

# Jesus is with me...

If there is one axiom I come back to more than any other—one I find myself saying out loud when things start to tilt—it's this:

**Jesus is with me.**

Not *it's not over.*

Not *if I die, I die.*

Those are good words. They've got grit in them. But this one goes deeper.

This one holds.

Click to watch the video

When I'm over my skis.

When the diagnosis lands and everything shifts in a moment.

When a relationship fractures in ways I didn't see coming.

When the darkness gets loud and starts telling its stories—

There is one truth that can carry the full weight of that moment:

**Jesus is with me.**

Because when that is true—and it is—what else is there?

What nightmare, what victory, what valley, what fire could possibly outshine the simple, steady reality of what He said:

*"Lo, I am with you always."*

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# About That Word

Now I know—*lo* doesn't technically mean what I want it to mean.

It means *behold*.

Pay attention.

Look here.

But when I hear it, I can't help it—I think of *low places*.

I think of valleys.

I think of those stretches of life where you can't see ten feet ahead of you, where the road drops out and you're left feeling your way forward.

And somehow... He's there too.

I don't know how this day is going to work out—but Jesus is with me.

I've got that conversation I've been putting off—but Jesus is with me.

I don't know how the end of my story will unfold—but Jesus is with me.

That's the secret hiding in plain sight at the end of the Great Commission.

We read the command—go, make disciples, baptize, teach—and then we tend to rush right past the final line, as if it were a closing formality instead of the whole foundation:

*"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."  
—Matthew 28:20*

It's not our talent that carries us.

It's not our intellect, or our abilities, or our strength—or even our best intentions.

It's not our looks—thank the Lord.

The secret is the **traveling companion**.

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## One Word

There's a story about G.K. Chesterton that I've never been able to shake.

He was stopped on a London street corner by a reporter who asked him:

"If the risen Christ appeared right now and stood behind you—what would you do?"

Chesterton didn't hesitate. He looked him in the eye and said:

**"He is."**

That's it.

Not a theological argument.

Not a carefully framed answer.

Just a quiet correction of reality.

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## Waking Up to What's Already True

Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century nun who spent her life learning how to pray, wrote these words in *The Interior Castle*:

*"We know quite well that God is present in all that we do. Our nature is such that it makes us lose sight of the fact. But the Lord, who is near at hand, awakens it."*

That's the whole thing, isn't it?

We don't conjure His presence.

We don't summon Him with the right tone or the right words.

We **wake up** to it.

This isn't magic.

It's memory.

It's the soul shaking itself awake to what is already, permanently, unchangeably true.

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## **Say It Out Loud**

There is no mountain, no fire, no villain, no diagnosis, no setback, no conflict that I will ever face alone.

Not because of who I am—

—but because of the One who is with me.

So when the day comes apart—and it will—say it out loud.

Say it in the car when you're gripping the steering wheel a little too tight.

Say it when the phone rings and you already know it's not good news.

Say it when you feel like you're fading, like you're disappearing into the noise of everything.

Say it until your heart catches up with your words:

**Jesus is with me.**

Not as a wish.

Not as a hope.

As a fact.

**Lo. He is.**

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## **A Prayer**

Jesus—

You said it plainly, and You meant it:  
*I am with you. Always.*

Not until it gets too hard.  
Not until we fail one too many times.  
Not until we wander too far.

Always.

Teach us to live inside that word.  
To say Your name in the dark and mean it.  
To stop looking for You somewhere out ahead,  
and realize You are already here—

already with us,  
already enough.

Amen.

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# **The Howling Black Dog and the Still Small Voice**

*Four Lessons for the Depressed from 1 Kings 19*

Early in my ministry, I was serving as a youth pastor in Amarillo, Texas when I walked straight into a deep chasm of spiritual warfare. It was born out of too many promises, too many personal expectations, and a growing pile of disappointments. In the midst of all the victories I experienced back when I had less gray hair and more energy—lives changed, ministries growing—depression crept in like a snake in the castle of my personal world. And it whispered four words: Your ministry is over.

It was a difficult season. When I should have been in a place of rejoicing, all I could do was wish the journey of life was over.

Out of that time, I began to search the Scriptures and came across a familiar passage about depression. It's amazing how when we search the Scripture, the Scripture begins to search us.

In 1 Kings 19, I met a strong and dynamic leader who had a limitless amount of faith—certainly much more faith than a twenty-six-year-old youth minister. He had seen fire from heaven. He had confronted kings. He had taken up the sword of spiritual warfare and knocked the foundations of idolatry across an entire nation.

And yet here we see this man, Elijah, being threatened by one vicious woman. After so many victories, how could this be? He escapes into the wilderness, collapses under a broom tree, and says, "Enough. Enough."

At first glance, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Jezebel doesn't even deliver the threat herself. She sneers to a messenger: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

And Elijah—the same man who had just called fire from heaven—was blanketed in fear. He ran. He told God, "I have had

enough, Lord. Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors.” And then he fell under that broom tree in total, stark, deep, dark depression—and fell asleep.

You know the story. An angel comes, touches him on the shoulder, and says, “Get up and eat.” Then this: “Your journey is too much for you.” And Elijah was strengthened.

The lessons I see in this story are some of the best counsel for anyone going through depression—those who have entered into this unwanted fraternity. We often call it “that howling black dog.” Sometimes it’s acres away from your house. Other times, it’s right at your doorstep.

## **1. God Meets Us in Our Exhaustion**

The first lesson I’ve learned, especially through the story of Elijah, is that God meets us in our exhaustion. He doesn’t rebuke us. He doesn’t hand us a gym membership. He doesn’t rattle off all the reasons we should buck up and feel grateful. He doesn’t even begin by sharing great wisdom.

Elijah had just come off the spiritual high of Mount Carmel, where God’s power was displayed and his enemies ran for the hills. But God met him there in his exhaustion—with care, not a lecture.

Sometimes the best thing we can do when we’re depressed is to get away, eat some good food, drink some water, and have a nap. As one of my mentors once said—and I quote this because it is staggeringly profound—“The most important thing to do when you’re exhausted is to get some rest.” I know. Groundbreaking. But sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is sleep and eat. God addresses the physical before he addresses the spiritual.

With every battle, every trial, every failure, and every victory, our bodies take a blow. Those blows can cause us to

stagger into a cave that no one wants to enter.

## **2. Depression Can Follow Our Greatest Victories**

Elijah didn't fall apart during the contest with the prophets of Baal. His boldness allowed him to mock the idolaters to their face, making caricatures of their gods. If he spoke in English, let's just say his trash talk would have definitely made the highlight reel.

But the emotional crash after that intense battle didn't indicate a lack of faith. It indicated humanity. Elijah realized that the power was never from him. It never was.

As we walk through depression, it's important to realize that the same great power that can calm storms and move mountains is also the God who brings us face to face with our own humanity.

## **3. Isolation Distorts Our Perspective**

We hear Elijah say to himself and to God, "I'm the only one."

And the Lord responds—in this literal cave where Elijah spent the night—with a powerful question: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" That's a question I think God asks us all the time. He asked it in the Garden. And he asks it of us. Where are you?

For those times when I've entered into depression, I've also heard that still small voice: Where are you, Matt?

I can relate to Elijah's response. I've often prayed, "God, I've been faithful to you. I've been zealous for your name. And nothing seems to work." Israelites will be Israelites, and

the church will be the church. And we feel those words of Elijah: "I am the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me too."

But then God gives Elijah a reality check. He tells him to get out of the cave and go stand on the mountain. His voice seemed to say, "Look, you've done some amazing things, and I've been able to use you to advance my kingdom. But I want to tell you this: you're not alone."

There were 7,000 prophets who had not bowed to Baal. In America today, I think God would say there are hundreds of thousands of churches and millions of faithful men and women who serve him. The reality check of depression allows us to see that it's not on our shoulders. The battle doesn't hinge on our strength to stand.

## **4. God's Rescue Is Rarely Dramatic**

And then the last thing I see in the Scripture—the one that helps me when that dog is at my doorstep barking and I'm huddled in the corner—is that God's rescue is rarely dramatic.

He speaks softly. He speaks in a still, small voice. The wind, earthquake, and fire came, but God wasn't in any of that. And then slowly, steadily, he begins to speak with a gentle voice. Not an accusing voice. Not a screaming voice. Softly. Carefully.

When we're depleted, we may expect God to show up in spectacular ways—to rescue us from the waters like he did the children of Israel. But instead, he comes to us and invites us to rest, to get a bite to eat, to take one step and then the next and then the next. And sometimes that's all you can do.

Don't concentrate on next week. Just look at today. God didn't give Elijah a five-year plan. It was just one assignment. Just one next thing.

If you're feeling the slings of depression, I hope you'll remember Elijah—a foremost prophet of God whose mighty deeds cover Sunday school walls everywhere. But the picture that has encouraged me the most is the one you won't find on a flannel board: an exhausted servant who encounters God through a still, small voice.

Shut down the email. Turn off the TV. Get off social media. Have a good meal. Take a nap. And listen.

That's not a complete prescription, of course. Those who are struggling with depression should seek all the tools that are available. All good gifts come from God—including connecting with a counselor, listening to wise counsel about medication, and learning how to set boundaries. But those first three steps—eat, rest, and listen—will help you get back in the fight.

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## **The Limping Prince at the King's Table**

Coldplay's haunting anthem *Viva La Vida* tells the story of a king who has lost everything—once commanding armies and ruling cities, now reduced to sweeping the very streets he used to own. It's a portrait of reversal, of glory turned to ash, of a crown that couldn't save him.

When I hear that song, I think of Mephibosheth.

He was born into royalty—the grandson of King Saul, son of Jonathan, heir to a dynasty. He should have ruled. Instead, he was hiding in a forgotten wasteland called Lo Debar, crippled, broken, and waiting for the kind of knock on the door that

only meant one thing in the ancient world—execution.

He used to be a prince. Now he was *sweeping streets he used to own*.

But then David came looking for him. And everything changed.

It's the story of Mephibosheth, a funny name for a powerful allegory of God's grace.

## **The Pursuit of Kindness**

David had a heart to do kindness to someone in Saul's house. It would be easy for David to say, "I want nothing to do with the memories of this brutal king who fought me at every turn, who pursued me without mercy, whose mental instability resembled a dark triad." But instead, David goes in pursuit of kindness.

I am reminded of the generational curse. We were all once enemies of God. We came from a long line of sinners. And yet we were pursued.

Notice—it wasn't Mephibosheth who inquired of David. David sought out Mephibosheth. A long time ago, God sought you. For some of us, He is still seeking. For others of us, we have forgotten the fact that we were immobile because of our sin and our shame.

## **The Wages of Sin**

In the ancient culture, Mephibosheth would be executed. I'm reminded that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

The fact that Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet reminds us of our own helplessness. He can't defend himself. He can't advance himself. He can't inherit anything on his

own, because his life is bankrupt—just as our lives are bankrupt.

## No Pasture

Mephibosheth lives in a land called Lo Debar. That name means “no pasture, no word.” In other words, he is living in a state of wilderness where there are no green pastures and still waters. There is no word.

I know that I have often experienced seasons when the voices of my life grow silent and there is no word for me.

And yet the first word that Mephibosheth hears is: **“Do not fear.”**

This is the gospel. We have nothing to fear.

## Gospel Language

Throughout the story of Mephibosheth, we hear gospel language. There is no condemnation. There is only great grace.

Mephibosheth calls himself a dead dog—broken, worthless, forgotten. **But God.**

Paul captured this same reality when he wrote:

*“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!”* —Ephesians 2:1-5 (CSB)

It was David who found Mephibosheth, restored his land, his security, and gave him a seat at the table.

King David said, **“You shall always eat at my table.”**

This is not a probationary period. This is not a temporary reprieve. No, this is permanence. He eats at the king’s table.

## **Hidden Beneath Grace**

But notice—he’s not healed. He remains lame. He continues to be broken. And I find that one of the most encouraging details in the entire story.

Grace doesn’t erase our brokenness, but it covers it.

Mephibosheth still limps to the table. Every single day he makes his way into the king’s presence with that same halting, uneven gait—the limp that tells the story of everything he lost, everything he couldn’t fix, everything that remains undone in him. And yet the seat is still there. The table is still set. The king still welcomes him.

I know that limp. I live with it daily. The same struggles that marked me before grace found me have a way of following me still—the same patterns, the same weaknesses, the same uneven stride. Some days I arrive at the king’s table barely holding it together, wondering if this is the day the invitation gets rescinded.

It never does.

Because the miracle of grace isn’t that it makes us suddenly whole on this side of eternity—it’s that it covers what remains broken. His feet are hidden beneath the tablecloth, and ours are too. We are welcomed not because we have healed ourselves but because the king himself made a way. We still limp. But we still feast.

Our feet are covered and hidden under the table of grace. His feet are hidden beneath the tablecloth, and ours are too.

Thank God for grace. Thank God for Mephibosheth, who personified the state of every human that ever existed on this planet—except One.

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## Lessons on the X-15

When I was 3, I had an X-15.

Picture a small trike with more noise than brakes – and a whole lot of reckless joy.

I loved racing down hills on that thing – the wind in my face, the rattling wheels, the rush of freedom.

But I had one problem: I didn't trust the pedals to slow me down. Instead, I'd press my shoes against the concrete. It worked... sort of. But it shredded my sneakers and bloodied my toes.

It drove my mom crazy – but it did keep me out of her hair.



My parents told that story for years...

it revealed something true about me:

I've always tried to control the uncontrollable.

I love adventure... to a certain point of fear.

Fear is a balancing act.

It's good to have fear – otherwise, we might manufacture our

own premature demise. (Like racing your X-15 off a ledge into oncoming traffic.)

But fear can also keep us inside.

Keep us fortifying our overblown rainy-day funds.

Keep us binge-watching the latest on Netflix.

Keep us blaming people, parties, and our own pitiful limitations.

And keep us from ever testing the thrill of the X-15 we call life.

We try to control pain – both the kind we feel and the kind we cause.

We try to manage our image and outcomes.

Sidenote: Sometimes we even try to manage God's image – keeping Him neat and predictable– a Sunday School friendly version rather than this boundless ground-shaking Savior.

The Lion will not dwell in our cage.

Safety can be appreciated,

but life won't stay inside the lines. Collisions happen. Hearts break. People disappoint us.

And yet – this is where life actually begins.

To avoid the mess, we turn to our self-invented tools:

People-pleasing.

Perfectionism.

Escapism.

Addiction – the “easy button” we press to avoid our deep need

for connection.

They promise relief, but they deliver isolation.

The truth is, life with Jesus isn't tidy. It's wild. It's unpredictable.

It's the rush of the hill – with a Savior who says, “Trust Me. Don't drag your feet.”

Surrender isn't giving up; it's opening up.

It's connection. It's risk. It's grace.

Maybe the invitation today is this:

Trade your torn shoes for courage.

Stop trying to control the ride.

Be like Jesus– Live without cages.

There are no cages in heaven – and the only ones here are the ones we build ourselves.

I'm still that kid on the X-15, learning (again) how to let go and trust the wind.

I want to live like Jesus lived– Cage Free.

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## **The Natural & The Gospel**

After heart of Redford's passing, my mind wandered back to my sophomore year at Louisiana College, when I stepped into a darkened theater at the Alexandria Mall to watch “The Natural.” With just a couple of teenage months to spare I was captivated by what seemed like a simple story about baseball

and second chances. Now, in the seventh inning stretch of my life, I approach the film with different eyes and accumulated experience. Perhaps the greatest revelation I've discovered is the Christ figure that emerges in fleeting glimpses throughout the movie through the character of Roy Hobbs.

Baseball has always been fertile ground for mythic tales and mind-bending consequences—from the ball slipping through Bill Buckner's legs, to the limping gait of Kurt Gibson as he rounded the bases in the Dodger's World Series, to the Babe pointing to the stands before his legendary home run. This week, I streamed the movie again, drawn perhaps by nostalgia and the timeless pull of great storytelling. As with any great movie, I discovered new layers I had never noticed before, or perhaps had never spent time truly contemplating. Mythological and biblical imagery abound in ways that are both subtle and profound. I'm sure I'm not nearly the first to notice them and I made a point not to Google it. I will after writing this.

I was particularly struck by the scene between The Judge and Hobbs, where Roy is tempted to throw games for money. The parallel to Jesus's forty days in the wilderness became unmistakable. "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8-9). The Judge's seductive offer mirrors Satan's temptation precisely. His promises of money and comfort strikingly reflect this biblical encounter.

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/D69ShXtN\\_\\_s?si=FPjkg86hB5iGKj7a](https://www.youtube.com/embed/D69ShXtN__s?si=FPjkg86hB5iGKj7a)  
The lightning bolt serves as perhaps the film's most potent symbol of supernatural power. Born from a tree struck by lightning, Roy's bat—Wonderboy—carries mythic significance. The wooden bat itself echoes the cross, an instrument of both destruction and redemption. When his teammates become captivated by Roy's miraculous performances and choose to stitch lightning bolts on their jerseys, it mirrors the Great

Commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), each carrying forward the symbol of transformation.

Roy’s rejection of pure materialism echoes Jesus’s response: “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4). His choice to pursue his calling rather than wealth reminds us of Philippians 2:7, where Christ “made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,” choosing mission over personal gain.

The silver bullet piercing Roy’s side from the mysterious Harriet Bird echoes the fate of a more perfect One: “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (John 19:34). After years of silence and exile, Roy emerges—much like Jesus striding out of the wilderness to begin his ministry. This resurrection motif transforms Roy from a fallen hero into something approaching the sacred.

Roy’s teammates become his disciples of sorts, transforming from a ragtag squad of nobodies into followers of a champion. There’s something profound about his mysterious, late arrival to the scene—Roy Hobbs seems to be on a divine mission, just as “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:13-14).

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/Y1pgp1B0qqM?si=TbRHpo6Ld2B9vmPY>  
The film’s ending offers perhaps its most heavenly imagery: Roy playing catch with his son in golden, almost ethereal light. This scene suggests paradise regained—all relationships restored, all purposes fulfilled. It evokes the promise found in Revelation 21:4: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” I couldn’t help but

think of my own father and all those who have passed before us, and the promise that we will all gather together again in that perfect light.

The Imperfect Savior: Certainly, there are profound differences between Roy Hobbs and the figure of Christ, even in metaphorical terms. Roy was full of pride, experienced a devastating fall, and struggled with very human weaknesses. Yet perhaps this is where the metaphor becomes most powerful—it places us in Roy’s shoes. Like the apostle Paul, we can say: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15). We are often attacked, frequently tempted, and sometimes betray those we love most.



The story of redemption echoes through the longings of our own hearts and lives, reminding us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Roy Hobbs is not Christ, but he points us toward Christ. His

story reminds us that even the fallen can rise, even the wounded can heal others, and even those who have lost everything can find their way back to grace. In the end, “The Natural” offers us more than entertainment—it provides a glimpse of the gospel played out on America’s most mythic stage.

The metaphors may be imperfect, but they are undeniably present, woven throughout the film like threads of gold catching light in unexpected moments. Sometimes the most profound truths come to us not through sermons or scripture alone, but through the stories that capture our imagination and refuse to let go.

Mr. Redford, I don’t know if I’ll see you in the life to come. But I want to thank you—for bringing Bernard Malamud’s story to life with such care, dignity, and beauty. Through your performance, you gave me another glimpse of the gospel. Another reminder that even in a game, even in a story, we can catch sight of something eternal.

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## **Striving for Something We Already Have**

Grace slips through our fingers like water, not because it’s elusive, but because we keep clenching our fists. There’s something almost maddening about the concept of grace—how it defies every instinct we have about earning our place in this world. We live in a universe of transactions, of cause and effect, of merit and reward. So when we encounter love that asks for nothing in return, acceptance that comes without prerequisites, forgiveness that arrives before we even ask for

it, our minds revolt. *This cannot be! There must be a catch.* And so we bargain for things we already possess.

We spend our days climbing mountains, thinking God waits at the summit with a checklist and a stopwatch. We catalog our good deeds like currency, counting up our prayers like coins in a jar, convinced that somewhere there's a cosmic ledger where our efforts will finally tip the scales toward worthiness. All the while, He stands in the valley below, arms open, calling us home.

"There is always room for one more," echoes through the chambers of our striving hearts. One more son. One more daughter. One more opportunity to simply receive what has already been given. But we've forgotten how to have open hands. We've trained ourselves to grasp, to work, to prove.

We know grace like the back of our hand—that familiar territory we've mapped with our minds—and yet we cannot seem to turn that hand palm-up in surrender.

The truth is devastating in its simplicity: the work has already been done. Every prayer we think we need to earn, every moment of acceptance we believe we must achieve, every drop of love we imagine we must prove ourselves worthy of—it's already ours. Not because we're perfect, but because we're His.

We don't need perfection. We need direction. Not toward some distant goal of worthiness, but toward the radical act of receiving. There's something achingly familiar in the way we catalog our spiritual efforts, isn't there? Like that haunting refrain that asks if we've got soul—we keep taking inventory of all the things we've done, as if the ledger itself might save us. But grace doesn't keep score.

Still, we climb. We strive uphill, bloodied knees and calloused hands, trying to improve our spiritual résumé while Love itself waits in the mess of our valley. In our

woundedness. In our spiritual chaos. The invitation isn't to clean ourselves up first—it's to come as we are, broken and beautiful and bewildered by grace.

"Come home," He whispers, while we shout up the mountain asking to be accepted.

"Help me," we cry, not realizing we're already held.

"Redeem me," we plead, blind to the fact that redemption happened long before we knew we needed it.

What He wants isn't our perfection—it's our passion. Not our achievements, but our attention. Not our worthiness, but our willingness to be loved without earning it. He's waiting for that moment when we finally exhale the words that change everything: *"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."*

Broken, bloodied, and feeling utterly useless as we may be, this is the movement from chaos to serene—not through our striving, but through our surrender. Not by climbing higher, but by coming home.

Grace remains maddening because it asks us to accept what we cannot earn, receive what we did not work for, and trust in love that makes no sense by the world's standards.

**Perhaps that's exactly the point.**

In a world obsessed with merit and achievement, grace stands as a quiet revolution—a love that simply is, without condition or clause, waiting for us to stop climbing long enough to be embraced.

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# Red Beans and Rice, Cher!

My son, Jacob, asked me for my Red Beans and Rice Recipe. I didn't give him the recipe like it was given to me. Otherwise it would sound something like this:

*Lemme tell you how we do it way down da bayou, bébé.*

*First t'ing, you take dem red kidney beans, put 'em in a big ol' bowl. Cover dem beans wit' water – 'bout an inch or so over da top, yeah – an' let 'em soak good overnight, let dem swell up nice an' fat.*

*Come da nex' day, you dump dem beans in da colander, rinse all dat dirt an' bad mojo off. Den you slap 'em in a big ol' pot, pour you a coupla cans dat red tomato sauce, maybe a lil' splash water too, just to keep her from dryin' out.*

*Now, when you runnin' roun' dat store, you peek in da frozen box – you gonna find dat Cajun seasonin' mix, got da peppers an' da onions all chopped nice. Dat's easy, easy. But if dey ain't got it, no sweat, cher – you just cut you up some big ol' onions, some fat bell peppers, an' don' forget dat garlic, non! Dat garlic, she make da pot sing, yeah.*

*You track you down some good andouille sausage – not dat city stuff, get da good smokey kind, make your nose dance soon as it hit da pot. Throw it all in dere wit' dem beans, turn dat fire down low, let it bubble, let it talk to you real slow, like a fiddle playin' in da night.*

*When you t'ink maybe she ready, you take one dem beans, mash 'em 'gainst da side o' dat pot – if she smash all soft an' creamy, dat's da Holy Ghost tellin' you it's time, cher.*

*Some folk round here, dey don't use no tomato sauce, mais I tell you straight – dat sauce, she give it da little extra somethin' to make you slap ya mama, it's so good.*

*When dem beans be ready, you heap you a big ol' spoonful right on some fluffy white rice, yeah. An' don' be shy now – you splash a good bit o' dat Tabasco sauce on top, spice it up real nice, make it dance on your tongue like a fais do-do on Saturday night, sha!*

**Dat's how we cook it, true true. Now come pass a good time, yeah!**

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## **The Christ Figure in The Brothers Karamazov**

So far, for me, it's been the character I can't escape. Perhaps because there are shadows of the great divine in this part of the story.

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### **God Approaching**

You'll know Him when you see Him.

He carries the likeness of no mortal man.

He will turn you upside down and shake you until your pockets no longer jingle.

He will turn the heat up until meltdown occurs.

He can swallow galaxies.

He can stand on the hairs of your thumb.

He will take your personal certainties and make them uncertain.

He will take the earthly securities and make them insecure.

He will do all this for His own reasons

They are His and He won't tell.

Not today.

Fearing Him is glorious.

He smells the fear as worthy sacrifice.

When He comes, don't hide or run.

Die and He will roll the stone from your lifeless resting place.

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## Your Own Private Qumran

*If you're not into metaphors, nothing to see here. If you love it like I do, come along!*

In the arid Judean wilderness, perched on the edge of the Dead Sea, lies Qumran, a site steeped in history and mystery. It's here that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, unlocking ancient truths and revealing a hidden treasure trove of Scripture. For me, Qumran serves as a metaphor of the spiritual pilgrimage. Like the shepherd boy, I'm throwing rocks into the dark caves of my own story and questions.

**If you want to find God, you must go into the wilderness.**



Like the hidden scrolls, God's truth often lies buried deep within us, waiting to be uncovered. This discovery requires intentionality, humility, and a willingness to venture into the wilderness of self-examination.

When we surrender to Christ, He becomes our guide through the wilderness, teaching us to confront the brokenness of our old lives and to search the Scriptures for eternal truth. As the psalmist writes, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts" (Psalm 139:23). This act of surrender and self-examination mirrors the process of uncovering the scrolls—peeling back layers to reveal the treasures God has hidden within us.

### **The Dead Sea of Our Old Lives**

The Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, is a stark image of desolation. Its waters are lifeless, incapable of sustaining fish or plants. Yet, in its depths lies a story of transformation. Just as the Dead Sea encircles Qumran, our old lives often feel like lifeless wastelands—marked by sin, emptiness, and self-reliance. But in Christ, the desolation of our past becomes the fertile ground where God's truth is

revealed.

Vera Nezarian, a Russian writer shares an observation that resonates with me: *“The desert and the ocean are realms of desolation on the surface. Both, seething with hidden life. The only veil that stands between perception of what is underneath the desolate surface is your courage.”*

If we sit in the space of desolation long enough, we can observe that there’s something more going on there.

### **Christ as the Living Word**

The Qumran scrolls remind us of the enduring power of God’s Word. Just as those ancient texts were preserved against all odds, so the Word of God speaks into the brokenness of our lives with timeless relevance. Jesus, the Living Word, illuminates the Scriptures, helping us grow in the knowledge of God and in our surrender to Him.

As we draw closer to Christ, we learn that truth is not a distant or abstract concept but a person. Jesus declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus beckons us to come into the hard places to find the answers to the Mystery.

### **A Call to Unearth the Scrolls Within**



God calls you into desolations and dark nights, a land like Qumran, because it's there when you might stumble into the greatest discovery of your life. While your desolation might look like barren wildernesses, he might, just might, be leading you into a sacred space where you can experience God more fully.

### **Frequent Caves of the Qumran soul:**

*Depression*

*Job loss*

*Disaster*

*Betrayal*

*Prodigals*

*Chronic Illnesses*

*Loss*

*Disapproval*

*Rejection*

*Aging*

*Cancer*

It is in this wilderness, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we confront the Dead Sea of our old lives and embrace the living waters of Christ. But we will never make sense of the wilderness, if we aren't searching. I found the truth of Christ, but my search continues for the fragments

I've yet to discover in Him. I don't have all the answers. Neither do you. We're all still looking and revelation is in real time.

As believers, we are called to unearth the "scrolls" of God's truth in our lives. These scrolls are not hidden in distant caves but within our own hearts, waiting for us to dive into the Word of God, to pray, to listen, and to surrender. In doing so, we allow Christ to rewrite the story of our lives, transforming our desolation into abundance and our wilderness into a garden.

As I've pondered this metaphor, I'm reminded of Paul's words: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). This verse beautifully took me back to Qumran, emphasizing the fragility of my humanity and the divine treasure within us.



Like the ancient scrolls preserved in simple clay jars, God's

truth resides in the humble vessels of our lives. The jars of clay, fragile and unremarkable, symbolize our weakness and dependence on God. Yet, it is through these fragile vessels that His power is displayed. In the context of Qumran, the clay jars that protected the scrolls echo the transformative work of Christ in us—His truth and glory shine through our imperfections, revealing that the source of life and redemption is not in us but in Him. As we surrender to Christ, our brokenness becomes the means through which His light and truth are made known to the world.

Robert Frost's poem "**A Servant to Servants**," he reflects on the inner turmoil and the weight of circumstances, yet also hints at a search for deeper understanding and purpose. He concludes: *"The best way out is always through."* This line captures the essence of spiritual surrender and transformation—moving through the wilderness of our struggles to discover the treasure of God's truth. It aligns with the idea that Christ meets us in our brokenness (our "jars of clay") and leads us through it, revealing His glory in the process.

Qumran stands as a powerful reminder of God's faithfulness to preserve His truth and reveal it to those who seek Him. It is a metaphor for the transformative journey every believer takes—a journey that leads us from the desolation of our old lives to the life-giving truth found in Christ.

### **A Blessing**

*So may you be inspired, my brothers and sisters, continue to search deeply within yourself, trusting Christ to guide you. In the quiet wilderness of your heart, may you find not only ancient truth but also the living presence of the Savior, who invites you to grow in the knowledge of God and experience the fullness of His grace.*