

Jesus, The Early Riser

We see Jesus rising up early:

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Mark 1:35-37

Jesus leaves the house before the crow of the rooster. He retreats into the morning air.

There's something about waking up alone and experiencing the first stirrings of morning. The air seems pure. The sounds of night in glorious stillness. The whole countryside waits in longing anticipation for the light of morning. This is the dawn-treading Messiah sleuthing for the stillness of the dawn's advent.

Before any healing, deliverance, miracle or story, Jesus' days begin with the power of stillness, intimacy and prayer. It is the key to true mindfulness.

He wakes to pray...

He prays to wake...

Lord. of the Dawn...

King of Creation...

Teach me your abiding peace that seeks the Father before any other relational transaction.

When everyone is looking for me, may I, first, begin to look for You.

Jesus, the Increasing One

They came to John the Baptist with a report of Jesus baptizing. "All are going to Him," they observed. This itinerate preacher who made his home among reeds and wild goats listened and then replied. "You heard me saying from the start that I am not the One. Don't expect me to be anything other than elated by His renown, **All must go!**"

John's was the first all-in believer who gleefully tossed his ambition into the fire of His coming.

"He must increase and I must decrease."

This is the disciple's passage into the Kingdom: *"It's not about me. It's never been about me."*

Once a disciple of Jesus understands the grand, expansive nature of Christ, everything else falls away. The things that were once important and needful are now flimsy and unsatisfying. The things we chase after aren't worth the wind. It's not a sudden change. At least it hasn't been for me. We often give in to the instinct to build our own castles and place His name on the threshold. As we grow closer to Him, we begin tearing down these false edifices for something more beautiful: the presence of Christ... in every inch of our souls.

Piece by piece we dismantle the personal idols and achievements to make more room for His presence. We learn that the works of our hands are best used as kindling for the fire of our own sanctification. No relationship, account, possession or achievement can touch the joy of falling headlong into His grace. And so we toss it all in with little thought of their merit. As we do this, Christ's presence expands and overtakes our territory. He increases and we decrease.

Like Enoch, if we walk with him long enough we will be no more.

I often lust for definition
affirming nods
Self-decision
Protection for extreme derision
Better plans
And high ambition

Then...

I come to see
And come to say
that what I need
in close of day
is more of you and less of me
More of you and less of me

The world doesn't need more of me
My brains, my skill, my vanity
I wish to take a solemn vow

To say to heaven here and now
That what I have is travesty
With less of You and more of me.
Life is filthy rags times three
When there's less of Him
and more of me.

So drown the egocentric urge
Begin the Romans 12:1 purge
My ever foolish bent to judge
To trust myself
To hold a grudge
Let truth be told
And words be few

Less of me
And more of you.
Less of me
and more of You.

Jesus, The Subversive Figure

The second chapter of the Gospel of John contains two very different stories about the early years of Jesus ministry:

A [wedding feast](#) where earthen vessels used for bath water became scared decanters of divine creation.

Then, seemingly out of the blue, the narrative shifts to a sudden altercation in the bustling market of temple courts during the most sacred season of the Jewish calendar:

Passover. Christ disrupts the religious flea market. He experienced this year after year but now it was different.

Throughout history, people have assumed that Jesus somehow just flipped into a rage, but this subversive act was planned. He didn't just grab a whip. He **made** the whip (John 2:15). With the might of a hundred soldiers, Jesus moved into a forward area of battle. His enemies weren't the tax collectors, the Roman outposts of occupation or the idolators of false gods. He brought the fight to the religious apparatus that strangled the Jews, choking under the grip of legalism, filthy money and pseudo-holiness.

His angry declaration echoes into our souls even today. "Stop making my house a marketplace!"

It's haunting to think of all the regulations we add to the cross in modern Christianity. It's crushing when we consider all the false precepts and useless items we purchase as a flimsy substitute for true spiritual intimacy with Him. This was the first cleansing of the temple. Another would follow at the advent of the week of His sacrifice. But Jesus is constantly cleansing my own temple of false religion. His whip is not a punishment for sins but a driving away of every false assumption I have of religious dignity. He hasn't come to drive me away. He has come to scatter to the four winds of creation everything that separates me from his furious, relentless love.

Sometimes He comes as a shepherd gently guiding me to safety. Other times, He attacks the wolves of my own destitution and destruction.

Jesus remains a subversive figure. We are his temple and He has come to clean house.

Jesus, The Overcomer

On the Day of Atonement, a priest would lay his hands on a goat and place the sins of the entire nation. After this solemn act the scapegoat, would be led into the wilderness.

Jesus, the one who would bear the sins of the world, was also led into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights.

The tempter approached with a proposal, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread."

Jesus rejected this proposal because He knew that there would be a night when He would gather around a table with His beloved brothers. He would, Himself, be turned into bread. "This bread is my body, broken for you."

The tempter led him to the pinnacle of the temple. He spoke again, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

No doubt, Jesus knew there would be a day when he would be thrown down under the weight of a Roman cross. There would be no angelic rescue. An Ethiopian man would come to His aid and lift the burden off His wounded back as He made his way to a hill outside the holy city.

The devil took Him to a high place where He could scan the all the kingdoms of the world. He uttered a final proposal to Jesus: "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me."

But Jesus foreknew the glorious day, the day not yet realized

when every knee would bow and every tongue would confess...

Every kingdom and crown,

Every power and principality,

Every race and ruler,

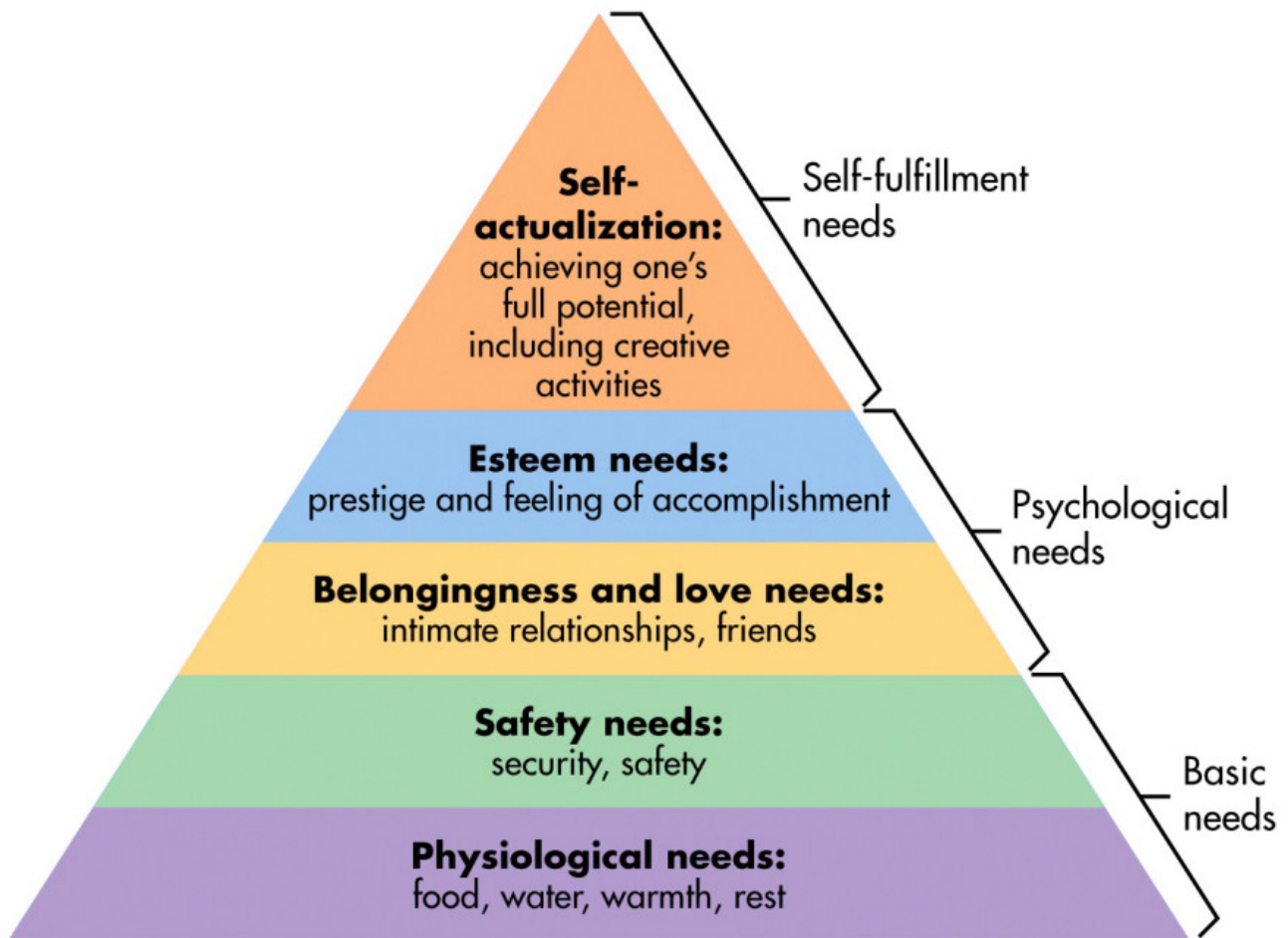
All would confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus, the Beloved Son

There was John and then there was Jesus.

John couldn't be categorized as anything but completely, radically, undeniably committed. His calling and mission propelled him into the vortex of the Jesus story. What do you call a man who wears camel's skin and a belt? How do you explain a consistent diet of wild honey and extra crispy locust?

He improvised His way through all the things we call "necessities." Maslow's hierarchy of needs turned itself upside-down for John



Basic needs? Food, water, rest- To John? Not that important...

Safety? To John? Not on the radar.

Belonging? No, not really a mission statement of John the Baptist.

Esteem? He gave that up a long time ago.

At the very foundation of John's life was the realization, the actualization of his mission and purpose in the story. This man was all-in on the one thing that would matter.

No reputation
 No retirement plan
 No family
 No boat
 No Sunday clothes (or Saturday for that matter)

No 20 year plan
No one to impress

This was John the Baptist.

I wonder what would happen if I laid everything on the table like that? It's a "betting the farm" faith. It's a faith that is well-aware that the mission is more vast than the person.

John was the prophet.

Jesus was the Savior.

Luke writes, "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too."

At that moment Jesus enters the pilgrimage and path of every seeker- man, woman and child.

Jesus was baptized too.

Jesus was buried the currents of the water and surfaced to the sound of the Heavens parting and the proud Papa: "This is my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

We believe that every person who claims Jesus as Lord, becomes a part of this story. When someone enters the waters of baptism we can be sure that this same gracious Father is saying, "This is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

We are baptized and *Jesus was baptized too.*

It's so easy for me to forget amidst the deep flaws of my life, that there is a Father who loves me because Jesus was baptized too.

When the pain is too great to bear, we remember Jesus suffered

too.

When rejection hovers over us like a cloud, we remember that Jesus was rejected too.

Life, in all aspects, is made beautiful because Jesus lived too. He is the Savior who came among the devils and dust of fallen humanity so He could lead us to heights unseen,

Jesus was baptized too. The Father blesses. The waters part. The Holy Spirit comes down. And the Father smiles. And life becomes a moveable feast.

Jesus, the Hidden Savior

They up and left for Egypt and parts unknown. Jesus disappears from the pages of scripture. We *do* have one curious story. Maybe Mary and Joseph forgot him or they just didn't notice that he wasn't with him until they reached the ancient exit ramp outside the walls of the Holy City. Even that story underscores his elusive nature. I can't fault the parents. I often forget to take Jesus home from church. When I cry out, "God, where are you?," it comforts me to know that Mary and Joseph asked that question, too.

Other than that story, He was missing, hidden... a mystery. There's no record of anything He said, but He was there. The people of Nazareth knew him as the carpenter's son and as far as anything else, scripture leaves us guessing. Why don't we get to peek into the scriptural home movies of Sabbath school adventures featuring the 8-year-old Jesus. Why no literary snapshots of the 15, 18 or even 28 year old rabbi? Perhaps even in His silence there was a message. Jesus, the Word made flesh, simply needed to dwell among us. He observed before he spoke. He witnessed before he acted. He experienced first-hand the iron fist of the Roman Empire. He saw the cultural and religious injustice in plain sight. Jesus became a witness of the mess of it all for 30 years. He developed a personal history of his own humanity before one divine word or supernatural deed. Again, He became flesh and dwelt among us. Before the battle of the ages, He had sandals on the ground for years so that he could weep, celebrate, observe, and be God with us.

I don't know your story, but I've waited years for a divine act or word in certain unrealized aspects of my life. I remember the hidden years and I wait for the voice crying in the wilderness who will (I must not doubt...) cry out, "Behold the Lamb! Jesus is our example and archetype of God as listener. Jesus reminds me that I can't act or speak and truly listen. Perhaps stopping, listening, observing and showing up before we speak or act is the key to living in step with Jesus. And though cloaked in veil of silence and mystery, Jesus is still God with us all.

The Spirit of Herod

As a stealth and sinister conspirator, he sent his henchman into the city of promise. He orchestrated the visceral wails of young mothers.

The horsemen of the holocaust...

Their hooves crushing the hearts of the mothers.

Cruelty felt palpable that horrid night.

I'd rather skip this story. There's nothing good in all the unspeakable, gratuitous violence other than a reminder that the enemy of Christ is real. And the enemy of the innocent remains on this Earth. It is the spirit of Herod that stands opposing the Spirit of God.

The spirit of Herod seeks to destroy anyone it feels threatened by.

The spirit of Herod gladly murders children for personal gain.

The spirit of Herod believes he is not culpable as long as the sword is not actually in his hand.

The spirit of Herod, tells lies to unsuspecting bystanders in the hopes they will do his work.

The spirit of Herod will never be satisfied, because his stomach is never too full for violence.

And to be sure, the spirit of Herod is among us today. Even though we can't hear the wailing mothers or the rattling swords. The spirit of Herod thrives. Just because you don't hear, see, smell or touch this reality, doesn't mean it isn't there. It's in the abortion mills, the bidding rooms, the brothels of the third world, and the halls of governing bodies.

The slaughter of the innocents may seem like such an ancient holocaust but just because it's digitized, jet-lagged, and modernized doesn't discount the genocide. Just because you don't hear the Syrian orphans or the mourning mothers of Darfur, doesn't mean in the least that they don't exist. We don't intimately acquaint ourselves with these horrors, but they are there. Today. Right now. The suffering is sure as sand.

The spirit of Herod remains.

The target of the suffering is the sacrifice delayed. Delayed but sure for 33 years...

Delayed suffering would give birth to redemption for every broken heart of Bethlehem.

In the beginning...

Jesus was born. Yes, this is where the greatest adventure commenced and yet the beginning can only be described as "before." Before war, before cities, before language, before thought... Jesus was there. Spirit moving over the face of the deep. Jesus began before the shout of angels outside Bethlehem's borders. But his story expanded far beyond the reaches of the solar system and galaxies we know. Jesus finds his way into the protoplasm every cell teeming of the intricacy of undiscovered life. And every prism of light

whispers of something far beyond our feeble reason.

How can someone so expansive and superseding be so personal? This is the majesty of the mystery. Could He be so grand and yet lonely? Could an all-powerful God still chose to reach out to this wild, beautiful symphony of breath and blood we call mankind?

Why?

Anyone who claims to wholly answer this question is at the peril of his own foolishness. This is the mystery of the divine. It only makes sense in parables, metaphors, music and allegories. It is too royal for syllogisms, formulas, and boundaries.

Welcome to the mystery of Jesus.

Words from the Stable

Darkness

Confusion

Rejection

Uncertainty

Improvisation

Accommodation

Dust

Straw
Labor
Danger
Adaptation
Pain
Gasps
Breaths
Sweat
Contractions
Interruption
Animals
Fear
Wonder
Whispers
Consoling
Motivation
Soon
Weeping
Helplessness
Pushing
Grasping
Encouraging
Tears
Straining
Fluid
Blood
Tiny head
Chest
Relief
Joy
Infant
Crying
Father
Rejoicing
Mother
Smiling
CHILD

Rags
Nurture
Connection

King
Answer
Peace
Lamb
Savior
Hope
Joy
Exchange
Love
Sacrifice
Grace
Yes
Jesus
Beginning

The Great Samaritan

Can you hear the Great Samaritan?

He's just outside your door

He's carrying the wounded

We so oftentimes ignore

His holy arms are holding
The lonely and the lost
So great his holy ransom
How precious was the cost.
You are his solution
Chosen for this day.
Please don't cause him sorrow.
Please don't turn away.
We joy in all he's given
We thank him for his grace
But we fail to hear his call
And reject Him to His Face
The Samaritan is here right now
Eyes of love and tears of grief
His love is everlasting
Far beyond belief
Not guilty was His verdict
Salvation is complete.
And now he's calling to us all.
Will we be his hands and feet?
