

He's the Greatest and He is with Us

The truth that we are deeply flawed humans is supremely overshadowed by the truth that we have a triumphant Savior and He has a plan. His presence and our acknowledgment and devotion to Him equips us to overcome every challenge we face as believers. As stumbling creatures, we own nothing more empowering than this strong, never changing moniker of His love: "He is with us!"

In a just a few verses in Hebrews, we find every reason to believe that His presence is enough. Jesus is the greatest.

Jesus is the greatest owner.

"He (God, the Father) has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things."

Hebrews 1:2b

In this chapter the writer reminds us that Jesus owns it all. This changes our perspective on the sufficiency of Jesus. If He owns it all then we truly are without want. God lavished everything on the Son who gives to us all good things.



Everything we need, he has. Everything we toss His way is made ever more glorious and effective. In His presence we walk into the sanctuary of the divine and encounter the aroma of warm, holy bread. God's word tells us that He is the giver of everything good. What an amazing thought! If Jesus is the one who gives and He is our champion, how could we ever lose in this life or the life to come.

Jesus is the greatest artist and creator.

And through whom also he created all things. Hebrews 1:2c

Just think about this amazing creation. There are 300 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy. And the brightest astronomers will tell you that there are more than that many galaxies in the universe. They can't be counted, much less named. Your body has more than 50 trillion cells and the more we know about cells, the more we find that each cell is like a huge metropolis of activity and parts.



This was no accidental occurrence and in this verse we find who holds the keys to this macro and micro creation.

Jesus is the greatest resource.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Hebrews 1:3



Man sustains his belongings, his career, and his activities by the sweat of his brow. God sustains the entire universe with His Word! And He's asked us to trust Him as our resource. He owns the herd! This is how Christians through the years have given dangerously to him

through tithes and offerings. When we give, we are saying, "God, I trust you with my resources because I know that You

own it all. It all belongs to you.” That’s what we are saying when we give. God promises that he will keep His end of the deal.

- Do you trust Him to sustain you during financial turmoil?
- Do you trust Him to sustain you when marriage become difficult and kids rebel?
- Do you trust Him to sustain you when the grey clouds of adversity discourage you?

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in Me will ever be thirsty again.

John 6:35 (HCSB)

4. **Jesus is the greatest authority.**

...You crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.”

Hebrews 1:7b-8a

The writer of Hebrews uses this word picture to describe Jesus’ authority. He is above it all. He wears the crown of authority and everything is under him.

Still most people, including Christ-followers scrape and fight to get the upper hand in life.

Most people live their lives in calculated steps marching to their internal mental metronome. They measure their moments by pleasure and risk management. Most people in the church are prone to use worship as a guilt squelching, touchy feely, two dose shot in the arm. It’s just **tragic**. Most people are far too busy achieving to acknowledge who really holds the keys. They will end their life’s in greater regret of the smallness of lives hypnotic noises and the drone of the daily grind.

And this one and only Jesus is our brother, father, provider, healer, friend, confidant, and redeemer.

(He is) the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Hebrews 2:11-12



We aren't made holy by all of our good deeds, our prohibitions on vices, or ability to look holy. Jesus makes people holy. He covers us in His righteousness and here's the other amazing truth: He calls us his brothers and sisters. This is the mystery of grace.

- What problem are you facing that's too big for Jesus?
- What need are you lacking that's too great for Jesus to handle?
- What leadership crisis in your life is too complex for Jesus?

Prayer:

I recognize you as my Source and my sustainer. Lord, I bow before you and trust you with everything that is within, beyond, around and beside me. Lord you have full access to my life. Possess me Lord, Renew me. Revitalize me. Change me. Transform me. Correct me. Equip me. Love me.

I acknowledge that above all you have full and complete authority. I speak against any power or earthly principality that seeks compromise me blood relationship with you.

An Awkward Rite of Passage

Every stage of life has its milestones and ceremonial rites. At 20, it's a party surrounded by eligible bachelorettes. Turning 30, it's a birthday lunch with business associates and a rare evening out without changing a diaper. At 40, it's a surprise birthday party orchestrated by your kids. In your 50s, it's *"Strap on this hospital gown, we need to see what's going on down there."*

If you haven't had a colonoscopy, I want to tell you that it's really not that big of a deal. It starts with two delicious gallon-sized beverages that taste like a very heavy 7-Up that initiates all-out civil war in your stomach. I thought an alien would bust out of my midsection at any moment. But yea and verily, this lasts only for a season. Just stay close to the bathroom, invite no dignitaries over, and turn the music up loud throughout the house. The rumbling and ruckus will sporadically turn embarrassing.

After a day comprised of sugar-free lime Jello cups and enough broth to strike fear in the hearts of chickens everywhere, we made our way to the diagnostic clinic. When we got there they informed me that the worst was over, and truly it was. They also informed me that I'd be getting the Michael Jackson drug.

"And you're telling me this because..."

But I survived the propofol, the rear slit of the hospital gown, the long wait, the paperwork, the Miralax (AKA: InstaColonQuake), the paranoia about what they did to me while I slept, the embarrassing things you say after you wake up,

and I was polyp free! Yes!

Shout out to the doctor, my wife, and the nurse that I thought was Mother Mary. I'm not even Catholic.

Guys, if it's time, please get this screening. It's no big deal. Just *don't* go for pizza right after the procedure. Just trust me on that one.

The Peculiar Relationship of C.S. Lewis and Ms. Moore

One of the most peculiar backstories of writer and theologian C.S. Lewis is the unusual 30 year motherly relationship he had with Mrs. Janie Moore. When C.S. Lewis served in World War I, he fought alongside Paddy Moore. Lewis returned wounded and Paddy was killed in action. While in the hospital recovering, C.S. Lewis notified his father who promptly replied that he was too busy to see him. However Paddy's mother, some 30 years older than Lewis did visit. Later Lewis stayed in her home and, according to C.S. Lewis' brother, it reached the point of almost slavery, where C.S. Lewis attended to her and Moore became increasingly demanding in her old age.

As I read this story, I wondered how Lewis' life would have been different if his dad had left the office and attended to the needs of his wounded son. I'm sure the story would have been much different. The rejection of a father caused an unhealthy attachment to a woman who found him to be easy prey



for her own selfishness. As fathers, this story reminds us that if we don't step up to the bat in our kids' lives, they will seek a replacement for the love and presence we are withholding. Often those replacements are cheap substitutes for the blessing and attentiveness of a father. Our lack of concern could set our kids back for years.

What does it mean to exasperate your children? Perhaps it begins by simply ignoring them. To seem invisible is often the worst feeling a child could ever experience.

See it and Weep

Nehemiah heard the news of Jerusalem. Wars, disaster, fires made the city a disaster. The people in the city were in real and daily danger. The news struck him to the core of his soul and he mourned. When is the last time you've been wrecked by the state of your world? Have you felt the sting of a friend walking away from the faith? Have you sent the poverty of the third world country where young women walk for miles to bring dirty water to their waterless town? What wrecks you today? Whatever it is that has your attention, there's a very good chance that, like Nehemiah, God is calling you to take action. Not everyone weeps about the same thing. Nobody can possibly weep over every injustice in the world, but we all can do, and are called to do at least one thing. For Nehemiah it was a wall and a culture to reform. For you, it might be something as huge as a foster child, or as small as a leaky faucet in a community center. Whatever it is, God is waiting for men to weep and then act. For Nehemiah, it was a long journey, a number of years, a lot of struggle before the dream of a

righted Jerusalem was realized, but if he could speak to us today, I'm sure he'd say that he lived without regrets. And he'd say to us that we can do this.

Atheism, disillusionment, detachment, terror, and fear saturate our world in darkness. This is where we come in. Martin Luther King Jr. was right: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." We are God's first option to change the world. And in case you were wondering there is no second option.

The Gift of Hiddenness

One of the greatest, most unappreciated gifts God gives us is **hiddenness**. Few even recognize it as an actual word. But it's desperately needed in the evangelical lexicon. Everything in our culture works feverishly against it. So many, (including myself) have felt unseen without truly enjoying the power of this great gift. But it is throughout the Bible.

The psalmist sings, "You are my hiding place." John the Baptist declares it. "He must increase and I must decrease." Moses is hidden between the rocks when God's glory slowly passed by him in a mysterious place of meeting. The hiddenness of a Man named Mordecai almost cost him his life until God intervened.

The legends of our faith knew the value of hiddenness. But everything in our flesh would hope that somehow we would be seen. This is especially true for writers, performers, artists and many preachers. There is a gnawing sense of discontent when the art, the poetry, the messages are in the shadows rather than syndicated to the masses. We crave a bigger

platform, a larger readership, a growing subscriber base, a mention on Facebook, a retweet, and to keep our name valuable in the currency of the collective conversations we share. **Jesus valued none of this.**

Do we need more books, more roles, more opinions, more editorials, more decorative doves and theological theories? Do we need more blog posts like this one?

No.

We need more mystics, monks, servants and seers.

When we are hidden, when credit is not given, when the awards are not received, this, for the believer is the real nectar and bliss of Gospel living.

This truth frightens me: *Lucifer fell from the heights of heaven after rejecting the virtue of hiddenness in the Father.*

Can you make a habit out of **rejoicing** when you are not acknowledged or affirmed?

Can you enjoy the pleasure of giving generously, but secretly?

Are you praying more in the closet than you do in the public arena?

The duality of this post is that I am writing about the very thing that I am NOT doing as I am writing! As I write I hope that people will read it. Perhaps I'm a hypocrite. I don't really know.

I will actually post this somewhere out in the open air of the illustrious and vulgar marketplace of ideas. It will be no longer hidden. If I'm lucky more than three other people will read it. But I am trying to adjust my posture about the words I write. Living more for Him. Trying, failing, stumbling, repenting as I decrease. Hopefully by the end of my life Jesus

will be more visible than I make Him today and I will almost disappear completely. Maybe at the end of my journey those closest to me will stand around my bed and whisper, "God took him and he was no more."

How does one speak out and enjoy the hiddenness of the inner sanctum?

(I'm still wrestling with that one.)

It's a tension we all must manage because there is a very fine line between godly hiddenness and false humility. The artist, writer, minister has been commissioned but for Whose legacy? Who gets admired in the process? Do we say, "What a great song!" or do we say, "What a great God!"

This I *do* know. I know what hiddenness is. (Desiring it is quite another thing all together.)

It is stopping when I begin to promote myself. It is valuing Sabbath when I feel the urge to leap past rest and into a mad dash of activity and responsibility. Hiddenness is willing to stop and give secretly, generously because that is what love does. Hiddenness is enjoying being out of the spotlight and admiring the successes of others. Hiddenness is enjoying the slow decline of your notoriety and the advent of your anonymity.

Hiddenness is when your head hits the pillow and you thank God extravagantly for keeping you hidden for another day.

John the Speediest

For some men, it's all about the race. Just stay on the interstate for any length of time and you'll see lots of guys who seem to be fanatical about getting to their destinations before you do. At gas stations, I see them hurrying their wives and kids along as they watch cars whizzing down the road as they're returning the gas nozzle to the pump. All the while they're thinking to themselves subconsciously, *Look at that! They're beating us!*

Inside the story of the resurrection, we get a little glimpse of man's deep desire to be first-man-there.

John is telling the story of Jesus' glorious resurrection and in John 20:4. He records the triumph of the empty tomb and as a side note he also remarks about who got there first. It seems worthy of a sports announcer like Darrell Waltrip. *"In the inside lane—Simon Peter in the sandals and beard. On the outside lane, John the Beloved, AKA the other disciple also in sandals and a beard. Boogedy, Boogedy, Boogedy!"*

John records the results for all eternity in verse 4: *"The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first."* But that's not quite enough. John underscores who came in first and second time in verse 6: *"Then, following him, Simon Peter also came."*

We get who got there first and it was not Simon Peter. But John continues to make sure you understood in verse 8: *"The other disciple, who had reached the tomb first..."*

So John the Beloved is also John the Speediest. I can just imagine Peter reading the Gospel delivered straight from Patmos where John had been exiled. As Peter thought of the

incredible world-changing resurrection, he must have smiled at the tiny subplot of the Jerusalem 1200 meter dash and the much, self-heralded triumph of John the Speediest. Somehow John managed to get the bragging rights in his permanent record.

Grace on a Family Tree

One of my friends loves Jesus. That sounds commonplace doesn't it? It becomes less pedestrian when I tell you that his Mom died a drug addict and his father was a devout atheist. My friend was gloriously saved at the age of 10 at a Vacation Bible School event and never looked back. This. Makes. No. Sense. They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree but this apple fell off the tree rolled down the hill, was picked up by a pilot and flew across the ocean! (Figuratively speaking, of course.) And believe me, I don't have the enough white space here to chronicle the entire sordid tale. His story is a monument to the fact that God can save anybody He wants to save, no matter how messed up the family tree.

The New Testament begins with a family tree that had a number of ugly branches. Matthew 1 tells us that in Jesus' lineage are a number shady characters including a prostitute, daughter of incest, an adulterer, a lying brother, lots of cautionary tales and ultimately an scandalous unwed pregnancy. It's almost like God wanted to say from the start that this Gospel is all about grace and not about our upbringing. God isn't as interested in your family history. He's interested in what happens next. And when it comes to transformation, what happens next is glorious. He flips the script with grace. It's His specialty. Never count yourself or your family out because of what happened yesterday. It's an insult to the power of God

when you do.

Stick with the Plan. Keep it Simple Somehow

The high school football coach was being heckled mercilessly in the first quarter by all the player's dads. He just kept calling the same running plays over and over again. The coach, who happened to be a member of my small group, told me his plan the night before. He was going to run the ball, over and over again because he knew the front four of the opponents team was strong but they didn't have the conditioning that his offensive line had. He said, "It's just a matter of time." The crowd harassed the coach relentlessly as the running backs eked out a ground game in the first quarter two or three yards at a time. No passes. All rushes. But by the 3rd quarter, the defensive line had their hands on their hips. They were gassed! And the two-yard gains became 20-yard gains in the fourth quarter as they rolled to victory easily.

Whether it is growing our retirement plan, growing a Small group, or devising a strategy to lose weight, we must plan. Often the plans are not exciting. They drone on respectively and require consistency, patience and a relentless nature of doing things (or not doing things) day after day after day. It's not thrilling. It's doesn't make your heart beat faster like a reckless short-term plan often does, but it works. The writer of Proverbs reminds us that diligence always trumps recklessness. Let's make sure that we're consistent with our plan so that the 4th quarter and the victory celebration will be that much sweeter.

What's your game plan? Allow me to share mine. It's such an easy plan. I still have to look at it every day or I'll forget it. (And yes, I often do.)

Stick with the plan:

1. Give at least ten percent.
2. Save at least ten percent.
3. Always take one day a week to rest.
4. Continue to date your wife.
5. Don't talk about people behind their backs.
6. Work out 6 days a week.
7. Journal at least one day a week— even if it's just a few sentences.
8. Meet with an accountability partner.
9. As much as you can, eat unprocessed food.
10. Meet God daily. Find a place, read the Word, work your prayer list.

I know it is pretty basic, but I'm a basic guy. It's not a complicated playbook, but the more I keep running it, the more I frustrate the opponent. If I'm faithful to it, I will need no Hail Marys.

Don't Drive Like Jehu

What is it about driving that turns a normal guy into a crazed lunatic? We've all seen it, haven't we? But I think I have some clues: Men love races and the road is subliminally set up like a race. There's a destination. There are green lights, red lights, stripes, places for pit-stops and every

journey ends with an imaginary finish line. It is so in my blood and I'm not NASCAR guy. I'm at the gas pump and I want the family to finish using the facilities because I look at all the cars on the road and somewhere deep in the synapses between the cerebral cortex and the hypothalamus gland, a voice is whispering as I watch them whiz by, "They're all beating you!" Where did this voice come from? Did I watch too many Dukes of Hazzard reruns? Do I secretly adhere to the creeds of Ricky Bobby? Was I traumatized by my brother's victory at the Super Speed Go-Cart Derby?

Most guys that I know talk to the other vehicles. I see them. Is this therapy? Does it really help? We know they can't hear us but that doesn't stop us from blurting out the snarkiest observation we can think of. I thought it was just an American deal until I went on a mission trip to Guatemala. They were just as annoyed and perhaps even more assertive than American drivers.

I think it all started with a guy in 2 Kings named Jehu. If you want a picture of road rage, look no further. Whenever you find Jehu in the narrative, he's either racing around the Northern Kingdom in his tricked out chariot with the spinning hubcaps or he's shooting his arrows all over the suburbs. He actually ran over wicked queen Jezebel with his chariot. He was so notorious in his chariot that people around town thought reckless driving and Jehu were synonymous. Note the following passage:

Again the watchman reported... "The driving is like that of Jehu son of Nimshi—he drives like a madman." 2 Kings 9:20

When you get behind the wheel think about Mary on her donkey, not Jehu in his chariot. We'll all be a lot safer and sleep a little sounder. And if someone tells you that you drive like Jehu, that's not a compliment. That's a warning! You might need extensive counseling.

My Mom

My mother made it to Heaven this past year, but she left an indelible mark on my life. Growing up, I thought my mother was the strictest, most penny-pinching woman on the planet. As an adult, this theory has been confirmed. I used to think this was a flaw more than a virtue. I was wrong.

Mom was prepared for every crisis. The apocalypse, the great tribulation and the nuclear meltdown never happened but they did, the world would have turned to her and they would all receive stacks of canned hominy, frozen vegetables and enough toilet paper to go around. But not the two-ply toilet paper. Much too expensive...

I remember our weekly runs to the bread surplus store to get expired cinnamon bread at half price. If it weren't for the commercials I wouldn't have even known that McDonald's served French fries until I was over the age of accountability.

I can still hear her say, "I'm so glad you were born but after all those labor pains, I should be the one to get the presents." Yes, birthdays were celebrated and gifts were given. I knew she was joking but there was an imputed virtue in the middle of this humorous proverb—no one should get rewarded for just showing up on earth. We had to find our own jam and figure out how to play it well.

Along with her skill of saving, she mastered the art of discipline. She didn't have to lay a hand on me. Her laser-

focused glare could singe my eyebrows from 600 yards away. I used to complain that Mom made me go to bed earlier than any other child in North America. The only acceptable places to be after 8 p.m. were church or bed. Screen time wasn't an issue in our house. My big brother and I stayed out of the house for hours because we knew if we weren't studying, she'd have a list of activities on hand that involved brooms, scouring pads and variety of household cleaning chemicals. Of course, I was way too busy for this, so we usually braved the elements and rode our bikes like we were training for the Tour De France.

One of the greatest things my mom did growing up was to force me to fail. She didn't just want me to feel the thrill of victory. She knew that I had to learn the agony of defeat. I still remember the day she yanked the training wheels of the bike without telling me. If she saw a fear or weakness in my psyche, she would push me in that direction. This kept me from the sin of cockiness. She knew that I had no sense of direction- none whatsoever, so she'd send me on errands that would surely get me lost in the streets of our town. With no hand-eye coordination, she signed me up for piano lessons which I enjoyed about as much as I did cleaning the grout- both of which were daily activities. I can't play anything today, but it gave me the chutzpa to run toward the things I really enjoyed doing with an even greater passion.

Mom isn't with us this year but she programmed me for success in so many ways and whenever I get too big for my britches, I still feel her influence over me. I still tithe at church, watch my language, eat my vegetables, try to do more than what's expected, and, yes, I still put the seat down on the toilet.



She also parented three of the greatest people on earth, my dear brother, Mark and my two awesome sisters, Melodye and Melinda.

I guess you could say I was sheltered as a child, and I am so thankful for it.