

▼  
**A**  
**J E S U S -**  
**S H A P E D**  
**L I F E**

*Forty  
Days  
Toward  
Christ-  
likeness*

**S T E V E**  
**C O R D L E**

**A  
JESUS-  
SHAPED  
LIFE**

*This page intentionally left blank*

▼  
**A  
J E S U S -  
S H A P E D  
L I F E**

*Forty  
Days  
Toward  
Christ-  
likeness*

**S T E V E  
C O R D L E**



Copyright 2021 by Steve Cordle

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™ All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. [www.lockman.org](http://www.lockman.org).

Printed in the United States of America

*Cover design by Grace Boto at Terra Firma Studio*  
*Page design and layout by PerfectType, Nashville, Tennessee*

Cordle, Steve.

A Jesus-shaped life : forty days toward Christ-likeness / Steve Cordle. – Franklin, Tennessee : Seedbed Publishing, ©2021.

pages ; cm .

ISBN 9781628249224 (paperback)  
ISBN 9781628249231 (Mobi)  
ISBN 9781628249248 (ePub)  
ISBN 9781628249255 (uPDF)  
OCLC 1273731459

1. Jesus Christ--Example--Prayers and devotions. 2. Jesus Christ--Character--Prayers and devotions. 3. Devotional calendars I. Title.

BT304.2.C57 2021

232

2021948549



SEEDBED PUBLISHING  
Franklin, Tennessee  
[seedbed.com](http://seedbed.com)

For Logan, Hope, and Grayson:  
I am cheering you on as you grow in Jesus.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	xi
---------------------	----

## *Week 1*

### **Made for This**

<b>Day 1</b>	Desiring What God Desires	5
<b>Day 2</b>	Why Christlikeness Is Not Natural	9
<b>Day 3</b>	Is Change Even Possible?	14
<b>Day 4</b>	Marked by Grace	18
<b>Day 5</b>	Our Ultimate Life Coach	23
<b>Day 6</b>	The First Word in Transformation	27
<b>Day 7</b>	Working It Out	31

## *Week 2*

### **The Obedience of Jesus**

<b>Day 8</b>	The Answer Is Yes	35
<b>Day 9</b>	Simulated Holiness	39
<b>Day 10</b>	Renouncing Sin	43
<b>Day 11</b>	When You're Offered the World	48
<b>Day 12</b>	Stubborn Sin	52
<b>Day 13</b>	Inside-Out Living	57
<b>Day 14</b>	Working It Out	61



*Week 3***The Relationships of Jesus**

<b>Day 15</b>	What Counts	65
<b>Day 16</b>	Forgiving Others	69
<b>Day 17</b>	Look Closer	74
<b>Day 18</b>	Good Sex	78
<b>Day 19</b>	For Every Age	83
<b>Day 20</b>	A Passion for God	87
<b>Day 21</b>	Working It Out	91

*Week 4***The Courage of Jesus**

<b>Day 22</b>	Set Apart	95
<b>Day 23</b>	Think Differently	99
<b>Day 24</b>	Though None Go with Me	103
<b>Day 25</b>	Comfort or Christ	108
<b>Day 26</b>	Lust-Proofing	112
<b>Day 27</b>	Resisting Money's Orders	118
<b>Day 28</b>	Working It Out	123

*Week 5***The Justice of Jesus**

<b>Day 29</b>	Just, Like Jesus	127
<b>Day 30</b>	Kingdom Greatness	132
<b>Day 31</b>	Love Made Visible	136
<b>Day 32</b>	Bridging the Racial Divide	140
<b>Day 33</b>	Jesus in Disguise	145
<b>Day 34</b>	Good Works and Good News	149
<b>Day 35</b>	Working It Out	154

*Week 6***The Mission of Jesus**

<b>Day 36</b>	Sharing Jesus' Purpose	159
<b>Day 37</b>	Urgency	163
<b>Day 38</b>	Glow in the Dark	168
<b>Day 39</b>	Use Your Words	173
<b>Day 40</b>	Working It Out	177

*This page intentionally left blank*

## *Introduction*

“Whoa,” whisper onlookers. Others gaze silently, awed by the startling beauty of what lies before them.

More than five million people visit the Grand Canyon every year, and no one seeing it for the first time can be adequately prepared for the stunning view. The depth, color, and scope are impossible to describe. Pictures cannot do it justice. One of the most spectacular geological sites in the world, the Grand Canyon extends up to 18 miles wide and six thousand feet deep. It stretches for 277 miles and contains several ecosystems.

Geologists tell us that the Colorado River carved the canyon over millions of years. The river cut so deep that its strata reveal 40 percent of the earth’s history. Even today, the relentless water flow continues to imperceptibly erode the canyon floor, deepening and widening it.

Whether we realize it or not, there are seen and unseen forces working on our hearts and minds too. Our thinking, values, and character are continually being shaped by myriad influences. Some of them are obvious, such as our family of origin, nationality, or education. Our life experiences—both the painful and the enjoyable—also significantly shape us.

Other influences go unnoticed. Take, for example, our cell phones. Tony Reinke writes that heavy cell phone use

leaves us continually distracted. As we check our phones an average of three hundred times per day, we ignore the people and events around us.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, our interaction with the Internet fragments our ability to focus and reduces our attention span.<sup>2</sup> Algorithms increasingly determine what we see and, thus, affect what we think.

If all that sounds disconcerting, here is some good news: if you are a follower of Jesus, there is also a supernatural force at work in your life shaping you in healthy, life-giving ways. That force is the power of God forming you into the image of Jesus.

Romans 8:28–29 says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*. (emphasis added)

God's eternal goal is that we live a Jesus-shaped life. From the moment you trusted Christ, God began the process of making you like his Son. And Philippians 2:12–13 urges us to engage in our part of that process: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

---

1. Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

2. Mike Wright and Ellie Zolfagharifard, "Internet Is Giving Us Shorter Attention Spans and Worse Memories, Major Study Suggests," *Telegraph*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/06/06/internet-giving-us-shorter-attention-spans-worse-memories-major/>.

It is God's power that shapes us into the image of Jesus, but we are not passive. Unlike the rock in the Grand Canyon that lies motionless as it is molded by the river, we are actively engaged in a cooperative effort with God. Philippians 2 says that God works in us, and we work out our salvation. He acts, and we respond with the strength he provides. When it comes to becoming like Christ, without God we cannot, and without us, God will not. The Lord will not force us to become like Jesus against our will.

Notice the verse does not say we are to work *for* our salvation. Salvation is a gift of God's grace that we receive, not earn. We are to work *out* our salvation. We already received our salvation; now, we are to develop it.

It is similar to a physical workout. You don't work *for* your arms—they were given to you at birth. You work *out* your arms; that is, you exercise to strengthen them. Once we freely receive new life in Christ, we begin the process of becoming like him. As we work more of Jesus' life into our habits, routines, and character, we grow in his image.

## About This Book

This book is designed to be read over a forty-day period, ideally as part of a small-group experience. Each week explores one aspect of Jesus' nature and what it looks like for us to share in it. The Working It Out section at the end of each week is a menu of spiritual exercises to help you to process and apply what you've read. Putting God's truth into practice is vital because hearing his Word without responding to it stagnates our growth and diminishes our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Conversely, applying what we hear results in growth and spiritual maturity.

At the same time, it is impossible to change our lives in forty different ways over forty days, so be selective. At the end of each week, ask yourself which reading stood out to you the most. Perhaps that is the Holy Spirit's arrow pointing you to the next area of growth he has for you.

Because spiritual growth happens best in community, small-group questions are included. They are designed to prompt you to share your journey with a few trusted friends. After all, we are transformed as we serve and are served, as we love and are loved. That is why the New Testament gives us forty-seven "one another" commands, such as "Love one another" (John 15:12 NASB) and "Bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2 NASB). Our spiritual journey is personal but not private. So, read the daily reflections, and gather weekly with others who are on the journey to pray and encourage one another in your action steps.

Of course, becoming like Jesus will take longer than forty days. But do not be discouraged; it will happen. Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

And on that day, when Christ's work in you is completed, you will reflect the image of Jesus to such a degree that onlookers may whisper, "Whoa."

**A  
JESUS-  
SHAPED  
LIFE**



*This page intentionally left blank*

*Week 1*

## **Made for This**

God's will is for you to be holy . . .

—1 Thessalonians 4:3 NLT

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

—Romans 8:29

Who are you going to live for—yourself or God?

—Rick Warren

*This page intentionally left blank*

Day 1

## Desiring What God Desires

► Read Ephesians 1:1–4.

Even before Todd was born, his father had plans for him. Marv would make Todd the perfect quarterback.

Football ran in the family. Marv had been a captain for the University of Southern California and played professionally. Todd's uncle had been a star quarterback at USC. Now that Marv had a son, he intended to raise Todd to surpass them both.

Marv gave Todd frozen kidney to teethe on as an infant. Marv was stretching Todd's hamstrings when Todd was one month old, and had him doing push-ups before he could walk. Todd's parents made sure that he adhered to the purest diet: no junk food and no sugar. Todd even brought his own cake to birthday parties. *Sports Illustrated* later called Todd "America's first test-tube athlete" and reported that he had never eaten a Big Mac or an Oreo.

For a while, it seemed that the plan was working. Todd excelled as a quarterback in high school and went on to play at USC. After college, the Oakland Raiders drafted him in the first round.

But all was not as it seemed.

Todd always wanted to please his overbearing father, but he also wanted to be a normal kid. In grade school, Todd started sneaking junk food, and by high school, he was smoking marijuana regularly.<sup>1</sup> In college, he broke free from the strict rules of his upbringing. He began a struggle with harder drugs that shortened his professional career and plagued him for the rest of his life.

Eventually, the pressure became too much for Todd. During his freshman year at USC, he briefly left school and confessed to his mother, “I wish I could go somewhere else and be someone else. I don’t want to be Todd Marinovich.”<sup>2</sup> In short, Todd did not want to be the man his father desired him to become.

Have you ever felt that way in your relationship with God? While wanting to please your heavenly Father, have you wondered whether you can measure up to his expectations? Perhaps you’re not always sure you want to, even if you feel you should.

Our image of what God desires of us determines how we relate to him. If we believe that God wants us to live in a way that we consider unappealing, we will keep our distance from him. So, if we want a trust-filled relationship with God, we need to desire what he wants for us.

---

1. Michael Rosenberg, “Learning to be Human Again,” *Sports Illustrated*, January 11, 2019, <https://www.si.com/nfl/2019/01/11/todd-marinovich-dad-marv-quarterback-drugs-rehab>.

2. Douglas S. Looney, “The Minefield,” *Sports Illustrated*, September 3, 1990.

And what is it that God desires for us? It might not be what we think it is.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us: “Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes” (NLT).

God wants to make us holy. Does that idea inspire you or induce you to cringe? Your answer likely depends on what you believe it means to be holy. If you think that *holy* is a code word for well-behaved, you probably won’t be enthusiastic about it. If you imagine holiness to be a grim, duty-bound existence, you might say, “I’ll pass.” But, in reality, true holiness bears no resemblance to those tired stereotypes.

*Holy* is the word the Bible uses to describe God’s character. Holiness is not sterile rule-keeping; it is the word that sums up God’s goodness and his power.<sup>3</sup> Holiness is wholeness. It is our interior and exterior life syncing up with heaven’s heartbeat. It shows up as life-giving words, thoughts, and actions. Holiness is life as God originally intended it to be. In short, to be holy means to be like Jesus. And God created us for that life.

“Even before he made the world, *God loved us.*” God wants us to be like Jesus because he loves us, not because it annoys him if we are not. He knows how rich and rewarding it is to live a Jesus-shaped life, and he desires that for us.

God desires to free us from both the penalty and the power of sin. We can be eternally grateful that God forgives us and promises us heaven after we die. Yet, he also makes it possible for us to taste the kingdom of

---

3. “Holiness,” *The Bible Project*, accessed August 31, 2019, <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/holiness/>.

heaven here and now. God loves us too much to leave us trapped in the grip of sin that robs us of peace, tears apart our relationships, and blocks us from fulfilling his plan for our lives. While it is wonderful to know that we are forgiven for our disobedience, it is exhilarating to be liberated from the compulsion to repeat that sin.

Do we want a Jesus-shaped life? Do we desire what God wants for us? When we see the fulfilling life God has in mind for us, will we desire it? Admittedly, as we grow there will be moments (maybe seasons) when we want our own way. Saint Augustine once prayed, “Lord, make me chaste [sexually pure], but not yet!”<sup>4</sup> But the good news is that if we ask him, the Holy Spirit will change our desires to match God’s good ones for us.

Take a moment now to talk with God about your feelings regarding a Jesus-shaped life. Be honest with him. Where do you want his will? Where have you not yet embraced it?

### ► Prayer

*Lord, thank you for your love for me. I know you want the best for me. By your Spirit, help me to want what you want for me. Amen.*

---

4. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145.

## Day 2

# Why Christlikeness Is Not Natural

► Read Ephesians 4:22–24.

The movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* features a grotesque character named Gollum. Before he came to possess the “one ring to rule them all,” he used to be a hobbit named Sméagol. But, gradually, the power of the ring distorted his body and mind, turning the wholesome hobbit into the ghastly Gollum.

Eventually, Gollum loses the ring, and a hobbit named Frodo acquires it. Gollum pursues Frodo, scheming to regain possession of the ring by any means necessary. Yet when Frodo meets Gollum, he doesn’t harm the creature. Instead, he reminds him of his prior life and name. As a result, Gollum begins to call Frodo, “Master,” and becomes an uneasy ally in his quest.

Later, however, Gollum’s old, twisted nature resurfaces. One night, as Sam and Frodo sleep, Gollum is tempted to steal the ring. However, he is torn. One part of him wants to betray Frodo, but another part of him



doesn't. His old Gollum nature wants to take the ring. But his new Sméagol nature wants to help Frodo. The two natures argue with one another:

Gollum: "We wants it. We needs it. Must have the Precious. They stole it from us. Sneaky little hobbitses. Wicked. Tricky. False."

Sméagol: (*shaking his head*) "No. Not Master."

Gollum: (*snarling malevolently*) "Yes . . . They will cheat you, hurt you, lie!"

Sméagol: "Master's my friend."

Gollum: "You don't have any friends. Nobody likes you."

Sméagol: (*closes his ears with his hands*) "Not listening. I'm not listening."

Gollum: "You're a liar and a thief."

Sméagol: "No."

Gollum: (sinister whisper) "Murderer!"

Sméagol: (voice breaking; hurt by Gollum's remark) "Go away!"<sup>5</sup>

Most of us know what it's like to argue with ourselves—to engage in an internal struggle. If you have ever tried to lose weight, you may have had a conversation that goes something like this:

New healthy self: "I'm not going to eat that donut!"

Old undisciplined self: "Yes, you are. You know you are. Just admit it."

New healthy self: "No, I'm not! I eat healthy now!"

---

5. Concept from Preaching Today, <https://www.preachingtoday.com/search/?query=Gollum&sourcename=Illustrations&order=newest&type=>.

Old undisciplined self: “You’ll never really change. You know it’s just a matter of time until you cave in. You may as well do it now and enjoy it.”

If improving our eating habits is difficult, how much more challenging is it to change our very character from self-oriented to Christlike? Toning up our bodies is difficult; how much harder is it to grow into the image of Jesus?

Anyone who has followed Jesus for more than a couple of weeks knows that becoming Christlike can be a struggle at times. We can honor Jesus one minute, only to stumble into sin the next.

The reason we wrestle with those inner battles is that we have two natures. Ephesians 4:22–24 tells us we have an “old self” and a “new self.”

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your *old self*, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the *new self*, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (emphasis added)

The old self is the nature with which we were born. It is our human nature, and it is not like Jesus. Verse 22 says it is being corrupted. It does not want what God wants.

Our new self, however, comes from God. The moment we put our faith and trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit creates a new spirit in us. This new nature is made in the likeness of God. Our new self desires holiness. It is comfortable with Christlikeness.

Ephesians 4 tells us how to respond to each of our two natures. We’re told to “put off” the old nature. We

don't become like Jesus by struggling to reform our old nature. Life in Jesus is not about managing our sin. We become Christlike by receiving an entirely new nature.

Verse 24 tells us to “put on” the new self. Becoming like Jesus is the process of learning to respond to the new self and to ignore the old one. God doesn't ask us to improve our old nature; we are exhorted to kill it—that is, to consider it dead by ignoring it. We are to refuse to give it what it demands.

However, the old nature doesn't leave quietly. When the New Gollum (Sméagol) told the Old Gollum to go away, the Old Gollum mockingly asked: “Go away?”

Sméagol: “I hate you. I hate you.”

Gollum: “Where would you be without me? . . .

I saved us. It was me. We survived because of me.”

Sméagol: “Not anymore.”

Gollum: “What did you say?”

Sméagol: “Master looks after us now. We don't need you.”

Gollum: (appalled) “What?”

Sméagol : “Leave now, and never come back!”

As the New Gollum realizes there's no counter-response, he jumps and rejoices: “Gone! Gone! We told him to go away, and away he goes! Gone, gone, gone! Sméagol's free!”

Do not be discouraged in your wrestling with your old self. Remember that you have a new nature that comes from God. You do not need to take orders from your old one. As you learn to ignore it, you will find that it

will back down and weaken. You, too, will say, “I told him to go away, and away he goes! I’m free!”

► **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank you for the new nature you have given me. Help me to ignore my old self and live by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## Day 3

# Is Change Even Possible?

### ► Read Romans 6:1–4.

“Mom, I want to play football.”

I was thirteen years old and feeling inspired by the NFL game I was watching on TV. Although I often played football in the backyard with my friends, I wanted to try out for an organized team.

My mother wisely replied, “Baseball season will be here soon.” I was a skinny kid with little upper body strength, and she did not have the heart to tell me I wasn’t cut out to be a football star. I tried eating more and working out, but eventually, I had to concede—I did not have a future in football.

Each of us confronts our limitations at some point. Whether our goal is to perform a screaming guitar solo or to earn an A in organic chemistry, sometimes, despite our best efforts, our dreams never become reality.

Is a Jesus-shaped life one of those unrealistic pipe dreams? Is holiness an unattainable goal that God expects us to work toward, all the while knowing that we’ll never reach it? No one likes to fight a losing battle. If we can’t

change, we might as well accept defeat and content ourselves with appreciating God's forgiveness when we fail.

Some Christians do just that. Maybe you've seen the bumper sticker that reads: "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." That is true as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. That saying implies that the only difference between Christ-followers and everyone else is that God forgives us and not them.

However, Jesus tells us something different. In Matthew 5:13–14, he says, "You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world." We can't be salt and light if we live the same way the world does. Jesus expects us to stand out from our culture.

God's forgiveness is an amazing gift, but he wants to do more than take away our guilt. First John 1:9 promises: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just *and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (emphasis added).

God promises to both forgive us *and* change us. He will purify us so that we do not have to keep falling into the same sins. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. . . . So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34, 36).

We are not just sinners saved by grace. We are also children of God set free from sin by Jesus. Romans 6:1–2 asks: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Theologians will debate exactly how much freedom from sin we can experience in this life, but here is what we need to know: *there is no sin from which Jesus cannot free us.*

Is there a habit or sin that has harassed you? Jesus can deliver you.

For example, if you have a habit of exploding in anger, you don't need to say, "Well, when I was growing up, my family screamed at each other. It's just how I am wired." That might be true. Perhaps responding in anger was your default setting. But that was the old you. The new nature God birthed in you is free to be patient. You do not need to be a slave to anger. The same is true for any other sin; you don't need to accept its control over you.

Ginger Whitacre had been praying for her husband, Mark, for ten years, and his parents had been praying for even longer. But Mark wasn't changing. He was gripped by materialism, status, and power. At age thirty-two, he was already a division president of one of the nation's largest companies. He had an extraordinary salary, lived in a mansion, and flew in his own corporate jet.

Even so, Mark was not content. He was driven by a constant, relentless craving for more. He became a workaholic and a stranger to his wife and kids. Eventually, his greed led him to participate in his company's billion-dollar price-fixing scheme.

One day, Ginger learned that Mark was breaking the law and forced him to go to the FBI to report it. The authorities gave him a choice: wear a wire to record his colleagues or go to jail. He chose to wear the wire. For three years, Mark secretly collaborated with the FBI to build a case against his employers. In the end, several executives went to jail, including Mark. Although he had complete immunity in the price-fixing case, he was so firmly in the grip of greed that he could not resist stealing millions of dollars from his company even while he was working with the FBI. It was illogical, but Mark was a slave to greed.

In spite of it all, Ginger kept praying for him. Finally, while he sat in jail, Mark became a follower of Jesus. He

said, “I became a free man in prison.” He was powerfully changed. He was liberated from the grip of greed. His whole perspective on life was transformed.

For the last thirteen years, Mark has lived a Jesus-shaped life. After his release, he took an entry-level job and later rose to become chief operating officer of the company, leading research efforts in cancer prevention and the global battle against HIV. Today, corporations invite him to speak about business ethics at their training events. He is also a leading spokesman for Christian Business Men’s Connection. He said, “I am not looking for forgiveness. [He found that in Christ.] I am looking to show people who have fallen short, as I have, that there is an opportunity to turn one’s life around.”<sup>6</sup>

### ► Prayer

*Lord, help me to expect change by your power so that I can see myself as a new creation in Christ. Amen.*

---

6. Walter Pavlo, “A Presidential Pardon Long Overdue for Whistleblower Mark Whitacre,” *Forbes*, May 31, 2018.



## Day 4

# Marked by Grace

### ► Read Isaiah 6:1–7.

Isaiah had been worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem for decades. He was familiar with the layout of the courts, the rhythm of the prayers, and the smell of the incense. He often stood silently, head bowed, outside the Holy of Holies, where God's presence dwelt.

One day Isaiah was jolted out of his routine by a surprise encounter with the living God:

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies!  
The whole earth is filled with his glory!”

Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations,  
and the entire building was filled with smoke.  
(Isa. 6:1–4 NLT)

Ushered into the presence of God, Isaiah was utterly undone. He was staggered by the unfiltered sight of God's majesty and holiness. He glimpsed the God who is not just holy but "holy, holy, holy."

Isaiah didn't respond by saying, "Awesome! Wait 'til everybody sees this on Instagram!" No, when Isaiah encountered the holiness of God, he became aware of his unworthiness to be in God's presence.

Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies." (v. 5 NLT)

Isaiah was a respected religious and national leader. Some regarded him as a holy man. But when he came face-to-face with the holiness of the Lord, Isaiah realized that his sin and God's glory could not mix. He was sure he was doomed. But instead, Isaiah was surprised by grace.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven." (vv. 6–7 NLT)

Isaiah was literally touched by God's grace where he most needed it. His lips were a source of shame to him ("I have filthy lips"), and that is exactly where the angel applied the coal.

Isaiah's experience shows us four truths that shape us on our journey toward Christlikeness:

### **Truth #1: We need deep spiritual healing.**

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he realized that there was a huge holiness gap between himself and God. It's not just that he said and did some wrong things; he recognized that his very being was out of sync with God's ("I am a sinful man"). If you or I caught a glimpse of the glorified Jesus right now, we would realize that, apart from him, we could not stand in his presence.

### **Truth #2: God accepts us by grace.**

God saw Isaiah's sin but did not reject him. Isaiah didn't plead his case or make excuses for his sin. He admitted his moral neediness. The Lord forgave and purified him out of undeserved mercy, not because Isaiah promised to shape up or be a better person. Isaiah received mercy.

God sent Jesus as our atoning sacrifice. We are saved by grace through faith in him (Eph. 2:8–9). We don't pursue Christlikeness so that God will accept us. We seek a Jesus-shaped life because God has *already* accepted us. When we remain anchored to this truth, we will not sink into discouragement or anxiety.

### **Truth #3: God transforms us by grace.**

We do not have what it takes to become like Jesus. No amount of self-control or good intention will transform us. But the good news is that we don't need to have what

it takes—because God does! God’s grace not only forgives us, it also transforms us.

Hang with me for just a couple of paragraphs of theology.

John Wesley taught about three types of grace: prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. These are labels we use for the different ways God works in us. Let me explain why this matters to you.

First, you need to know that following Christ was not your idea; it was God’s. Even before you wanted to be a Christ-follower, the Holy Spirit was drawing you toward Jesus. That work of the Spirit is called *prevenient grace*. You didn’t deserve or ask for God to draw you to himself; he just did it.

Then, when you responded to the Spirit’s tug by putting your faith in Jesus, God forgave you and made you right with himself (Rom. 5:1). That work of God is called *justifying grace*—it is the grace that saves us (Eph. 2:8–9).

And after you became a child of God through faith, God began to make you more like Jesus. This work is called *sanctifying grace*. It is what the apostle Paul wrote about in Philippians 1:6: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

By grace, God’s Spirit drew you to himself. By grace, God forgave you and graciously gave you a new nature. Do you think he is going to quit working by grace now? Do you think he’ll say, “I’ve taken you this far. It’s up to you from here on. Good luck. See you in heaven . . . maybe”?

No, God does not leave us to our own devices. He is at work in you right now. He is the one who has given you the desire to be more like Jesus. He will also give you the power to do it. Yes, we have a part to play in

this process. Spiritual transformation is a joint venture between God and us. We grow by cooperating with the Holy Spirit's work in us. (That is what you're doing right now by reading this book!)

### **Truth #4: Grace propels us toward mission.**

Isaiah's story does not end with being forgiven by God's grace. After he was cleansed inwardly, he received a new focus for his life.

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?"

I said, "Here I am. Send me." (Isa. 6:8 NLT)

Isaiah spent the rest of his life on a faith adventure that made an eternal impact. And you and I can too. As we let the Holy Spirit transform us more into the image of Jesus, a new purpose will open up for us. And it is all by grace.

#### **► Prayer**

*Lord, thank you for your grace, which drew me to seek you, saved me, and is now transforming me into the image of Jesus. Amen.*

## Day 5

# Our Ultimate Life Coach

### ► Read John 16:5–15.

I spent the summer after my freshman year in college coaching twelve-year-old boys at an overnight baseball camp. I instructed campers in the fundamentals of a compact swing, running the bases, and getting in front of ground balls. My favorite task, though, was coaching pitchers. I worked alongside the camp's owner, who had pitched professionally. We demonstrated wind-up, delivery, and follow-through techniques. Then we watched the kids as they threw. If we saw a camper shift his weight at the wrong time, we stopped him and reminded him of the proper form. If his lead foot came down in the wrong spot, we stepped in to correct it.

As coaches, the last thing we wanted to do was to discourage the kids by pointing out what they were doing wrong; our goal was quite the opposite. We were there to help them to become the best baseball players they could be. We corrected their pitching mechanics so they could throw strikes and get batters out. We looked for flaws in their swings so that they could eliminate them and drive

the ball farther. We knew that improving their skills would help them enjoy the game more.

The job of a coach is to help players achieve new levels that they would not reach on their own. Sometimes that means that a coach will say, “Not that way; do it this way.”

Even adults pay people to tell them what they should do differently. Nobody hires a piano teacher to tell them how lovely they play. No, they hire a teacher to instruct them on how to perform better. That means sometimes the teacher will stop the student and say, “That’s not the right rhythm; it goes like this.” People hire a personal trainer to help them improve their fitness. They expect the trainer to push them: “Don’t quit now! Give me ten more reps!”

The Holy Spirit is our ultimate life coach. He knows that God created us to become like Jesus, and he will encourage and correct us toward that end.

Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus told his disciples: “And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8 NASB). Just like a good coach, the Holy Spirit will sometimes tell us, “Not that way; do it this way instead.” That is called conviction.

The Spirit’s conviction can take the form of a sudden realization or an inner catch. For example, if I walk away from a conversation and think, *I shouldn’t have said that*, it is possible that the Holy Spirit is convicting me. He may be trying to tell me that Jesus would have spoken differently than I did. That can prompt me to apologize and to speak with a different tone in the future.

Conviction is not the Holy Spirit saying, “Gotcha!” His aim is not to scold us; it is to redirect us. The Holy Spirit wants to get our attention so that he can show us a

better way—Jesus’ way. He is alerting us of our need for change because he is for us.

A few years ago, I was worshiping with our congregation. Just before I stepped up to preach, one of our staff tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, “Your fly is open.” I felt my face grow pale. I was mortified. I corrected the situation as quickly and discreetly as possible. Then, a second emotion filled me: gratitude. I was thankful that he told me *before* I stood in front of hundreds of people and not after! When I thanked him later, he replied: “Friends tell each other these kinds of things.”

The Holy Spirit is our friend. Through conviction, he taps us on the shoulder to tell us when we need to change. He will convict us, but he will never condemn us. There is a big difference.

Conviction is specific. When we are convicted, we can name a particular action or attitude that God wants to change. For example, “I did not tell the truth to my boss,” or, “I took what didn’t belong to me.” Conviction is not an enjoyable feeling, but the Spirit’s purpose is not to shame us; it is to transform us.

By contrast, condemnation is general. Instead of saying, “You acted in an un-Christlike way,” condemnation says, “You are a bad person.”

Conviction corrects us. Condemnation accuses us. Conviction comes from God; condemnation comes from Satan. (In fact, the name *Satan* means “accuser,” or “adversary.”)

Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When you put your faith in Jesus, you were completely forgiven. You became a child of God, and your heavenly Father loves you. He will lead you to maturity, not punish you or



shame you. As you seek to be Christlike, be sure you are listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and not to the accusations of Satan.

We cannot become like Jesus by trusting our judgment alone. We need an outside perspective. Thankfully, the Lord has sent us the ultimate life coach: the Holy Spirit. He will convict us through a variety of means: other people, inner prompts, circumstances, Scripture, and more. And best of all, he will empower us to make the changes he prompts.

### ► Prayer

*Holy Spirit, “Search me . . . and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24). Amen.*

## Day 6

# The First Word in Transformation

### ► Read Matthew 4:12–17.

A person's last words can be both fascinating and revealing. And so can their first. Writer George Orwell's first word as a baby was *beastly*. When he was around eighteen months old, he caught a severe case of bronchitis and was confined to bed. It was there he spoke that first word. Ironically, he used the word *beastly* in every book he wrote except for his novel about beasts, *Animal Farm*.

Pablo Picasso could draw before he could speak. He first learned to ask for things by drawing pictures of them. His first word was *piz*, which was the way he pronounced *lápiz*, the Spanish word for "pencil." The world is grateful that his mother gave him one.<sup>7</sup>

The book of Matthew records that the first word Jesus spoke in his public ministry was *repent*. In Matthew 4:17,

---

7. Arika Okrent, "First Words of 11 Famous People," October 11, 2013, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/53129/first-words-11-famous-people>.

Jesus announced: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” He was declaring that a new way of life had arrived—the “kingdom of heaven” (or “the kingdom of God”). The kingdom of God can be defined as life when God is in charge. With his first words, Jesus told us to repent so that we could experience this new way of life God designed for us.

To live a new way, we need to stop following our old routines. That is what repentance is all about. To repent means to change one’s mind and to go a different direction.

Recently, I was driving while listening to a podcast. I knew my exit was coming up soon, but I was so absorbed in what the podcasters were saying that I turned off one exit too early. Before I knew it, I was on a limited-access toll road headed in the wrong direction. Realizing what I had done, I desperately wanted to turn around and go the other way, but I couldn’t. I had to wait until I reached the next exit. That twelve-mile stretch of road felt like it was one hundred miles long because every mile I drove was taking me further away from my desired destination and costing me time. When I finally got to the exit and turned around, I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that I was once again headed in the right direction. I had “repented” from my driving error.

When Jesus arrived, he told us that we could experience the full life God created for us to live—if we changed our minds and direction. We can’t keep living as we always have and experience the kingdom of God at the same time.

As we follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit will show us when our actions or attitudes are outside of God’s will. Then he will call us to repent—to stop living our way and to start living God’s way.

So, what does it look like to repent? C. S. Lewis wrote that “Repentance is not something God demands of you before he will take you back . . . it is simply a description of what going back is like.”<sup>8</sup>

There are three movements to repentance:

### **1. Admit that we sinned.**

When I took the wrong exit, I needed to admit that I was on the wrong road before I could turn around.

The Holy Spirit will be faithful to open our eyes to where we have taken a wrong turn and sinned. Sometimes that awareness produces an inner stab of remorse; other times, it is just a clear-eyed recognition that something we did or said was outside of God’s will. Admitting to ourselves that we have sinned is the first step toward repentance.

### **2. Confess and ask for forgiveness.**

*Confess* literally means “to say with.” When we confess our sin, we “say with” God that we did wrong.

Psalm 32:3–5 describes a prayer of repentance:

When I kept silent,  
     my bones wasted away  
     through my groaning all day long.  
 For day and night  
     your hand was heavy on me;  
 my strength was sapped  
     as in the heat of summer.

---

8. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 57.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, “I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD.”  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.

When we confess our sins, God forgives us. We don’t have to drag guilt around any longer. We don’t forgive ourselves; we embrace God’s forgiveness.

### **3. Ask for the power to live God’s way.**

Repentance starts with changing our minds, which leads us to live differently. Until we do so, we have not repented.

There is an old story about a man who wrote a letter to the Internal Revenue Service explaining that he hadn’t been able to sleep well for the last ten years because he had cheated on his income tax. Enclosed in the letter were eight \$100 bills. The man concluded the letter by saying that if he didn’t sleep better, he would send the rest. That’s not repentance; that’s just a guilty conscience.

Repentance is not a one-time act; it is a lifestyle. As we follow Jesus, we come to realize that becoming like him involves ongoing change.

#### **► Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, please change any part of me that keeps me from following you with my whole being. Amen.*

## Day 7

# Working It Out

### For Individual Reflection

1. **Give thanks to God** for his faithfulness, goodness, and activity in your life.
2. **Pray** Psalm 139:23–24:

*Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Pause and open yourself to anything the Holy Spirit might bring to your attention.

3. **Review your week.**
  - a. How did I act on what God told me last week?
  - b. Where have I noticed God at work?

**4. Respond.**

- a. What stood out the most from this week's readings? Where is God asking me to focus my attention this week?
- b. What will I do in response?

**Group Discussion Questions**

1. When you hear the word *holy*, what comes to your mind? How closely does that image resemble Jesus' character and life?
2. Does pursuing a Jesus-shaped life mean that we will lose our individuality and become clones? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do you most frequently see your old nature show up in your thoughts and actions? How would your life be different if your new nature were able to win more of the inner battles?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that you will become more like Jesus over the next six months? Why?
5. What pitfalls might we face if we do not realize that it is the grace of God that enables us to become like Jesus?
6. Share a time you recently sensed the Spirit's conviction. How does knowing that you are already accepted by God change the way you respond?
7. Why is repentance essential to a vibrant spiritual life?