

Jesus, Unleashed

By Joel M. Killion

Chapter One: **Beneath the Flesh**

I told my mom that I wanted to blow my brains out. I thought I was stupid. At least that's what my teachers, class-mates, and so-called friends thought, and somehow what they thought of me seemed to matter more than it ever should have. But I didn't know any better. I was seven years old and very impressionable. I didn't meet the standards of the traditional educational system. I didn't read or count or rhyme like my peers. I didn't socialize, dress and carry myself like everyone else. So, to them, I was missing the mark. In their eyes, I was failing. And I didn't know who I was enough to know that I could ignore them. I guess I thought their positions of power and influence or their roles as "my friends," made them more qualified than anyone, including me, to measure me; and I certainly didn't think to consider Jesus' take on me, even though he was always the only one who was ever truly qualified to appraise me.

It seems I didn't meet the standards of anyone who expected me to be someone I wasn't, to be like all my peers. And if it hadn't been for the Lord who led my parents to take me and my brother out of public school to homeschool us, I may have become exactly what everyone "out there" wanted me to be. Who knows? But Jesus knew what He was doing. He put my brother and me in a place where we would be conditioned by Him to live completely unafraid of being who He made us to be – nothing more, nothing less. For the next eleven years, we were encouraged to follow our passions and dreams; we were allowed to think outside every box that everyone "out there" believed in. We were taught to ignore the pull of the world that always seeks to pressure us to conform and comply or else.

And believe it or not, we experienced this worldly pressure in the church more than anywhere else. It was like another world that made the rest of the world look good. And it didn't matter what church we went to; they were all the same even though they said they weren't. They all expected what we couldn't deliver as long as we were ourselves. And it wasn't hard to disappoint them because they were always weighing us in their souls, waiting for us to say something or do something that didn't fit their mold just right. I remember feeling like there was always an elephant in the room hounding me simply because I was different. They seemed to pity me because I didn't have what they had or didn't believe like they believed. I never had all the nice clothes, and when I turned sixteen I didn't have the best car, which only confirmed, in their eyes, how deprived and sheltered I really was. Of course, I never bought into their way of thinking because I could see right through it all, so I just kept being me. When we had Bible study, I asked questions that made the leaders cringe inside – they never could answer my questions – and I made comments that crossed their favorite doctrines; to many of them, I was deceived. When the unpopular were being ridiculed, I defended them, which always made me the new target. When I could muster the courage, I prayed for the sick and hurting, knowing they didn't believe in divine healing or miracles. And as I grew in the Lord and in life, I became more and more free. Of course, I had times when I thought it would be easier to give up and give in and there were times when I did. And, for a time, it was easier, but it never lasted because something in me, like an eagle in a cage, wanted to break out and fly. I had a fire in my bones,

and the longer I held it inside, the more it hurt – it even sometimes hurt my physical body. So I bailed, until eventually I became so free that I just let go. I stopped apologizing for being me. I stopped letting what other people think about me be more important than what my Best Friend thinks of me. I quit caring about the status quo and political correctness. The steely gazes and cold shoulders became more and more invisible to me.

I've often loved the quote from Albert Einstein which says, "He who joyfully marches to music in rank and file has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would fully suffice." And I like this one too: "Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocre minds. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit...but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence."

From the beginning, I've always been fascinated with the people in history, like Einstein, who were radical non-conformists, who swam upstream and defied every limitation that everyone tried to bind them to. People like William Wallace, Abraham Lincoln, Evan Roberts, John G. Lake, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Winston Churchill, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ronald Reagan, Rush Limbaugh, and others like them have always inspired me to be me. Something inside me loved their stories, their sufferings, and their successes, and I still do. I love their journeys. To me, their lives seem more valuable than all the cookie-cutter masses since the beginning of time.

And yet there has always been one person who has been my primary "role model," my "idol," the one I knew was greater than everyone I'd ever heard of or read about. I knew this man knew everything I had ever felt – good, bad, and ugly – and knew how to overcome all the odds to be who he was born to be. So I studied his life and found my own, and the clearer he became, the more I knew myself. Now, I no longer have to question who I am. All my masks are in the trash. I don't have to waver between being me and being what everyone else wants me to be. I have been given permission to be like him.

He was bold, confident, strong, and true, and no one could shake him. There was nothing in him that anyone could exploit, not even Satan (Luke 4:1-12; John 14:30). He was grounded, not wishy-washy, double-minded, and confused, and he made distinctions like no one else. But it was who he was on the inside, at his core, that made him like this.

What you are about to read is a portion of what I have found about Jesus that has made me new in so many ways and is still being worked into my life. I say a portion because I can't possibly explain the depths to which his identity has affected my own. He has influenced me and is still influencing me in many ways that are far beyond my understanding.

I haven't been able to find anyone like him. At times, I've thought that he is too high, too great, too wonderful to emulate, but, then again, why would I want to lower the bar to what I think is doable? Why settle for second or third best when his life is the best there is and ever will be?

What if we knew who we are just as he knew who he was? Would we not live very different lives? Would we continue to let even one percent of our lives be moved by anyone else? What was Jesus' secret to such an amazing life? Do you really want to know?

The Word Made Flesh

When Jesus came out of the water at his baptism, the heavens opened, and a voice said, *“This is my son, my beloved, in whom I delight!”*

Jesus’ spent his first 30 years *“doing”* nothing, as the world understands it, but the first thing we hear about him, out of his daddy’s mouth, is how proud he is of his boy. Before he ever preached one *“sermon”* or worked one miracle, he had our papa’s approval. His significance never came from his behavior, performance, or achievements. He didn’t have to *“earn”* his father’s praise or affection. He didn’t need the next three years to become significant. He already was.

Then, after hearing his father’s words of love for him, Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit where his metal – his identity and nature - was tested by fire, by Satan himself; when Satan tried to get him to question who he was, Jesus didn’t say, *“I know who I am.”* Rather, he said, *“It is written...”* or, as he would say today, *“My daddy said...”* Thus, Jesus never relied on his own self-knowledge, on what he thought about himself.

After passing the test, he returned to his hometown and went to church on “Sunday morning”; he approached the *“pulpit,”* was given the scroll of the book of Isaiah, opened it, and read the following:

“The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon Me, because he has anointed Me [the Anointed one, the Messiah] to preach the good news (the Gospel) to the poor; he has sent Me to announce release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send forth as delivered those who are oppressed [who are downtrodden, bruised, crushed, and broken down by calamity], to proclaim the accepted and acceptable year of the Lord [the day when salvation and the free favors of God profusely abound.].” (Isaiah 61:1-2, Amplified)

When he finished reading, he gave the scroll back to the attendant and sat down. Then, with all eyes on him, he said, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled...”* In other words, he said, *“Today, this Scripture has come to pass, and here I am, the Anointed one, the Messiah, ‘the Word made flesh,’ before your very eyes.”*

Naturally, this confused everyone who heard him because they thought, *“Hold on! This doesn’t make any sense! Isn’t this guy Joseph and Mary’s boy from down the road? How can he be the Messiah?”* He then assured them that they wouldn’t receive him for who he really was because no prophet is accepted in his own hometown (*“Familiarity breeds contempt”*). Then, to make matters worse, he mentioned the ministries of two incredible prophets who were highly respected in Israel’s history – Elijah and Elisha – putting himself on their level. This immediately filled everyone with so much anger that they threw him out of the *“church,”* kicked him out of town, and dragged him to a high cliff where they tried, without success, to throw him to his doom (Luke 4:1-30).

These two events – at Jordan and the *“church”* - sparked the beginning of Jesus’ public life and ministry. He was openly affirmed by his father and believed it so much that he made his identity the subject of his first *“sermon”* which almost got him killed by his first *“congregation.”* His

audacious claims about himself posed the dividing point between reality and everything everyone had ever held dear.

In his famous book, Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis makes this statement: "*Christ says that He is 'humble and meek' and we believe Him; not noticing that, if He were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings. I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*"

Jesus didn't have an identity crisis like so many of us, even though he was a human being, made a little lower than the angels, just like us (Hebrews 2:9, 17-18; 4:14-5:2, 7-9; Psalm 8:4-5; Philippians 2:5-8). He never temporized or waffled about himself. He knew who he was, where he came from, why he was here, and where he was going, and most didn't like it (John 4:10, 25-26; 8:14, 23; 18:36-37). His perception of reality determined his identity. His life was established on the Word of God; that is, he was the byproduct of His daddy's affirming words. He didn't entangle himself with the affairs of this life (2 Timothy 2:4-5). He lived before the bar of God (Galatians 1:20) as the Word made flesh, the epistle of God, written on a tablet of flesh for all to read (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

He also knew who he wasn't – he knew his limits - because you cannot know who you are without also knowing who you aren't. He knew he was not of this world even though he lived in it with everyone else (John 17:14). He knew he was not an earthly king and that his Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36-37). And when you're that liberated, that self-aware, that settled, only then can you truly live.

Public Persona

His fame grew with every miracle, sign, and wonder he performed, but his personal value wasn't moved, good or bad, by the approval or disapproval of others (Matthew 4:23-25; John 5:41-44). Some loved him, but most did not. Nevertheless, he wasn't encouraged by praise or discouraged by rejection (Luke 18:18-19; John 5:44; 12:43). He wasn't happy when the crowds were big and sad when they were small, as if numbers had anything to do with his success or failure; in fact, there were times when the crowds grew so large that he would purposefully thin them out by either saying offensive things, climbing mountains, or crossing lakes (Matthew 8:18-22, John 6). When people approached him, wanting to follow him, he would shock them with impossible conditions and many times, let them walk away discouraged (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 9:57-62; 18:18-30). His idea of discipleship was nothing like ours (Matthew 7:13-14; 10:25-33; Luke 13:22-30; 14:25-35).

His disciples were never bored because they never knew, moment to moment, what he was going to say or do. He was a mystery-man, an enigma, a living riddle. He was neither boring nor predictable. He never said or did anything the same way all the time. He was spontaneous and quick to change whatever preconceived ideas everyone had.

For instance, in Mark 3, Jesus and his disciples went to a house (probably Peter's), where they were immediately overwhelmed by a crowd that was pressing upon them with such force that they could not even eat their meal (v. 20). Now, it isn't clear what happened in that house. All we know for sure is that Jesus suddenly began displaying bizarre behavior while he was "*driving out demons*" (verse 22). Then when his family and the disciples heard what he was doing, they went to take him "*by force*" to get him under control (v.21, Amp). According to different translations of the Bible, those who were present thought Jesus had "*lost his senses*" (New American Standard Bible), was "*beside Himself*" (King James Version), "*out of his mind*" (New International Version), went "*crazy*" (Worldwide English New Testament) and got "*carried away with himself*" (The Message Bible). The Wycliffe New Testament says he "*turned into madness.*" The original Greek says he was "*out of His wits, insane or bewitched*" (Strong's #1839). Moreover, the scribes and teachers of the law, after observing his behavior, accused him of being possessed by Satan and said that he was casting out demons because he was himself possessed by the prince of demons (verse 22-23). Evidently, Jesus was not "*himself,*" at least from everyone's point of view; in fact, from the religious crowd's view, he was acting more like someone who was demon-possessed than someone who was merely crazy. Of course, we know that Jesus wasn't really possessed by Satan but we can see from this that he did at times do crazy things that didn't look right, that disturbed everyone's religious apple-cart.

This reminds me of the 120 believers in Acts 2 who were accused by onlookers of being drunk, when in fact they were simply responding to the activity of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, Jesus and his followers didn't value respectability over the operations of the Kingdom. Those who only observed things on the surface never saw the true value of what was really happening; they were merely offended by methods and appearances from their limited points of reference. Only those who had the humility to see the heart of the matter were able to see what God was really doing beyond what they experienced with their five natural senses.

As Philip Yancey stated in *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Jesus' "*...Searing honesty made him seem downright tactless in some settings. Few people felt comfortable around him; those who did were the type no one else felt comfortable around. He was notoriously difficult to predict, pin down, or even understand.*"

There were many times when he insulted, tested, or refused those who were desperate for help or advice (Matthew 15:22-26; 17:17; John 4:46-48). At other times he only healed one person in a great multitude, leaving the rest uncured (John 5:1-9; Luke 4:25-27). When his good friend Lazarus was sick, he didn't heal him but let him die and didn't raise him from the dead until four days later (John 11:1-44). Needless to say, His pattern of behavior disappointed all who sought a "*conventional*" leader.

Jesus didn't play to people and had no desire to make a name for himself (Philippians 2:7). He was so secure in himself that he actually discouraged those he had healed from telling anyone

about what he had done for them (Matthew 8:1-4; 9:30; 12:16; Mark 1:44; 8:22-30). And again, when he was transfigured before Peter, James and John, he told them not to tell what they had seen to anyone, until his resurrection (Matthew 17:9).

On another occasion, when the annual Feast of Tabernacles – one of the greatest events of the year – was near in Jerusalem, Jesus stayed in Galilee. But his brothers protested, “...*You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.*” But the reason his brothers said this was because they didn’t really believe in him; if they had, they would have known that he had no desire to “*show*” himself to the world as a well-known “*public figure*” – he didn’t have to (John 7:1-6, NIV). There was no supernatural glow about him, no halo. There was nothing in his appearance that attracted anyone (Isaiah 53:2-3). He spurned the spotlight, distrusted crowds and public opinion, and spent most of his time in towns of small size and little importance.

At times it seemed as if the whole world was going after him (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:1-19); then it would turn on him, hating him and seeking his death (Matthew 10:22; John 7:7; 15:18, 24-25). In many ways it seems the masses were bipolar and schizophrenic, shouting “*Hosanna*” one week and yelling “*crucify him*” the next. But this never took Jesus by surprise because he knew who they really were. When his disciples, his own hometown and even his own family members including his cousin John the Baptist, doubted or were offended at him, he wasn’t bothered as if their opinions mattered (Matthew 11:2-6; 13:10, 53-58; 15:12; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 7:18-23). He knew the futility of their thoughts, and he knew their true nature, which is why he never allowed himself to be moved by them; he never committed or entrusted himself to anyone (John 2:23-25; 1 Corinthians 3:20). If he had, he would never have been truly free.

Jesus’ focus was so entirely upon the Kingdom and the things of the Kingdom that those who were of a different mind were constantly bothered by him. He offended and insulted the masses (Luke 11:29; 12:54-59; John 6), terrified and confused his disciples (Matthew 14:26; 15:15-20; 16:5-11, 24), and upset religious leaders, scribes, and lawyers (Matthew 15:1-14; 16:1-4; 19:1-12; 21:33-46; 22:15-32; 23; Luke 11:37-54). At one time or another, he managed to mystify and alienate every major group in Palestine. And to make matters worse, he was known by many, including his family, as an insane, blaspheming, demon-possessed, troublemaking, wine-bibbing, non-conforming disturber of the peace who wrote in the dirt with his finger and hung-out with the riff-raff of society (Matthew 3:20-22; 9:3, 34; 11:18-19; Luke 7:33-35; John 7:20; 8:48-49, 52; 10:20-21).

On one occasion when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, the entire city became agitated and began “*trembling with excitement,*” asking, “*Who is this?*” (Matthew 21:10-11, Amplified). This was a common occurrence with him, and yet he wasn’t moved. His confidence wasn’t shaken when he was banished from villages, towns, cities, or regions (Mark 5:13-20). He knew who he was, despite others, and no one could take that from him. He wasn’t troubled when people interrupted his messages, questioned his authority, tested his wisdom, ridiculed his good name, or rejected him altogether (Matthew 9:18, 24; 21:23-27; 11:27-33; Luke 20). It didn’t matter that most

overlooked or stiff-armed him before they ever really knew him. He was the sweet fragrance of life to the needy but an aroma of death to those who were dead in self-satisfaction.

He failed every known classification and did not fit anyone's expectations of "*the coming Messiah.*" As C. S. Lewis put it, "*He was not at all like the psychologist's picture of the integrated, balanced, adjusted, happily married, employed, popular citizen. You can't really be very well 'adjusted' to your world if it says you 'have a devil' and ends by nailing you up naked to a stake of wood.*" All too often we tend to believe that Jesus was normal, but what is normal? What if normal in his world is abnormal or even crazy in ours? How could anyone easily accept him when he made himself far too easy to reject?

What's funny to me is that no one knew who he was except the demons who always recognized him as the "Holy one of God" or "Son of the Most High." They clearly had more discernment than those who heard his words and saw his works everyday, and they recognized him better than all the religious leaders combined; this is why they knew his presence and obeyed his every word without question (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 1:21-26, 34; 5:1-13).

Relationship

Who we are, on the inside, is often shaped by the influences of our world around us (family, friends, books, mentors, media, etc.) and determines our level of faith, confidence and leadership which guides our whole life for good or evil. But there's a higher way!

A wise man once said, "*Tell me whom you love, and I will tell you who you are.*" Jesus was who he loved. His whole being was wrapped up in his father, the love of his life, who influenced him and made him who he was. In other words, he wasn't shaped from without, but from within, where his father lived.

No one had ever known God like Jesus did which explains why he was the first to live the kind of life he lived. Nowhere in human history had anyone ever called God "*father,*" let alone "*my father,*" but Jesus did (Matthew 7:21; Luke 10:22; John 8:19; 20:17). In a time when God was known as being distant and ineffable, when Jews never dared to pronounce his Name, Jesus called him "*Abba*" (A familiar Aramaic term of family affection, likened to "*daddy,*" the first word many children spoke). Jesus was the first to apply such a word to Yahweh. This, of course, set a new precedent for relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Unlike so many of us, he didn't identify himself with his blood-kin or natural heritage; his papa was his heritage, his real blood-kin, his only source of security and personal value. He and his father belonged to each other; their life was a shared life. Therefore, Jesus didn't suffer with insecurities or low self-esteem as we do because their perfect love removed all fear.

He was so in his father and his father was so in him that they were actually one, not two (John 5:23-24, 26; 8:16-18; 10:32; 14:9-11; 17:21). In fact, he was so close to his father that he was literally bi-located, with his father in heaven while on the earth, simultaneously, everyday – He was the first to experience what has always been available for every child of God (John 3:13; 17:11-13). They were so close that Jesus spoke of himself and his father as "*we*" (John 3:11; 17:22). If you knew one, you knew the other; if you saw one, you saw the other; if you heard

one, you heard the other (John 8:19; 12:44-45; 14:6-7). In fact, he was so united with his father, that he intuitively knew when others didn't know him (John 7:28-29; 8:54-55; 17:23). He was so united to Truth, Light, and Goodness, that he was able to discern error, darkness, and evil with pinpoint accuracy.

When Jesus told the multitudes not to worry about their lives, regarding food, drink or clothes, he spoke out of a personal familiarity with who his daddy really was to him (John 3:34-35; 16:15; 17:10). He knew his father loved him and them far more than the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25-31; 10:31; Luke 12:6-7, 22-32); he even went so far as to say to all the parents who were present, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* (Matthew 7:9-11, NKJV).

He knew his father loved him far more than the best parent in the world loves their children. I would even say that our father loved him far more than every parent who has ever lived in all of history has ever loved their children – and he loves you just the same.

This love is why Jesus was able to walk on water or sleep without fear in the back of the boat in the middle of the storm (Matthew 8:23-26; 14:22-32; Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-51). This love enabled him to stand toe-to-toe with violent crowds who wanted him dead. This is why he was who he was, lived the way he lived, and died the way he died.

He trusted his father so purely and distrusted himself so completely, in everything, that he transcended the realm of human explanation; he needed him more than oxygen, water, and food. He couldn't live without him. He needed his father who was his source, his life, his everything; this is why he said, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"* before he breathed his last breath on the cross (Luke 23:46, NKJV). At the very moment when he was the weakest he would ever be, there was only one person he could think of to trust with his life; there was only one person he knew who really loved him (John 2:23-25; 19:10-11).

On one occasion, he spoke of himself as a vine and his father as a vinedresser, showing the weakness and vulnerability of his life in the hands of his daddy who cared for him so much that he actually knew the number of hairs on his head (John 15:1; Matthew 10:30). Though he was God, he never drew upon his nature as God to do anything. He lived out of his relationship with our Father, living in the very same manner that our Father desires to live with us. His whole life was lived as a human being, dependent upon the life and power of our Papa's world within him (John 3:2). He was the first to live like this, the first to completely hand over the entirety of his life to our Father, the first to truly believe him. It was only as he rested in their relationship that he could express our Father in any given situation.

His Integrity

"No man can purchase his virtue too dear, for it is the only thing whose value must ever increase with the price it has cost us. Our integrity is never worth so much as when we have parted with our all to keep it." – Ovid

In a day when integrity is rare or nearly extinct, we need to remind ourselves of what it means. The word *integrity* speaks of wholeness, honesty, uprightness, completeness, absoluteness, soundness, entirety, and stability; those who possess this virtue are honorable, uncorrupt, unbroken, unimpaired, undiminished, and undivided. Can you imagine a heart like this? What would it be like? Look like? Sound like? Do you know anyone like this? Fortunately, we have Jesus as our example.

He never blew in the wind or changed with the weather. He refused every voice and every influence around him that contradicted his true self, because he was entirely whole within himself. He was outwardly who he was inwardly in everything he said and did. He never wore one face to himself and another to everyone else so that he or anyone was confused as to which one was true. He never separated the life he lived from the words he spoke. His teachings were so entwined with his person that they lived beyond his natural life, because he spoke out of who he really was and always would be. He said and did nothing for which he would not be willingly responsible forever. He didn't need rules or laws; his changeless core was his law. Against all odds, against all instincts of self-preservation, he never compromised. In a time when truth was rare, he was true, even to his own hurt and eventual death.

He was who he was, said what he said, and lived what he lived because it was right, not because it worked. He knew when to say “*yes*” or “*no*” and never caved to outward pressure, public opinion, or brutal opposition; he knew his purpose and stayed the course. He didn't work to fit into other's expectations because he burned with the realization of who his father said he was. He never compromised himself and was willing, if need be, to lose every friend on earth in order to maintain his honor. He spoke the Truth, even when he knew it would produce conflict and division; he maintained his focus without any support from those closest to him. He behaved in ways that were in harmony with his personal values and made choices based on his relationship with his father, despite his relationship with everyone else.

He never compared himself to anyone or measured himself by others. Rather, he chose to be a first-rate version of himself and not be a second-rate version of someone else. He never allowed himself to become, in any way, like the systems he opposed while he was in them but lived to the beat of a different drummer, operating by a different set of values.

This was the essence of his success in life. This is how he was able to accomplish so much in such a short time. His unsullied character kept his focus strong, which, in turn, fueled his life.

Everything he said and did – his whole life – came out of who he was. He conducted himself temperately and restricted himself in all things according to his purpose; he did not run without a definite goal (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). His priorities were in order. He kept first things first by loving his daddy and then loving people. This is why he fearlessly obeyed his father over and above men, because he feared and respected his father, not people, no matter who they were (Matthew 22:16; Luke 12:4-7).

Real Greatness

As Martin Luther said, Jesus “*conducted himself so humbly and associated with sinful men and women, and as a consequence was not held in great esteem,*” to such a degree that “*the devil overlooked him and did not recognize him. For the devil is farsighted; he looks for what is big and high and attaches himself to that; he does not look at that which is low down and beneath himself.*”

Jesus was so secure in his father’s love for him, that he did not love his life but rather hated it in order to keep it for eternity (John 12:23-25). He didn’t care about preserving his life, ministry or reputation. He never used his power to benefit himself. His life was a living sacrifice to his father, conformed to the ways of heaven, not earth (Romans 12:1-2).

When his disciples informed him that someone, who was not in their group with them, was casting out demons in his name, he was not at all concerned (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49-50). His ministry was a calling, not a career; he was a servant, not a card-carrying clergyman. He had nothing to protect, nothing to defend. *He* was not his ministry. He wasn’t in competition with anyone at any time because he didn’t have anything to lose that anyone could take from him. He wasn’t insecure about having an outsider minister in his name without being ordained, approved or commissioned by him. He wasn’t concerned about protecting his “*name brand*” because he never had a “*brand*” in the first place; nor was he worried about possibly being misrepresented by a complete stranger. So his answer to his disciple’s dilemma was simple: *Leave them alone.*

And then, to take his selfless leadership to another level, he worked himself out of the job by equipping and releasing his disciples, the seventy, and so many others into Kingdom service (Matthew 10; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1, 17-20). He even shared the keys of the kingdom of heaven with Peter and never took them back when he displayed satanic behavior (Matthew 16:19). He didn’t lose heart when his disciples exhibited stupidity, immaturity, and betrayal but rather empowered their fledgling lives and had the strength of character to see them through to the end because his trust was not in them.

Jesus didn’t care about himself, his name, or his popularity; this is why he never carried a title, sought a position, or required preeminence. He never wore fancy garb or rode in regal carriages; rather, he dressed in common clothes and chose to ride donkeys over stallions. He appeared weak by human standards so that everyone could choose freely for themselves what to do with him.

In many ways, he was like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. His idea of greatness was childlikeness (Matthew 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48) and sacrifice (Matthew 19:29). To him greatness was least-ness, not first-ness; it was service, not hierarchy (Matthew 19:30; 20:20-28; Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45; Luke 19:30; 20:20-28; 22:24-27; John 13:1-17). As he saw it, the best seat is reserved for those who take the lowest place (Luke 7:7-11).

And yet he said many things about himself that seemed arrogant and elitist to those who were adolescent, insecure, and weak in faith (See John 4:32, 34; 5:19-47; 7:37-38; 8:21-29, 38-59). Those who know who they are live who they are and are often perceived as being arrogant, but

true humility is agreement with Truth. When Moses wrote about himself in Numbers 12:3 as the meekest man on the face of the earth, he wasn't lying or being conceited; he was simply agreeing with the Truth. When Jesus said things like "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the father*" or "*I and the father are one*" or "*My judgment is right*" or "*The Scriptures...testify about me,*" he was telling the Truth, even though most condemned him as a mad, demon-possessed liar. Jesus knew who he was and who he wasn't. He saw himself as his father saw him (John 5:31-32). Therefore, his kingdom identity was more real to him than his earthly counterpart.

Jesus knew he was the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the King of all kings, the "I AM," and so much more (Luke 22:66-23:3; John 9:35-37). He knew he was greater than Jonah and Solomon (Matthew 12:40-42; Luke 11:31-32). And yet he had the strength of character to stand, side by side, on level ground with the broken, sick, and tormented, restoring them to wholeness through the power of who he was in his father and their Kingdom (Luke 6:17-19). Jesus didn't have to be with "*somebodies,*" "*big-wigs*" or "*movers-n-shakers,*" to feel good about himself. He didn't find his worth from being with "*bishops,*" "*pastors,*" "*popes,*" "*apostles,*" or even "*super-apostles.*" His reputation was one of a glutton and drunkard, a friend of "*nobodies,*" tax collectors, and sinners, and yet he was the "*the Bread of Life,*" "*the Light of the world,*" "*the Door of the sheep,*" "*the Good Shepherd,*" "*the Resurrection and the Life,*" "*the Way, the Truth and the Life,*" and "*the True Vine*" (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

Unafraid To Be Me

There is nothing certain or secure in this world. Everything is temporal. And yet we often depend on things that are passing as if they will last forever. Why do we do this? Are we blind? Every human being, every natural system, every worldly ideal and philosophy will fail us sooner or later. And when it all begins to implode, how will we cope? How will we overcome in the midst of hell on earth? Will we determine the times, or will the times determine us? Will we lead or be led?

I was 16 when my parents divorced. I remember it as if it was yesterday. Seeing them split up after being so close to them for so long; after enjoying their friendship and the warm sunrays of their union together as "one flesh" with the Lord at the center of our family; after depending on the security of their love and shelter and peace, it all came crashing down. What I once trusted in to keep me safe and sound was gone forever.

As I think of all the relationships I've had in my life, all the betrayals, broken promises, and cold shoulders, I can't help but think that I would have made better decisions if I had known my true self and lived out of "him" instead of "the other guy." Every relationship drew on different parts of my heart and influenced me to be a little different with each person, but what if I had just been me the whole way through? Why did I cater to their whims? Why did I change for them?

There has never been a time in history when being anyone other than who we were born to be was ever good for anyone. For me, after enduring one identity crisis after another and failing everyone's expectations in one way or another, I am beginning to wake up to the one I've always been afraid to be. And now I am beginning to let the hell of uncertainty around me reduce me to

the place where I see myself as he sees me. There is something about the pressures and tumult of life that are teaching me how to rest more and more in the peace that comes with being me, in him. He designed and built me to endure everything around me, and either I can let it beat me or I can let it bring out the best in me, leveling all my insecurities. He made me strong by making me like him and I am the only one who can kill his creation. And the same goes for you.

Most of us do not know who we are. We are like orphans and beggars without roots, without a home or family even though we may have a physical home and natural family. We live like God is not our father; we live below our privileges as his children, wandering and squandering, blindly going about our days confused, empty, lonely, and discouraged. Sound familiar? Be honest!

Why do we judge ourselves and others by the style of our clothes or the size and look of our cars and houses? Why do we see ourselves and others in light of what we do rather than who we are? Why do we spend so much time busily consumed with things to do and people to see, running to and fro without a definite aim, with little to show for our toil? Are we not trying to compensate for something? Are we not trying to fill a void in our hearts?

We are human beings, not human doings. And yet we constantly judge each other by our gifts, our resumes, our ministries, our professions, our accomplishments and our qualifications. We are not what we have or what we do. Only “*paupers*” and “*beggars*” define themselves by their possessions or performance. We all play this same silly game day after day and no one ever really wins. Our only hope, the only way we can win, is to not play at all. It’s all meaningless and only those who let their Father remind them of who they really are will live as they were designed to live. So let me ask you: How much of your activity and behavior is the result of your life in him? Do you live out of his life in you, or do you live out of yourself? Do you even know the difference?

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve thought I was “nobody” simply because I was homeschooled or because I’ve always been a non-conformist or because I’m a “home body” who loves to read instead of getting dirty outside with everyone else or because I never went to college or because I’ve never felt like I “fit in.” It’s hard to think you’re “somebody” when the pull of the crowd is so strong, trying to convince you that they are right and you are wrong. It’s hard to impress people when meeting their standards is the only way they will ever really like you. But the truth is that there is nothing in this world that can ever really make me “somebody.” If one day I feel I should get a degree in something, so be it, but that has nothing to do with who I am, and I should never find my identity in that or anything of a sort. The question is: Where does my trust lay? Do I really believe that my gift – who I am in him – will make room for me, or do I think I need to play by the rules of this world, and everyone in it, to excel? When people look down on me because I graduated from homeschool or because I don’t go along to get along or because I’ve never taken one college course, should I care? Should I listen? Who made them a credible judge of who I was born to be? Who defines what’s credible? What if we trusted Christ enough to follow his lead, despite the popular pull of “the professionals”? Is he not able to carry us?

Of course, I'm still learning to trust him this way. Though I want to follow him every day, there are times when I live as if he doesn't exist, as if I can take care of myself without his help. And while this may work for a time and even seem right on the surface, it never really ends well. But when I look at Jesus and how he lived, I see what enabled him to live the kind of life I've always been able to live, that's always been in him, in me. He lived free and full simply because he knew, firsthand, the length, breadth, height, and depth of our Father's love for him.

The times I've given into small thinking, which has always led to small living where I've lived below my privilege, are when I forgot who I am. As I once heard someone say, "*Pauperhood is relegated to the children of a lesser god.*" To the degree that we see our Father as He really is, we will see ourselves as we really are and live the kind of life he's always meant for us. Then, we will no longer strive to earn his approval (or anyone else's) but will live, safe and secure, in the delight he has always had for us.

Those who know who they are live simply, purely, and effortlessly out of who they are, despite their surroundings or circumstances. They know that the perfect will of God is hidden in every moment, at every turn, no matter what they are doing, waiting for them to enjoy life every day from his perspective. They are not waiting for tomorrow or next year to be released from what they are doing now, so they can finally be used by God or finally be in his will. Rather, they are enjoying him every day as they partner with him in every area of life – in the home, on the job, at church, in the car and everywhere else – because everything is sacred to the Lord. To them, there is no such thing as "*secular*" and "*sacred*," "*unspiritual*" and "*spiritual*," because everything is holy to the Lord, and everything can become worship to God (i.e. washing the dishes, going to work, changing diapers, mowing the lawn, mentoring someone over coffee, cleaning the house, washing the clothes, etc.). For this brand of believer, everything they do every day is an opportunity to let God live and work through them, expressing his love in everything, reproducing the environment around them that they have cultivated within them.

As long as we live below our birthright as children of God, we will continue to misrepresent him to the world around us. Those who don't know who they are cannot be who God made them to be. Perception is reality. Clearly, the enemy has been successful in committing identity theft, killing us in so many ways without actually killing us, leaving us, for the most part, with a poverty-paradigm and slave-mentality which has led to pitiable living and behavior.

Sin is the result of living out of a mis-taken identity – an identity that is mis-taken – being who we were never created to be. But those who know who they are, in Christ, live very different lives. A true Christian is a "*little Christ*." When Jesus said, "*I am the Light of the world*," and then said, "*You are the Light of the world*," he was affirming us as those who are like him. Think about it: Is our "*Light*" from a different source than his? Is our "*Light*" less of a "*Light*" than his, or is it the same "*Light*" from the same source? When John wrote, "*As he is, so are we in this world*," was he telling the Truth, or was he lying? Are we rotten, ragged sinners saved by grace, who are waiting for death or the "*rapture*" to take us to heaven? Or are we righteous, reigning saints who are sons and daughters of God Almighty bringing heaven, within us, into the earth, living his life every day? Are we just "*Christian soldiers*" of the faith, or are we heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus taught us to pray, “*Our father*” rather than “*My father*”? Jesus didn’t see himself as an only child but as the firstborn of many offspring (Acts 17:28; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15). Of course, when we say we are children of God, it is said so casually that it no longer has any real power or meaning. But what if we knew God as our Parent as much as our children know we are their parents? What if we related to him the way they relate to us? What if we felt as comfortable around him as they feel around us? What if we were as secure in his care for us as they are in ours? Our kids know that everything is “ours” – our food, our home, our cars, our everything - because we are a family. So they have nothing to fear; they can face anything knowing we are with them and for them and will never forsake them. They can be secure in knowing that there is nothing they can be, say, or do that will ever make us love them more or less. And yet Jesus said our love for our children – our flesh and blood – is wicked compared to our Papa’s love for us. And we cannot pray enough, fast enough, worship enough, read the Bible enough, go to church enough or do anything enough to please him more than he already is. His love for us has nothing to do with our behavior. He loves “us” and even likes us...a lot!

Paul said, “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 2:5). What if we thought the way Jesus thought? Is it possible? If not, then why did Paul say this? Is Jesus our pattern or not? If he is then would we not live a richer, more wonderful life in him by allowing him to flush out of our minds every thought, feeling, and desire that disagrees with his thoughts, feelings, and desires? Consider this: *The word meditation is related to the word medicine. Therefore, when we meditate on the life of Christ, we actually become more “healthy,” through and through, in our spirit, soul, and body. This is what it means to repent, to re-think, or “change the way we think.”* Since we are who we think we are (Proverbs 23:7a), we cannot, as Bill Johnson says, afford to have any thoughts in our heads that are unlike his thoughts about us; otherwise, we’ll never enjoy the kind of life he intended for us.

However, our love relationship with him is the foundation of our identity and is only possible for us as we abide in him who is love. He is Truth, and only he can make us free to be our true selves as we live in relationship with him. But this requires that we simply lean on him, or, as Jesus said, “abide in him” so that he can take over the responsibility of making us new from the inside.

When I started waking up to my true self – the person God created me to be all the time – I started losing the need to prove myself to everyone, to my parents, my in-laws, my wife and children, to friends and church leaders, and especially myself. I realized I had nothing to prove, that I simply needed to relax and be me. And now, every day, I’m learning, more and more, that it’s useless to try and play the “performance-based approval” game; most people will only like me as long as I jump through all their hoops and keep jumping. So what’s the use? The more I see myself the way Papa sees me, the bolder and freer I become. As my heart is flooded with the reality of who I am in his eyes, all the insecurities and fears I’ve struggled with all my life, (especially the fear of rejection) fall off like dead limbs on a tree.

So don’t live another day in limbo like everyone else. Stop running from your destiny. Of course, this won’t be easy, but it will be worth it. Be ready for opposition because almost everyone will fight against your choice, and they will not stop until they’ve won or you’ve endured past all

their attempts at making you like them, bringing you down to their level. And don't be surprised if you lose friends, get kicked out of your church (or even many churches) or are snubbed by your whole family. You will be misunderstood, and people always fear what they don't understand. To the degree that you are free and secure within yourself, you will be shirked, and no matter what you do, they will never embrace you until you are like them or they are free like you.

There were times when I tried to fit in with my peers or everyone else by dressing like them or listening to their music or watching their movies or talking about what they liked or agreeing with their point of view or whatever but as I grew up and my heart was broken over and over again by those who rejected me the moment I didn't play their game, I began to realize that I wasn't born to please or be like anyone. I was born to follow him as he waters and tills the garden of my heart until I am who he made me to be. So stay the course, and when you are despised, forgive everyone who hurts you ("They know not what they do."). Whenever you face pain, praise, or persecution remember how Jesus behaved at such times and find solace in his life. Be content in being your Father's child. Relax and enjoy the person he made you to be. Those who really love you as you are will be few, but they will celebrate your life in him and be faithful to the end. Those who reject you may come back someday with a change of heart, and when that time comes, embrace them. Those who see your heart will learn from watching your life and will be inspired by the liberty you enjoy as you live "on earth, as it is in heaven."