The Power of a Moment
March 5, 2018

A moment with Jesus can change everything. It sure did for me. For years, I carried with me a lot of abandonment issues from my childhood. After becoming a Christian, I felt like I should be able to move past these feelings, but I wasn’t. I was in Christian counseling and Celebrate Recovery, and I still felt stuck.

One day, I was practicing Holy Yoga, a Christ-centered yoga practice using the postures of traditional yoga with a biblical focus. While I was setting my intention for my practice, I asked God to take these feelings from me, yet again. As I started moving through the poses, I just kept praying. At the end of the class, as I was laying there, I felt Jesus telling me that he had been with me throughout all of the times that I had felt alone. He told me that my dad gave me all that he had to give and that I couldn’t expect any more from him than what he had. I was laying there just weeping, and I felt such a sense of peace and relief!

After that, I started thinking about all of the women who struggle with these same issues. I wanted to share with them the same things that Jesus shared with me! I decided to get involved with the leadership team of Celebrate Recovery (CR). When I moved to Ohio, I continued to be involved with Life Support and then CR as well. I also got involved in a Women’s Leadership Ministry called SheLeads, where the first part of the year is spent in finding out who we are as children of God and how to find our worth in him alone.

Who knew that God would use my pain to help other women overcome theirs? Without that encounter with Jesus, I don’t know how long I would have dragged around the issues that had already dictated the majority of my life. But what that encounter did for me is help me realize that there is nothing that cannot be overcome when we let go and let God. When we realize that Jesus is always with us, that he notices us and cares about our pain, and that he prays for us and wants us to be healed, it makes it easy for us to be disciples and minister to others as he ministers to us.

As Lead Pastor Ben Snyder pointed out this past weekend, a moment with Jesus can change everything. This week in LivingItOut, we are going to be unpacking
the passage from Matthew 9, paying close attention to what Jesus does and says to his disciples.

**Matthew 9:35-38**

35 Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. 35 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 He said to his disciples, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. 38 So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

My story is not unusual, but it is special. It made me want to tell the world about Christ and what he has done for me. This is what we are called to do. We are the workers and the harvest in this passage. When God touches our lives and we give ourselves to him, we become part of the harvest. We are also the workers, in that we become his ministers telling the world the good news about Jesus.

**Questions:**
Have you thought about yourself as one of God’s ministers? How could thinking of yourself in this way change your day to day life?

**Next Steps:**
Thinking of yourself as God’s minister, find a new way to tell the world about Christ. This could be as simple as sharing your story with someone new, starting a Group, or maybe volunteering somewhere.

**Prayer:**
*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending us your Son. Thank you for always being with me no matter how far or near I am to you. Help me to be your minister, bringing your light to all I meet. Amen*

*This post was written by Kelda Strasbourg, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.*
I love reading the gospels, especially the stories of how Jesus singles out people for his personal attention. Despite the crowds that surrounded him throughout his ministry, he stopped to restore the life of a widowed woman’s dead son (Luke 7:11-15). While traveling through Jericho, he noticed Zacchaeus up in a tree and went to his house for dinner (Luke 19:1-6). On a journey to Jerusalem through Samaria, he spent time with a woman who was isolated by her past (John 4:4-12). While on his way to heal the daughter of a temple official, he noticed the touch of woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, and paused to heal her (Mark 5:25-36). If you read these passages of scripture, you find that the people in these stories were changed forever by their encounters with Jesus... because he noticed them.

Jesus notices even me... and you!

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Do you feel like Jesus has noticed you? Maybe you’ve never felt like he has, nor anyone else. Or maybe you’re an ‘up front’ person, who gets noticed all time; yet you are wondering if anyone looks beyond the extrovert front. Whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert, we all have times when we wonder if anyone cares about us or what we are going through. In the stories above, and so many other examples in the gospels and throughout the Bible, God assures us of his loving care.

My story is one of growing up in church, then turning my back on it all for 20+ years while Jesus waited for me to notice him noticing me. I can relate so much to what is happening in this passage.
Matthew 9:36
When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

That was me, a confused and helpless sheep. As I said last week, I masked my insecurity with bravado and bluster. It wasn’t until I got to the end of all that (the end of ME), worn out from keeping up with the false narrative I had claimed for my ‘story,’ that I was able to see Jesus, noticing me... ME! My encounter with Jesus one night -- all by myself in my police car -- changed me forever. Just like when Jesus noticed the widow, Zacchaeus, the woman by the well, the woman who had been ill for 12 years, and the temple official’s daughter, Jesus notices us. Jesus notices me. In all of human history, in each individual person’s life, Jesus drew them to himself with his love, compassion, and above all, his offer of grace.

Even on days when I feel lonely and alone, I know Jesus notices me. More than that, he loves me and has great plans for me. He offers me a life of good orderly direction; I no longer need to feel confused or helpless. Psalm 23 says that the Lord is my shepherd. He directs my life and provides for me. He leads me, defends me, offers me rest and safety. He notices me, and you! He has work for us to do!

Questions:
Do you believe that Jesus notices you?

How has his attention changed your life?

Next Steps:
This week, try seeking someone in your world who doesn’t seem to get noticed much. Figure out a way (that isn’t weird or creepy!) to engage them, maybe ask about and listen to their story.

Pray about starting a new Group, inviting people you don’t know to join. This experience will stretch you, and you will join Jesus in noticing “the crowds.”
Prayer:
Lord God, help me to see who you see, and say what you want me to say. I want to notice the people who feel that they have been invisible, because no one is invisible to you. Everyone I lay eyes on is someone who matters so much to you that you sent your precious Son to rescue them through his sacrifice. I willingly go into the harvest field, Lord. Send me! Amen.

This post was written by Lauri White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.
A Passion for Compassion
March 7, 2018

Of all the characteristics that Jesus embodies, the most inspiring may be his passion for compassion.

Compassion is commonly defined as concern for the suffering or misfortune of others. But the compassion that Jesus exhibits is much more than a feeling. In his book A Life Beyond Amazing, Dr. David Jeremiah writes, “Sympathy is something you feel. Compassion is something you show, or better yet, something you do.”

In this way, I believe compassion, much like its close relation, love, demands action to be true. One of the most beautiful elements of the gospel of Jesus is how he so often calls us to action for the benefit of one another and his kingdom.

This week, LivingItOut is unpacking scriptural passages from the Gospel of Matthew with an emphasis on the teachings of Jesus. One of the twelve disciples of Jesus, Matthew authored the first book of the New Testament, one of three synoptic gospels (the others being Mark and Luke), in which he provides a biographical account of the Messiah’s life and teachings.

Today’s passage speaks to the compassion Jesus felt and displayed as he preached to crowds across Galilee.

Matthew 9:36
When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (emphasis added)

Dr. Jeremiah notes that Jesus was particularly compassionate toward the less fortunate – those who were lost spiritually, the sick, widowed mothers, lepers, and many similarly needy souls. But perhaps his most dramatic act of compassion was demonstrated in his most trying moment – on the cross. “His last acts were to pray for the forgiveness of his murderers and then to look beside him and feel compassion for the dying thief whom he encouraged and assured of salvation,” Jeremiah writes.
Though it’s unlikely any of us will ever be presented with such a dramatic opportunity to demonstrate our compassion for others, we can and should be inspired by the incredible example Jesus provided us.

**The Parable of the Good Samaritan** (Luke 10:25-37)
The most legendary story of compassion in all of literature (let alone the Bible) is one that has been referenced many times before in *Living It Out: the Parable of the Good Samaritan*. For those who are not familiar with it, the story centers around a Jew who was beaten and robbed as he traveled along the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho after nightfall. As he lay beside the road – barely clothed and barely alive – three strangers happened upon him in succession. The first two, a priest and then a Levite – both religious leaders – observed the man but found reasons to continue walking without stopping to help him. The third stranger, a Samaritan, stopped to help the man. Despite the fact that the Samaritans and Jews were essentially mortal enemies, the Samaritan saw the injured stranger not as a Jew, but merely as a fellow creature of God. He cleansed and bandaged the man’s wounds, transported him to an inn, and even paid for his lodging and care.

In a recent message titled *A Modern Day Samaritan*, Dr. Charles Stanley said of the Good Samaritan’s actions, “He opened his eyes, he opened his heart, and he opened his hands. He got busy.”

“When your heart can’t break, you are in trouble,” Dr. Stanley added. “All of us should be available for our heart to break. We should be able to feel and touch and know in our heart what real pain and suffering heartache is.”

The late Rev. Billy Graham once wrote, “Our compassion for others is an accurate gauge of our devotion to God.” As you move through this day, consider how even small acts of compassion can bring comfort to others and bring alive your devotion to living a godly life.

**Questions:**
Do you treat compassion more as a feeling or an action?
Think of how you feel when you are the recipient of compassion. How can you leverage this knowledge to more frequently share the gift of compassion with others?

What steps can you take today to bring to life your devotion to God through acts of compassion?

**Next Steps:**
Set aside time this week to consider the opportunities you have – both large and small – to act with compassion toward others. Perhaps it’s taking part in, or financially supporting, a mission trip; serving at church or in the community; or even just committing to being more purposeful in recognizing the difference you can make with a kind word or helpful hand to one in need. Whatever the case, commit to demonstrating your devotion to God through acts of compassion.

**Prayer:**
*Heavenly Father, I am both grateful for and inspired by your passion for compassion. Help me to emulate your ways by being ever aware of the impact I can make on others and your kingdom when I act with heartfelt compassion toward others. Amen.*

*This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.*
Help Wanted
March 8, 2018

I have a fairly large garden at home. We grow everything from carrots to tomatoes to raspberries. Even on a small scale, harvesting can be hard work. It can be dirty and labor-intensive. I grew peas for one year only. To harvest them, you pick the pods and split them open to remove the peas. After picking every pea pod that I grew, it took me over an hour of shelling just to have enough peas for one small side dish. Since then, I buy frozen peas at the grocery store.

You don’t have to be skilled to harvest fruits and veggies; you don’t even have to know anything about gardening. However, you do have to be willing to get your hands dirty and get the job done! Fruits and vegetables need to be harvested when they are ready and ripe, not when the gardener is ready, not when you have the time. Jesus says, “The fields are already ripe for harvest” (John 4:35b).

Tomorrow in LivingItOut, we will talk about what it means to get out and get our hands dirty. Today, we are focusing on Jesus’ instruction to pray for workers. Far too often, my prayers are much too focused on myself and what I need. Or, I look around at those who are confused and helpless and pray that God would send someone (else) to help them.

In Matthew 9:38, Jesus tells his disciples: “So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

As Ben Snyder mentioned this weekend, Jesus could have instructed us to pray that others would pay attention to his teaching. Or, he could have told us to pray for peace, love, judgment, revival, etc. These are good prayers, don’t get me wrong. But, it is not what he said. He looked at his disciples and said they should pray for more workers.

There is a harvest around each of us, and we have an opportunity to be one of the workers. The harvest is too great for us to do work alone, though. Think of the harvest that is ripe at your work, the harvest that is ripe in your neighborhood. Think of the harvest that is ripe in our church. All around us, there are people ready to take a step in their spiritual journey, and there is a need for workers to help them take that step. Think of the difference we could make if
we collectively obey God’s command to pray for more workers and to step up as he calls us.

**Questions:**
What have your prayers been about lately?

Do you see yourself as a “worker” whom God will use?

How can you pray for workers? Where do you see a need for workers in our church, community, country, and world?

**Next Steps:**
This week, make a conscious effort to pray for workers for CedarCreek and the church as a whole.

**Prayer:**
*Lord, thank you for believing in my potential. Thank you for calling me to be one of your workers. Please create the desire to serve you in my heart and help me call others to serve you also. Let us have an abundance of workers in the church and in the world. Amen.*

*This post was written by Meghan Yarnell, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.*
By now, you have probably heard of the Great Commission, whether or not you even knew it was called the Great Commission. After rising from the grave and before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave his disciples very specific instructions.

**Matthew 28:19-20a**

> Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." (emphasis added)

The call to action is evident in the words Jesus chose to use: Go. Make. Baptize. Teach. We may not know how to do any or all of those things, but Jesus also gives us some assurance in verse 20b: “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Along with the promise to go with us (in the form of the Holy Spirit), Jesus is not asking us to do anything that he did not do himself. Our passage for the week outlines the way Jesus lived his life.

**Matthew 9:35-38**

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Jesus demonstrated for the disciples (and us) how to live out the Great Commission. It is all written down for us in the Bible. Now, it is our time to live out this commandment. Each of the four elements of the Great Commission—go, make, baptize, teach—will look different for us.

Going into all nations does not necessarily mean participating in an international mission trip. There are lost people at your work, in your
neighborhood, at your school, in your family. Ask God to reveal the people he wants you to go to. This is your mission field!

Making disciples may seem scary, especially if we have never done that before. We may not feel equipped or able to make a disciple, but remember, as a follower of Christ, there will always be people who know less than you do. This step begins by becoming a disciple yourself.

Baptizing in Jesus’ name can seem just as daunting, but fortunately for us, CedarCreek provides resources and people to help us make this happen. If you or someone you know wants to be baptized, make sure they get connected to a CedarCreek staff member.

In order to teach Jesus’ commands, we must know them, which begins with studying the Bible. This will help to better equip and prepare you to make disciples and to teach them how to follow those commands. Like I said, there will always be people who are newer to their faith than you are; they may not even know anything about God or the Bible. You will always have something to offer to someone. Remember, you are the worker that Jesus was praying for. You are a minister!

Questions:
What is a worker? What do they do?

Is God calling you to go somewhere? (Remember, this may not be an international mission. Perhaps, he is asking you to go into your neighborhood to teach his Good News there.)

Next Steps:
Ask God to reveal the lost people in your life to whom he has specifically called you to minister. He will bring those people into your life in different ways. When he does, be ready and ask them to share a cup of coffee to listen to their story.
Prayer:
God, thank you for going before me to set the example of how I should live. Give me the courage to go where you send me, the knowledge to make disciples and to teach them to obey your commands, and a heart that breaks for the lost people in my life. Amen.

This post was written by Ryan Cook, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.