



GROWING MOVEMENTS SERIES

A 28 DAY

DEVOTIONAL EXPERIMENT

FOUR SEVENS

MEETING WITH JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF
LUKE

BY TOM HUDZINA



FOUR SEVENS

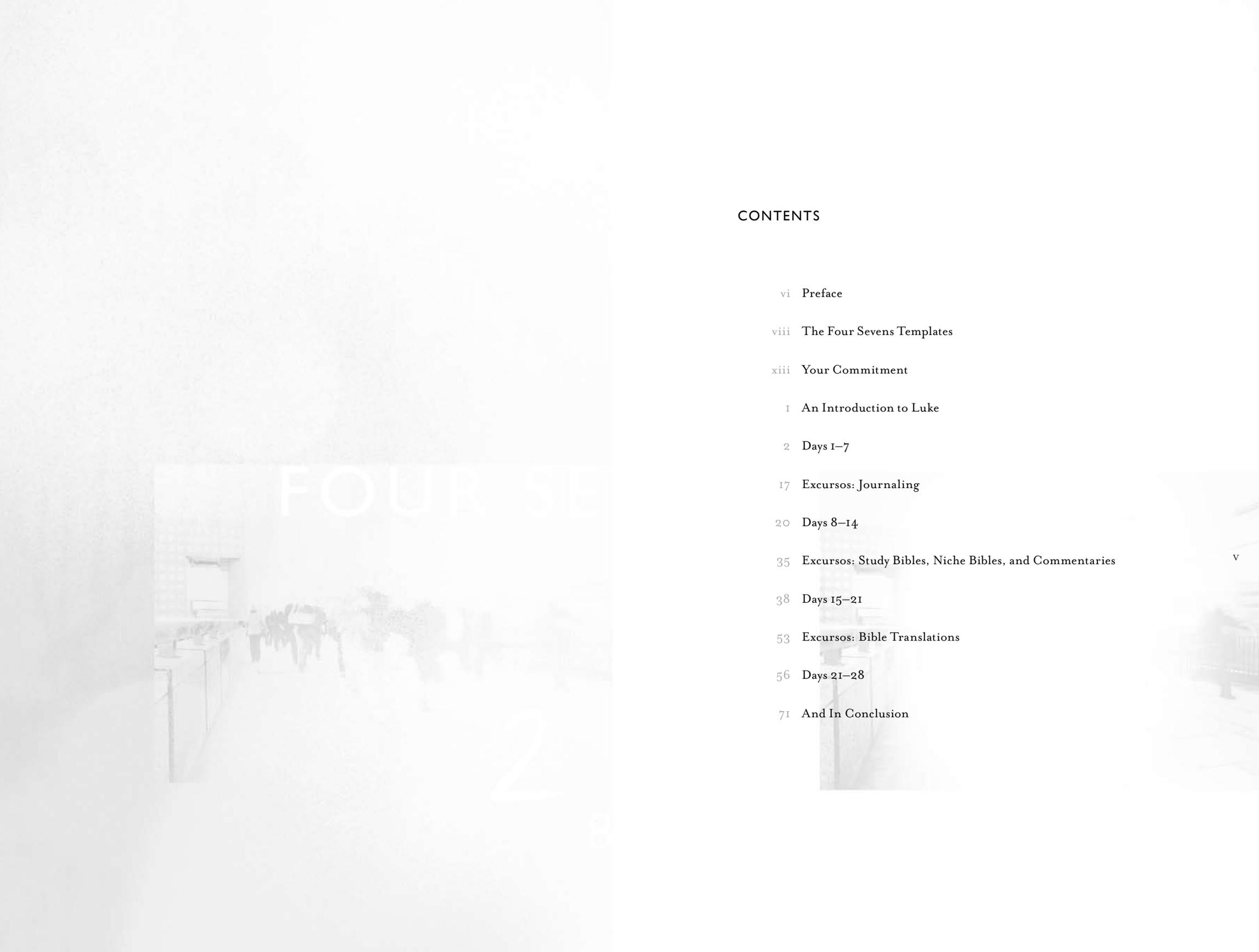
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By TOM HUDZINA

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Preface

I remember the first time I thought about reading the entire Bible. I was sitting in the back row of a church listening to one of the few people whose walk with God really impressed me. He said, “If you want to say you know God, then you need to know God’s story. And if you want to know God’s story, you have to read the entire thing. Knowing God means knowing his story.”

The statement stuck with me. At the time, I was in desperate need of knowing God, his story, and how my story had anything to do with his.

But attempting to read the Bible cover to cover can feel like jumping into a marathon without training. Pretty soon your legs start to cramp, your lungs feel as helpful as a pair of flattened soda cans, and you either limp off the course or finish with a time more in keeping with the America’s Cup than the Boston Marathon. This was what my frustrated, first attempt at some kind of a daily time with God felt like.

I would not return again to Mount Sinai and significant face-to-face time with God for

a while. But then, toward the end of my sophomore year in college, a friend of mine—another Christian on campus who knew I was a believer—asked me, “How are your quiet times going?”

To which I responded, “My what?” The term “quiet time” evoked nothing for me, except perhaps a vague memory of lying on a Snoopy mat after a lunch of P, B, & J and a pint of 2 percent milk in kindergarten.

But with a little encouragement and guidance, I began having my own daily ... well, quiet time. And it has completely revolutionized my walk with God.

So what’s a quiet time? Well, it says in Scripture that Jesus would often withdraw to a quiet place in order to pray. “Very early in the morning,” says Mark 1:35, “while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (While admittedly quiet time might sound a little juvenile, as you read this verse, what else would you call it? Solitary time? That would sound like a prison sentence, so we’ll stick with quiet time.) During this daily quiet time, Jesus habitually removed himself from the busyness of life and spent time in intimate communion with his Father.

If Jesus needed this time apart with the Father, it would seem logical to assume we need it just as much, if not more so. Let’s define quiet time as “a point during each day when we remove ourselves from the busyness of schoolwork, dorm life, and the ever-increasing demands of Facebook to spend time praying, reading God’s Word, and quietly listening to what God has to say to us.” As it took someone to kick-start my quiet times, so I’m going to do everything I can here to help you make this a part of your daily routine and establish a habit that will carry you through college and beyond.

Consider me a guide. While I cannot wake you up and get you out of bed for your quiet time, I will walk with you through it and share some things that should be helpful—things I’m grateful someone took the time to share with me. Each day we’ll read a passage from Scripture and meditate on it. I’ll point out a few things that are obvious and then a few things that are not so obvious.

While reading the entire Bible is a noble goal, it’s not where we’re going to start. We’re not going to be running a marathon; we’re going to take a short jog. We’re going to make our way through just a single book, the Gospel of Luke, and even here we’re going to do some skipping around. A simple undertaking, but one more inclined to success. Rather than ordering the triple patty bacon cheeseburger, we’re going to go with a snack wrap and Diet Coke.

We’ll spend twenty-eight glorious days together developing a habit of spending time in God’s Word and talking with him. They say it takes about twenty-one days to establish a habit, so—who knows?—maybe you won’t even need me for the last week. But either way, I’ll be here for you.

THE FOUR SEVENS TEMPLATES

Once we get into the twenty-eight devotions, you'll find that they follow a regular pattern. Something I selected randomly, pulling it out of the air? No. Believe it or not, I used some well-thought-out templates for constructing the devotions. And these are templates that I think you could benefit from understanding and turning into a habit.

I'm talking about templates for:

Bible Study

Prayer

Quiet Times

A TEMPLATE FOR BIBLE STUDY

When one is studying a passage of Scripture, a basic but helpful pattern to follow is the threefold process of observation, interpretation, and application.

Observation

This is pretty straightforward: observe what the passage is saying and describing.

First, read through a portion of Scripture and then go back and make some initial observations about it: Who are the characters? What's going on? Where is this taking place? Revisit the part of your brain that houses all of that literary criticism stuff your English teacher went on and on about while you doodled with your new four-color ballpoint pen. As a quick refresher, remember to ask yourself some basic who-what-when-where observational questions:

WHO is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters?

WHAT is the subject or event covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, event, or teaching?

WHEN do/will the events occur or did/will something happen to someone?

WHERE did or will this happen? Where was it said?

WHY is something being said or mentioned? Why would/will this happen? Why at that time and/or to this person/people?

HOW will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

I can never remember the "how," because it rebelliously begins with an h instead of a w. Maybe it's the same for you. If so, that's okay. This is just a general template; it's not meant to be a science or a straitjacket. Once you get a feel for some of these questions, try to keep an eye out for key words or phrases, repeated words, contrasts and comparisons, and terms of summary and conclusions ("so that," "for this reason," and so on).

Interpretation

Often observation slides right into interpretation. But strictly speaking, observation refers to trying to understand what's being said, while interpretation refers to understanding the overall meaning.

From what you've learned in your observation of the text, you are trying to discern a primary meaning of the passage—what the biblical author was seeking to communicate and what God was seeking to communicate through that biblical author. A particularly fruitful way to pull these things out of the passage is to ask questions such as "What sinful, broken, or fallen condition is being addressed or corrected by the passage?" "What is the deeper sin beneath the behavior?" and "What prompted the author to write this passage?" Keeping these questions in mind can help you uncover the primary meaning of the text.

Application

So, how does the passage apply to you and to others? And what are some actions you need to take in order to apply God's Word directly to your life?

Let me suggest something here. I think our reflections tend to skip along the surface level of behavior or habits that need changing. This is okay, but often a more significant application resides at the level of our relating to God—our experiencing his grace or trusting in his character or promises. In light of this, I like to pray through certain questions that help me to apply what I've been reading to my walk with God.

God, what are you trying to say to me through this passage?

In what ways am I looking to find life in things besides you, Lord?

In what ways am I seeking to earn your favor rather than live by grace?

What do my actions suggest that I'm wrongly believing about your character, our relationship, and what you've said in your Word?

In what ways do we need to be more intimate in our relationship?

In what way is Jesus the answer to my problem?

I particularly like thinking about the last one: In what way does Jesus provide an answer or solution to my sin problem? It's hard to get into too much theological trouble with a question like this.

In the daily devotions that follow, I've tried to draw out some key observations for you. I'm going to map out a little of this process so you can get the hang of it and feel confident that at any time you want to just skip class (though I'm not condoning this) and go and have a quiet time, you'll be able to get some quality insight from the Word.

A TEMPLATE FOR PRAYER

When I spend time reading Scripture, I often find that I have an intense desire to talk with God before I'm even finished reading the passage. I'll read about God's mercy and want to thank him for his mercy. Or I'll read something about God's power and glory and want to tell him again how awesome he is. Sometimes God's holiness comes through the passage and I'll feel the need to confess some sin that comes to my mind or some attitude I've had hidden in my heart that doesn't reflect his character.

By spending time in God's Word, we open ourselves up to his voice and he can speak to us directly—something he often does.

Prayer is a natural response to God's work in our life. A helpful model for me as I respond to God in prayer is the ACTS model: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Adoration: Telling God how great he is, why he's great (merciful, kind, and so on), and how much we love him for it.

Confession: Acknowledging to God any known sin that is displeasing to him so that we can come to him unhindered, completely surrendered and cleansed.

Thanksgiving: Thanking God for his grace and forgiveness in our lives, and thanking him for all the things he's done for us and given to us.

Supplication: Asking God for things that we want.

Let me give you some reassurance about this last piece of the puzzle: supplication. Once your heart and mind are in alignment with God, it's okay to go ahead and ask him for

stuff—personal stuff, physical stuff, an A on your statistics paper, whatever. He wants you to come to him with everything. There's nothing too big, nothing too small, so ask away, no matter how ridiculous you think it sounds. And the closer you grow to God through praying and reading Scripture, the better you will get at discerning his will for you, at knowing what he wants you to pray for. This is prayer that moves mountains.

Using this pattern of ACTS has helped me when I've not had the desire to pray. I've had to jump-start with ACTS when I've been confused, weary, sad, depressed, and outright weak. I just say to myself, Okay, adoration, right. Then I begin to pray: "God, you are greater than I am." On many an occasion, ACTS has guided me into an intimate time with the Lord when an intimate time with the Lord seemed impossible.

A TEMPLATE FOR QUIET TIMES

The template for our quiet times, then, is as simple as combining our templates for studying the Scripture and our ACTS template for prayer. But with one little nuance: sandwiching your Scripture reading between the prayer so that you're praying before and after.

It looks like this:

1. TALK TO GOD

Adoration: "Lord, I praise you for ... (some quality of attribute of God)."

Confession: "Lord, forgive me for ... (for some sin or shortcoming)."

2. LISTEN TO GOD

Prayerfully *read* a passage. What does it say?

Prayerfully *reflect* on its meaning. What does it mean?

Prayerfully *apply* it to life. What does it mean for me?

3. TALK TO GOD

Thanksgiving: "Lord, I thank you for ... (some specific blessing)."

Supplication: "Lord, I ask you for ... (requests for yourself and others)."

Talk to God, listen to God, and then talk to God again. It's that easy.

If you get used to this basic template and get used to meeting with God every day, you'll be feeling closer to God, living in his grace, growing in holiness, maturing in your understanding of his Word, experiencing his forgiveness—rewarding stuff. But, remember, the key to all of this is creating the habit and being intentional. Make time each day when this routine can and will take place.

YOUR COMMITMENT

Okay, let's make a covenant, or agreement, with God that for the next twenty-eight days we'll take a journey together. We will develop the habit of spending time with him, consistently and with expectation.

I COMMIT MYSELF TO

this experiment of developing a habit of spending consistent time with the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, and for next twenty-seven days, I make this commitment to you, Lord, to:

:: spend thirty minutes each day talking with you, reading your Word, and writing out my thoughts and feelings in response to your Spirit

:: ask one other person in my life to pray for me and to keep me accountable to this commitment I've made to you

:: attend a fellowship each week where people are excited about you and serving you on a daily basis

DATE: _____

SIGNED: _____

AN INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

THE BOOK OF LUKE IS WHAT SOME MIGHT CALL THE GOSPEL FOR EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD. ITS NARRATIVE IS THE STORY OF GOD, HIS REDEMPITIVE PLAN BEING PLAYED OUT FOR ALL TO SEE IN THE PERSON AND ACTIONS OF HIS SON, JESUS. JESUS IS THE CENTRAL CHARACTER IN THIS GOSPEL, AND LUKE'S GOAL, AS STATED FROM THE FIRST FEW VERSES, IS TO "REASSURE YOU OF THE TRUTH OF ALL YOU WERE TAUGHT." THE TRUTH BEING WHO JESUS IS, WHAT HE DID, AND WHY HE DID IT. LUKE IS ESSENTIALLY SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT AND SETTING US ON THE TRAJECTORY OF GOD'S REDEMPITIVE STORY.

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK YOU'RE GOING TO FIND THAT LUKE HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S DESIRE THAT ALL MEN MIGHT BE SAVED. AND OF COURSE WE'RE NOT TALKING JUST THE MEN, AS IN ADULT MALE PERSONS; WE'RE TALKING "MEN" IN THE SENSE OF HUMANKIND—MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN. AND NOT JUST A PRIVILEGED FEW WHO CAN GET TO THE MORNING SERVICE TO HEAR THIS GOOD NEWS. IT'S FOR THE ONES WHO SKIP CHURCH AS WELL, WHO CAN'T MAKE IT BECAUSE THEY'RE WORKING THE SHIFT DURING THOSE HOURS, OR WHO, QUITE FRANKLY, HAVE BEEN LEFT OUT OF THE RELIGIOUS LOOP FOR SO LONG THAT THEY'RE SKEPTICAL ABOUT ANYTHING OR ANYONE SAYING ANYTHING ABOUT GOD HAVING A PLAN FOR THEIR LIVES. IT'S FOR THE POOR, THE HELPLESS, THE OUTCAST, THE FORSAKEN. EVERYONE. GOD'S SALVATION IS FOR ALL. HAVE I MADE THIS CLEAR YET?

IN THIS REDEMPITIVE NARRATIVE, WE FIND THAT LUKE IS SHOWING US HOW JESUS LIVED, WHAT HE DID, AND WHY HE DID IT. HE SHOWS US WHO JESUS IS IN THE DETAILS OF HIS MINISTRY HERE ON EARTH, AND HE REVEALS TO US JESUS AS A RADICAL NEW TEACHER WHO SAYS, "YOU'VE LIVED LONG ENOUGH UNDER A HEAVY BURDEN. LET ME SHOW YOU A NEW WAY TO LIVE THAT BRINGS YOU AND OTHERS PEACE." JESUS IS STEEPED IN THE OLD TRADITIONS AND YET GIVES FRESH AND LIFE-GIVING INSIGHTS INTO WHAT THE LAW AND PROPHETS WERE POINTING TO. HE IS SHOWING US THAT THERE IS A NEW WAY TO LIVE LIFE, AND HE IS SAYING THAT TO BE A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS TO BRING GOD'S REDEMPITIVE PURPOSES TO THE REST OF THE WORLD, NOT JUST TO THE SUBURBS OF JERUSALEM. AND, WHAT'S MORE, WE CAN BE A PART OF THIS PROCESS AND PRIVILEGE.

ENJOY THE SHOW!

Talk to God

Take time to praise God for some quality of his, such as his grace or mercy or majesty. Then confess any sin or shortcoming you need forgiveness for.

Listen to God

God does the impossible. Read Luke 1:1-38.

I want to say, here on day one of this month-long experiment, that by day twenty-eight, you, too, will be talking directly to angels. But that would be a lie and not a good way to start our month of quiet times. You probably wouldn't want to see an angel either, because when they appear, it's usually to convey a rather dangerous plan that you'll be in the center of, as was the case with Mary.

When the angel approaches Mary with news of God's plan and her role in that plan, she responds with the words "May it be so." It sounds like such a simple and obvious response, but what is not explicit in the passage are the implications of what Mary was saying yes to.

Mary was saying yes to public shame, the label of adulteress, the likelihood of her husband divorcing her, a possible future of raising a child by herself, a stigma that would remain upon her family for generations, and even the chance of being stoned to death—all the stuff that came with having a child out of wedlock sometime around AD 1. And whatever the consequences, they would only have been compounded by using the unbelievable alibi of a divine conception.

But in spite of all these factors, and knowing full well what she was inviting into her life, she said, "May it be so."

Mary sets the bar high for those of us who desire to say the same thing to God.

:: In your mind what would be the hardest thing God could ask you to do? Would you do it?

:: Why do you think the angel told her about Elizabeth, her cousin?

:: The passage states, "The power of the Most High will come upon you." What does this say about God?

:: How does it make you feel that the power of the Most High, his Holy Spirit, dwells in you?

:: When was the last time you said you would do something for God only to find yourself not following through on that later on? What might have been behind that decision not to follow through?

:: Mary was willing to trust God in his plan for her. Where do you have a hard time trusting God?

:: What areas of your life where you are doing well in trusting God?

:: What has God done in your life that you thought was impossible?

:: What are the nearly impossible things coming up in your life that you need to bring before the Lord?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

Talk to God

Thank God for some specific insight or blessing he's given you. Afterward, pray through your requests for yourself and others, being sensitive to what God might want you to ask for.