

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus

We're [called to a radical life](#).

This is a life in which we're called to follow someone we've never seen. We've heard about him but we've never seen him with our own eyes. We've 'believed the report', the good message about who Jesus is and why he came, and our hearts have been convicted to follow him. And even though we haven't seen him, we love him.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" | 1 Peter 1:8, ESV

The Redemptive Power Of His Sacrifice

We have come to realise that, without Jesus, we are nothing more than 'dead men walking'.

We're reminded of the story of the serpent placed on the pole during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Numbers 21). Their criticism of God and His way brought a plague of poisonous snakes throughout the camp. Moses was told to place a copper snake on a pole for all to see and anyone who fixed their gaze on that serpent on the pole would be healed and live.

A snake on a pole has come to represent medicinal healing throughout the medical world today and we can, of course, see the redemptive symbol in this story for our Christian lives. The bronze serpent is the clearest type of the saving work of Jesus. Jesus himself used this symbol to appeal to the people in his day (John 3:14). Like the serpent, Jesus was to be raised on a stake for all to see, and all those who looked to his redemptive sacrifice would live.

We fix our gaze on Jesus, crucified, believing in the power

contained in his name, and though we are dying, yet we live! Death no longer has the final say.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”
| 1 Corinthians 15:-20-23, NIV

Believing And Becoming In Jesus

Our Christian life starts the moment we turn our eyes to Jesus and [acknowledge him](#) as Lord of our heart and our life. But our gaze must never leave him.

The Christian life is one of transformation; of more than just believing, but of becoming, where the impossible is possible. We are able to become more than conquerors through him who loved us.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” | Romans 8:31-32, 37, ESV

We are learning to follow where Jesus has gone already and we are learning, day by day, to trust him as our good shepherd.

A Leap Of Faith

Living the Christian life is often stepping out into the unknown. It's often an exercise in surrender, trust, and faith.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” | Hebrews 11:1-3, ESV

We look around us and see how things presently are, in this life, **and yet we believe that there is more** and that **we can be more**. This belief is underpinned by the [evidence of the risen Christ](#). Resurrection, the most unbelievable, incredible event to have possibly happened **has** happened. When Christians gather together for communion, we celebrate and witness to this remarkable event. The ramification for us as believers is not a small thing: the [same power](#) that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us!

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.” | Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT

“And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.” | Romans 8:11, BSB

Jesus promised his followers that he would be with them, even to the end of the world. This is his promise to us. Sometimes he will lead us through fire and across water, through deep valleys and up high mountains. There is no promise that the Christian life will always be easy but he promises he will never leave us or forsake us.

Some of you may be feeling the heat of those flames. Or

perhaps you feel like your feet are sinking and you're going to drown. Raise your eyes and fix them on Jesus! He goes before us, he stands beside us, every day of this Christian life.

Faith Is Learning From History

We learn a lot from the story of Israel and their exodus from Egypt. When the children of Israel were delivered out of slavery, that moment only signaled the beginning of a journey of faith. And almost immediately, they were brought to the edge of the ocean, with churning water ahead of them and the enemy hard at their heels. There was no way forward and no way back. And then, suddenly, a miracle was performed and God parted the ocean before them – a way out – seemingly impossible but clearly visible. They had to make a decision of faith – to step into that path cut through the ocean and cross through to the other side. Moses, their leader, spoke boldly at this moment:

“Don't be afraid, stand firm and watch God do His work for you.”

Some of us may be in that moment right now, afraid of what is behind us and unable to see a path ahead of us. Sometimes, the step of faith involves standing still and watching God go to work for us. Sometimes, faith asks us to step out into the unknown.

We have the story in Matthew 14:24-31 of Peter being called by Jesus to step out of the boat and onto the churning water. And we realise from reading this story that sometimes faith asks us to step out of the boat, out of the place where it feels comfortable and relatively safe and into the dark and churning ocean. In those moments, too, we must not lower our gaze. Faith will keep us afloat, fear will sink us.

We must look for Jesus and keep looking for Jesus. He is the

good shepherd, who laid his life down for the sheep, and, like the Psalmist, we can confidently say,

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” | Psalm 23:4

Keeping Our Eyes On Jesus

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus? How do we ‘follow him’ and keep him front and foremost in our minds, day by day?

We need to make him real! We need to learn about him, discover what kind of leader he is, read about his character, his personality, his emotions. We need to talk to him, tell him our struggles and our fears. We need to ask for his courage to be ours. We need to invest in **relationship** with him; deep and personal and transformational.

We need to be reminded and convicted in our hearts that he is not just our personal saviour and friend, but [the resurrected King](#), in whom all power rests and with whom all things are possible!

When we come together as church, we are reminded that the church was born from the sacrifice of a man who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. Who, for the joy that was before him, endured the cross. And whose resurrection assures us that the best is still yet to come.

“The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest. It’s the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God – “Jesus is my Master” -embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what He did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not “doing” anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting Him to do it for

you. That's salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between Him and me!" Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this – heart and soul – will ever regret it." | Romans 10-10-13, MSG

The Christian life isn't always easy and the next step isn't always clear. Sometimes we need courage to make that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.

Building Resilience

Resilience can sometimes be mistaken for indifference, unaccountability or emotional disconnection but in reality, resilience is the complete opposite of these things. It is the ability to truly face reality, to be responsible for our actions and to be emotionally vulnerable, if necessary. It is the inner strength that enables us to bounce back after facing unexpected challenges or setbacks. Resilience can be equated to mental fortitude and it lives in the small moments, as well as the large ones.

Resilience Isn't Endurance

It can be easy to think that resilience and endurance are alike but they're not really the same thing. While they both require mental or physical fortitude in moments of crisis or challenge, endurance simply hunkers down and waits for the worst to pass. Endurance is employed somewhat momentarily – once the crisis or challenge is over, things return to normal.

Resilience, however, says, “I will get through this and come out the other side stronger, perhaps wiser and having gained something of value. Things will have changed, because of this experience.” Resilience sees the challenge or crisis is an opportunity for growth and moves confidently towards it.

We don't get to decide if we will deal with life's challenges; they arrive whether we want them or not. But we do get to decide how well we'll get through them and what lessons we'll learn from them. Learning to be resilient means learning to be open, resourceful and accepting of those challenges or changes as they come.

It would be very easy to endure all kinds of trouble and yet learn nothing from it or remain unchanged by the experience. Resilience is what develops from these experiences, if we allow it. We all have the capacity for great resilience yet, like every acquired skill, it needs to be practiced and challenged in order to grow and develop.

The idea of growing resilience is commented on by James, the brother of Jesus, when writing his letter to the believers in his time.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” – James 1:2-4, NIV

James confirms that challenges are not meant to be just endured; they are meant to change us. We're being developed into [our authentic selves](#) in Christ and these challenges form part of that process.

Resilience Is The Enemy Of Fear

Learning to be resilient actually means learning to be

unafraid of things like failure, rejection, embarrassment or abandonment. At the core of resilience is the ability to be realistic about the potential for things to go wrong, coupled with positive optimism that things will go right. It's being grounded firmly in the here and now, in reality, but hopeful of better things. It's learning to deal with all the challenges we encounter with a growth mindset, not a fixed mindset. Resilience is the difference between "I can't do this", and "I can't do this yet". Resilient people don't just endure challenges, they're proactive about moving through them and coming out stronger. Where resilience lives, fear cannot flourish.

Resilience And Faith Are Friends

Hebrews 11 is known as the great chapter on faith. Yet it's also a list of a great number of individuals who, in essence, had developed resilience in their life and, because of that resilience, were able to undertake great things.

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies." – Hebrews 11:32-34, NIV

We realise from reading Hebrews 11 that resilience and faith are intrinsically linked. When we choose to believe in God's existence and His plan for us, we choose to put our faith in something greater than ourselves. This faith forms a large part of accepting God and embracing what He is doing for us. It also gives us a great deal of comfort that we are not alone and that God is working in our lives to bring about our good. Perhaps one of the best ways to start growing

resilience, or at least begin our pursuit of it, is to acknowledge that we have worth to God and that He has a purpose for our lives. Continually reinforcing to ourselves how much God really loves us and that our lives are infinitely precious lays down a positive foundation for beginning to build resilience.

“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” – 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, NLT

How To Build Resilience

There are certainly many practical ways to grow resilience and learning those skills and developing inner strength doesn't happen overnight. Here's some ways to start developing your inner strength and learn to face your challenges with confidence:

Get Friendly With Failure – your ability to cultivate resilience relies on your ability to acknowledge failure, without allowing it to cripple you. We all make mistakes, we don't always get things right the first time. But learning from our mistakes and growing through them is a key aspect of developing resilience.

Use Empathy – taking the time to consider another person's life or situation can really help when dealing with difficult situations or experiences. Instead of reacting in emotional ways, we should try to see things from their point of view and work to support and encourage them. Learning to deal with these people or situations, despite the challenges, develops our own level of resilience and inner strength.

Exercise Forgiveness – forgiveness allows us to move fully beyond a setback or disappointment and leave it in the past. It doesn't mean that we forget the situation. However, instead

of feeling victimised or indulging in bitterness or self-righteousness, forgiveness give us an opportunity to learn from the experience and constructively try to resolve the setback. Forgiveness is first and foremost a gift to ourselves. Coupled with learning to forgive is also learning to apologise to those we've hurt or mistreated. This is a crucial aspect of developing our own sense of accountability for the choices we make in our life.

Don't Compare – remember that we are all created as unique individuals and, despite what we may see on social media or how we perceive other's lives to be, everyone has their good days and their bad days! Not only that, we all have different talents and skills, different personalities and different cultural backgrounds. God doesn't require us to be as good as someone else – just the best version of ourselves.

“I know how to live humbly, and I know how to abound. I am accustomed to any and every situation—to being filled and being hungry, to having plenty and having need. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:12-13, BSB