believe how? Believe whom? My daughter is dead. My wife is distraught. And you, Jesus, well, Jesus, you are late. Had you come when I asked, followed when I led . . . Why did you let my little girl die?*

Jairus had no way of knowing the answer. But we do. Why did Jesus let the girl die? So that two thousand years' worth of strugglers would hear Jesus' response to human tragedy. To all who have stood where Jairus stood and asked what Jairus asked, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

Believe that he can. Believe that he is able to help.

Note how the story takes a sudden turn. Until this point Jesus has followed the lead of Jairus. Now he takes control. He commands the scene. He trims his team down to fighting size: "And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James" (Mark 5:37 ΝΚΙΥ).

Jesus tells the mourners to clam up. "When He came in, He said to them, 'Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping'" (Mark 5:39 ΝΚΙΥ).

Then they mock him, “he put them all out” (v. 40). The English translation softens the action. The Greek uses a bare-knuckled verb—*ekballo*, which means to cast out or throw out. Jesus, the temple cleanser and demon-caster, rolls up his sleeves. He’s the sheriff in the rowdy saloon placing one hand on shirt collar and the other on trouser belt and tossing the troublemaking doubt stirrers into the street.

He then turns his attention to the body of the girl. He bears the confidence of Einstein adding two plus two, Beethoven playing “Chopsticks,” Ben Hogan approaching a one-inch putt. Can Jesus call the dead to life? Of course he can.

But does he care? Might he be mighty and tender? Have muscle and mercy? Does the plight of a twelve-year-old girl in Podunkville appear on the radar screen of heaven?

An earlier moment in the story reveals the answer. It’s subtle. You might have missed it. “As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not be afraid; only believe’” (v. 36 NKJV).

Jesus heard the servant’s words. No one had to tell him about the girl’s death. Though separated from Jairus, occupied with the case of the woman, and encircled by pressing villagers, Jesus never took his ear off the girl’s father. Jesus was listening the entire time. He heard. He cared. He cared enough to speak into Jairus’s fear, to come into Jairus’s home.

He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,”

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” Immediately the girl arose and walked. (vv. 40–42 NKJV)

A pronouncement from the path would have worked. A declaration from afar would have awakened the girl’s heart. But Jesus wanted to do more than raise the dead. He wanted to show that he not only can and cares, but he comes.

Into the houses of Jairuses. Into the world of his children. He comes to the small as Mary’s baby and to the poor as a carpenter’s boy. He comes to the young as a Nazarene teenager and to the forgotten as an unnoticed kid in an obscure village. He comes to the busy as the oldest son of a large family, to the stressed as the leader of restless disciples, to the tired as one with no pillow for his head.

He comes to all. He speaks to all. He still urges:

“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

Believe that he can, believe that he comes, believe that he cares. Oh, how we need to believe. Fear pillages so much peace from our days.

When ancient sailors sketched maps of the oceans, they disclosed their fears. On the vast unexplored waters, geographers wrote words such as these:

“Here be dragons.”

“Here be demons.”

“Here be sirens.”

Were a map drawn of your world, would we read such phrases? Over the unknown waters of adulthood, “Here be dragons.” Near the sea of the empty nest, “Here be demons.” Next to the

furthermost latitudes of death and eternity, do we read, “Here be sirens”?

Mark it down. You will never go where God is not. You may be transferred, enlisted, commissioned, reassigned, or hospitalized, but—brand this truth on your heart—you can never go where God is not. “I am with you always,” Jesus promised (Matt. 28:20 NKJV).

Don’t be afraid; just believe.

The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. Even Christ was afraid (Mark 14:33). But make your fear a visitor and not a resident. Hasn’t fear taken enough? Enough smiles? Chuckles? Restful nights, exuberant days? Meet your fears with faith.

Do what my father urged my brother and me to do. Summertime for the Lucado family always involved a trip from West Texas to the Rocky Mountains. My dad loved to fish for trout on the edge of the white water rivers. Yet he knew that the currents were dangerous and his sons could be careless. Upon arrival we’d scout out the safe places to cross the river. He’d walk us down the bank until we found a line of stable rocks. He was even known to add one or two to compensate for our short strides.

As we watched, he’d test the stones, knowing if they held him, they’d hold us. Once he was on the other side, he’d signal for us to follow.

“Don’t be afraid,” he could have said. “Trust me.”

We children never needed coaxing. But we adults often do. Does a river of fear run between you and Jesus? Cross over to him. Had Jairus waved Jesus away, death would have taken his hope. If you

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

wave Jesus away, joy will die, laughter will perish, and tomorrow will be buried in today's grave of dread.

Don't make that mistake. Give the day a chance. Believe he can. Believe he cares. Believe he comes. Don't be afraid. Just believe.

GRACE MATTERS

On a splendid April afternoon in 2008, two college women's softball teams—one from Oregon, one from Washington—squared off beneath the blue sky of the Cascade Mountains. Inside a chain-link fence before a hundred fans, the two teams played a decisive game. The winner would advance to the division playoffs. The loser would hang up the gloves and go home.

The Western Oregon Wolves were a sturdy team that boasted several strong batters, but Sara Tucholsky was not one of them. She hit .153 and played in the game only because the first-string right fielder had muffed a play earlier in the day. Sara had never hit a home run, but on that Saturday, with two runners on base, she connected with a curveball and sent it sailing over the left-field fence.

In her excitement Sara missed first base. Her coach shouted for her to return and touch it. When she turned and started back, something popped in her knee, and down she went. She dragged herself back to the bag, pulled her knee to her chest in pain, and asked the first-base coach, "What do I do?"

The umpire wasn't sure. He knew if any of Sara's teammates assisted her, she would be out. Sara knew if she tried to stand, she

would collapse. Her team couldn't help her. Her leg couldn't support her. How could she cross home plate? The umpires huddled to talk.¹

And while they huddle and Sara groans, may I make a comparison? Blame it on the preacher in me, but I see an illustration in this moment. You and I have a lot in common with Sara Tucholsky. We, too, have stumbled. Not in baseball, but in life. In morality, honesty, integrity. We have done our best, only to trip and fall. Our finest efforts have left us flat on our backs. Like Sara, we are weakened, not with torn ligaments, but with broken hearts, weary spirits, and fading vision. The distance between where we are and where we want to be is impassable. What do we do? Where do we turn?

I suggest we turn to one of the sweetest promises:

For our high priest [Jesus] is able to understand our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it. (Heb. 4:15–16 NCV)

We have a high priest who is able to understand. Since he understands, we find mercy and grace when we need it. We are not left to languish. When we fall, we are not forgotten. When we stumble, we aren't abandoned. Our God gets us.

Theology textbooks discuss this promise under the heading "Incarnation." The stunning idea is simply this: God, for a time, became one of us. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

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” (John 1:14).

God became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ. He was miraculously conceived, yet naturally delivered. He was born, yet born of a virgin.

Had Jesus simply descended to earth in the form of a mighty being, we would respect him but never would draw near to him. After all, how could God understand what it means to be human?

Had Jesus been biologically conceived with two earthly parents, we would draw near to him, but would we want to worship him? After all, he would be no different than you and me.

But if Jesus was both—God and man at the same time—then we have the best of both worlds. Neither his humanity nor deity compromised. He was fully human. He was fully divine. Because of the first, we draw near. Because of the latter, we worship.

Such is the message of Colossians 1:15–16.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Not one drop of divinity was lost in the change to humanity. Though Jesus appeared human, he was actually God. The fullness of God, every bit of him, took residence in the body of Christ. “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in

Him” (Col. 1:19 NASB). The star maker, for a time, built cabinets in Nazareth.

Jesus may have looked human, but those nearest him knew he was prone to divine exclamations. Every so often Jesus let his divinity take over. The bystanders had no option but to step back and ask, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (Matt. 8:27).

Some years ago I served as the teacher at a weeklong Bible retreat. There is much to recall about the event. The food was phenomenal. The seaside setting was spectacular. I made several new friends. Yet, of all the memories, the one I will never forget is the Friday night basketball game.

The idea was hatched the moment David arrived. The attendees did not know he was coming, but as soon as he walked into the room, they knew who he was: David Robinson. NBA All-Star. MVP. Three-time Olympian. Two-time gold medal winner. Dream Team member. Two-time NBA champion. College All-American. Seven feet and one inch of raw talent. Body, ripped. Skills, honed. Basketball IQ, legendary.

By the end of the first day, someone asked me, “Any chance he would play basketball with us?” “Us” was a collection of pudgy, middle-aged, well-meaning but out-of-shape fellows. Bodies, plump. Skills, pathetic. Basketball IQ, slightly less than that of a squirrel.

Still, I asked David. And David, in a display of utter indulgence, said yes.

We scheduled the game, *the game*, for Friday night, the last night of the seminar. Attendance in the Bible classes declined.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

Attendance on the basketball court increased. Fellows who hadn't dribbled a ball since middle school could be seen heaving shot after shot at the basket. The net was seldom threatened.

The night of the game, *the game*, David walked onto the court for the first time all week. As he warmed up, the rest of us stopped. The ball fit in his hand like a tennis ball would in mine. He carried on conversations while dribbling the ball, spinning the ball on a finger, and passing the ball behind his back. When the game began, it was David and we children. He held back. We could tell. Even so, he still took one stride for our two. He caught the ball with one hand instead of two. When he threw the ball, it was more a missile than a pass. He played basketball at a level we could only dream about.

At one point—just for the fun of it, I suppose—he let loose. The same guy who had slam-dunked basketballs over Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley let it go. I suppose he just couldn't hold it back any longer. With three strides he roared from half court to the rim. The pudgy, middle-aged opposition cleared a path as he sailed, head level with the basket, and slammed the ball with a force that left the backboard shaking.

We gulped.

David smiled.

We got the message. That's how the game is meant to be played. We may have shared the same court, but we didn't share the same power.

I'm thinking the followers of Jesus might have had a similar thought. On the day Jesus commanded the demons to leave the possessed man and they did. On the day Jesus told the storm to be

quiet and it was. On the days Jesus told the dead man to rise up, the dead daughter to sit up, the entombed Lazarus to come out, and he did, she did, and he did.

“God was pleased for all of himself to live in Christ” (Col. 1:19 NCV). Jesus was undiluted deity.

No wonder no one argued when he declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18).

You think the moon affects the tides? It does. But Christ runs the moon. You think the United States is a superpower? The United States has only the power Christ gives and nothing more. He has authority over everything. And he has had it forever.

Yet, in spite of this lofty position, Jesus was willing for a time to forgo the privileges of divinity and enter humanity.

He was born just as all babies are born. His childhood was a common one. “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). His body developed. His muscles strengthened. His bones matured. There is no evidence or suggestion that he was spared the inconveniences of adolescence. He may have been gangly or homely. He knew the pain of sore muscles and the sting of salt in an open wound. As an adult he was weary enough to sit down at a well (John 4:6) and sleepy enough to doze off in a rocking boat (Mark 4:35–38). He became hungry in the wilderness and thirsty on the cross. When the soldiers pounded the nails through his skin, a thousand nerve endings cried for relief. As he hung limp on the cross, two human lungs begged for oxygen.

The Word became flesh.

Does this promise matter? If you ever wonder if God understands you, it does. If you ever wonder if God listens, it does. If

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

you ever wonder if the Uncreated Creator can, in a million years, comprehend the challenges you face, then ponder long and hard the promise of the incarnation. Jesus is “able to understand our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15 NCV). The One who hears your prayers understands your pain. He never shrugs or scoffs or dismisses physical struggle. He had a human body.

Are you troubled in spirit? He was too (John 12:27).

Are you so anxious you could die? He was too (Matt. 26:38).

Are you overwhelmed with grief? He was too (John 11:35).

Have you ever prayed with loud cries and tears? He did too
(Heb. 5:7).

He gets you.

So human he could touch his people. So mighty he could heal them. So human he spoke with an accent. So heavenly he spoke with authority. So human he could blend in unnoticed for thirty years. So mighty he could change history and be unforgotten for two thousand years. All man. Yet all God.

I once waded into the Jordan River. On a trip to Israel my family and I stopped to see the traditional spot of Jesus’ baptism. It’s a charming place. Sycamores cast their shadows. Birds chirp. The water invites. So I accepted the invitation and waded in to be baptized.

No one wanted to join me, so I immersed myself. I declared my belief in Christ and sank so low in the water I could touch the river bottom. When I did, I felt a stick and pulled it out. A baptism memento! Some people get certificates or Bibles; I like my stick. It’s

about as thick as your wrist, long as your forearm, and smooth as a baby's behind. I keep it on my office credenza so I can show it to fear-filled people.

When they chronicle their anxieties about the economy or their concerns about their kids, I hand them the stick. I tell them how God muddied his feet in our world of diapers, death, digestion, and disease. How John the Baptist told him to stay on the riverbank but Jesus wouldn't listen. How he came to earth for this very purpose—to become one of us. “Why, he might have touched this very stick,” I like to say.

As they smile, I ask, “Since he came this far to reach us, can't we take our fears to him?” Read the promise again, slowly, thoughtfully.

For our high priest [Jesus] is able to understand our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it. (Heb. 4:15–16 NCV)

Some have pointed to the sinlessness of Jesus as evidence that he cannot fully understand us. If he never sinned, they reason, how could he understand the full force of sin? Simple. He felt it more than we do. We give in! He never did. We surrender. He never did. He stood before the tsunami of temptation and never wavered. In that manner he understands it more than anyone who ever lived.

And then, in his grandest deed, he volunteered to feel the consequences of sin. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus didn’t deserve to feel the shame, but he felt it. He didn’t deserve the humiliation, but he experienced it. He had never sinned, yet he was treated like a sinner. He became sin. All the guilt, remorse, and embarrassment—Jesus understands it.

Does this promise matter? To the hypocrite, it does. To the person with the hangover and fuzzy memory about last night’s party, it does. To the cheater, slanderer, gossip, or scoundrel who comes to God with a humble spirit, it matters. It matters because they need to know that we can “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Because Jesus is human, he understands you.

Because he is divine, he can help you.

He is uniquely positioned to carry us home. Jesus does for us what Mallory Holtman did for Sara Tucholsky. Sara, remember, is the girl who tore an ACL during her home-run trot. When we left her, she was lying on the ground, clutching her knee with one hand and touching first base with the other. The umpires huddled. The players stood and watched. The fans shouted for someone to take Sara off the field, but she didn’t want to leave. She wanted to cross home plate.

Mallory Holtman came up with a solution.

She played first base for the opposing team, Central Washington University. She was a senior and wanted a victory. A loss would end her season. You’d think Mallory would be happy to see the home run nullified. She wasn’t.

“Hey,” she said to the umpires. “Can I help her around the bases?”

“Why would you want to do that?” one asked. Before she could answer, the ump shrugged and said, “Do it.”

So Mallory did. She signaled for the shortstop to help her, and the two walked toward the injured player. “We’re going to pick you up and carry you around the bases.”

By this time tears streaked Sara’s cheeks. “Thank you.”

Mallory and her friend put one hand under Sara’s legs and the other hand under Sara’s arms. The mission of mercy began. They paused long enough at second and third base to lower Sara’s foot to touch the bases. By the time they headed home, the spectators had risen to their feet, Sara’s teammates had gathered at home plate, and Sara was smiling like a homecoming queen.²

Well she should. The only one who could help did help. And because she did, Sara made it home.

God offers to do the same for you and me. Mallory’s message for Sara is God’s message for us: “I’m going to pick you up and carry you home.” Let him, won’t you? You cannot make it on your own. But Jesus has the strength you do not have. He is, after all, your high priest, able and willing to help in your time of need.

Let him do what he came to do. Let him carry you home.

SALVATION

Are you really *saved*? Many people don’t know. Many Christians don’t know. They live with a deep-seated anxiety about eternity. They think they are saved, hope they are saved, but still they doubt.

It seeps into the thoughts of the dying. When we forget our vow to God, does God forget us? Does God place us on a standby list?

Our behavior gives us reason to wonder. We are strong one day, weak the next. Devoted one hour, flagging the next. Believing, then unbelieving. Our lives mirror the contours of a roller coaster—highs and lows.

Conventional wisdom draws a line through the middle of these fluctuations. Perform above this line, and enjoy God's acceptance. But dip below it, and expect a pink slip from heaven. In this paradigm a person is lost and saved multiple times a day, in and out of the kingdom on a regular basis. Salvation becomes a matter of timing. You just hope you die on an upswing. No security, stability, or confidence.

This is not God's plan. He draws the line, for sure. But he draws it beneath our ups and downs. Jesus' language couldn't be stronger: "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never lose it or perish throughout the ages. [To all eternity they shall never by any means be destroyed.] And no one is able to snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28 AMPC).

Jesus promised a new life that could not be forfeited or terminated. "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Bridges are burned, and the transfer is accomplished. Ebbs and flows continue, but they never disqualify. Ups and downs may mark our days, but they will never ban us from his kingdom. Jesus bottom lines our lives with grace.

Even more, God stakes his claim on us. "By his Spirit he has stamped us with his eternal pledge—a sure beginning of what he

is destined to complete” (2 Cor. 1:22 THE MESSAGE). You’ve done something similar: engraved your name on a piece of jewelry, etched your identity on a tool, or monogrammed a gift. Cowboys brand cattle with the mark of the ranch. Stamping declares ownership. Through his Spirit, God stamps us. Would-be takers are repelled by the presence of his name. Satan is driven back by the declaration: *Hands off. This child is mine! Eternally, God.*

On-and-off salvation never appears in the Bible. Salvation is not a repeated phenomenon. Scripture contains no example of a person who was saved, then lost, then resaved, then lost again.

Where there is no assurance of salvation, there is no peace. No peace means no joy. No joy results in fear-based lives. Is this the life God creates? No. Grace creates a confident soul who declares, “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Of all we don’t know in life, we know this: we hold a boarding pass. “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13 NKJV). Trust God’s hold on you more than your hold on God. His faithfulness does not depend on yours. His performance is not predicated on yours. His love is not contingent on your own. Your candle may flicker, but it will not expire.

Do you find such a promise hard to believe? The disciples did. On the night before his death, Jesus made this announcement: “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matt. 26:31–32 NKJV).

By this point the disciples had known Jesus for three years. They'd spent a thousand nights with him. They knew his stride, accent, and sense of humor. They'd smelled his breath, heard him snore, and watched him pick his teeth after dinner. They'd witnessed miracles we know about and countless more we don't. Bread multiplied. Lepers cleansed. They saw him turn water into Chablis and a lunch box into a buffet. They unwrapped burial clothing from a was-dead Lazarus. They watched mud fall from the eyes of a was-blind man. For three years these handpicked recruits enjoyed front-row, center-court seats to heaven's greatest display. And how would they respond?

"All of you will stumble," Jesus told them. Fall away. Turn away. Run away. Their promises would melt like wax on a summer sidewalk. Jesus' promise, however, would stay firm. "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee" (v. 32). Translation? Your fall will be great, but my grace will be greater. Stumble, I will catch you. Scatter, I will gather you. Turn from me, I will turn toward you. You'll find me waiting for you in Galilee.

The promise was lost on Peter. "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (v. 33 NKJV).

Not one of Peter's finer moments. "Even if all . . ." Arrogant. "I will never be made to stumble." Self-sufficient. Peter's trust was in Peter's strength. Yet Peter's strength would peter out. Jesus knew it: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32 NKJV).

Satan would attack and test Peter. But Satan would never claim

Peter. Why? Because Peter was strong? No, because Jesus was. “I have prayed for you.” Jesus’ prayers hamstring Satan.

Jesus prays for you as well: “Holy Father . . . now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. . . . I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message” (John 17:11, 20 NLT).

Will God hear the intercessory pleas of his Son? Of course he will. Like Peter, we may be sifted like wheat. Our faith will wane, our resolve waver, but we will not fall away. We are “kept safe by Jesus Christ” (Jude v. 1 THE MESSAGE) and “shielded by God’s power” (1 Peter 1:5). And that is no small power. It is the power of a living and ever-persistent Savior.

But might some take advantage of this assurance? Knowing that God will catch them if they fall, might they fall on purpose? Yes, they might, for a time. But as grace goes deep, as God’s love and kindness sink in, they will change. Grace fosters obedience.

Look to Christ for your beginning and ending. He is the Alpha and Omega. He will hold you. And he will hold on to the ones you love. Do you have a prodigal? Do you long for your spouse to return to God? Do you have a friend whose faith has grown cold? God wants them back more than you do. Keep praying, but don’t give up.

God places a song in the hearts of his children. A song of hope and life. “He has put a new song in my mouth” (Ps. 40:3 NKJV). Some saints sing this song loud and long every single day of their lives. In other cases the song falls silent. Life’s hurts and happenings mute the music within. Long seasons pass in which God’s song is not sung.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOR

I want to be careful here. Truth is, we do not always know if someone has trusted God's grace. A person may have feigned belief but not meant it.³ It isn't ours to know. But we know this: where there is genuine conversion, there is eternal salvation. Our task is to trust God's ability to call his children home. We join God as he walks among his wayward and wounded children, singing.

Eventually his own will hear his voice, and something within them will awaken. And when it does, they will begin to sing again.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Back in the bustling seaside city of Capernaum, we meet Jairus, a city official whose daughter is dying. Jesus promised to help him but was distracted by a woman who touched his cloak, and Jairus, desperate for his daughter to be healed, began to wonder if Jesus would make good on his promise.
 - When you're in need, what is hardest to believe about Jesus: that he can, that he cares, or that he'll come?
 - How did Jesus show Jairus that he could, that he cared, and that he would come? (Mark 5:40–41)
 - What does this tell you about how Jesus will answer your prayers?
2. In need of strength? In hope of a miracle? Max urges us to recall "one of the sweetest promises" of Scripture: Hebrews 4:15–16.

- What does this promise mean to you?
 - Remember a time you held on to this promise. What challenge were you facing? How did recalling the promise make a difference?
 - “The one who hears your prayers understands your pain.” Have you experienced the truth of this claim? How did it recalibrate your faith?
3. Jesus promised eternity to those who trust their souls to him. “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24).
- Where do you turn when life turns dark? Do you find it natural to seek God’s voice in your pain?
 - When you imagine Jesus, how do you picture him? The sleepy Savior in a storm-rocked boat? The confident healer at a dead girl’s bedside? The teacher speaking to thousands on a Palestine hillside? What image comforts you? Why?
 - “The One who hears your prayers understands your pain.” Why do you know this is true?
4. Max said, “Trust God’s hold on you more than your hold on God. His faithfulness does not depend on yours. His performance is not predicated on yours. His love is not contingent on your own” (p. 105).
- How do you feel about these statements?
 - Do you find them difficult or easy to believe? Why?