

# C O N T E N T S



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CHAPTER ONE



*Preparing  
for an Encounter*  
WITH GOD

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*Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.*

*John 12:1*

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**AFTER A PERSON ENCOUNTERS GOD**, she should be changed. His very presence should produce a foundational transformation in the life of the one who has met with Him. It is not enough for us to talk about what we have experienced. We should be living it out flamboyantly. This is what He expects of us. He has said in His Word, “Come out from them and be separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). This is His call to us—to be changed as a result of our meetings with Him. But what does that change look like?

In John 12, Jesus pays a visit to His close friends sisters Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus. Jesus decided to share some time

with these beloved friends six days before the Passover Feast celebration. He might have wanted to visit them for several reasons. Realizing that His trials and subsequent conviction and crucifixion would soon take place, He may have wanted to spend time with His close friends before He died. Also, Bethany was a place of quiet rest for Jesus where He could escape from the demanding crowds for a while. At Passover, multitudes of people would be coming to see Him and vying for His attention. However, John 12:1 emphasizes what I imagine was His main reason for His visit to His friends. I am sure He wanted to inspect their lives, because this is “where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.” The last time He had visited them, Jesus had performed a

radical miracle in their midst. God Himself had shown up, and He had raised Lazarus from the dead! An encounter like that should have changed them forever.




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Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, as well as many other onlookers, had been privy to an astounding demonstration of Jesus’ power and love for them, and now He had come back to visit. What would He find when He saw them next? Had His miracle altered their everyday lives? I believe Jesus was watching carefully to see how their lives had been changed and whether they were different as a result of what had happened during His previous visit. I believe that the Lord is also watching us to see if we are any different after we have an encounter with Him. I wonder if He is watching you right now to see whether this will be

just another book that you read and you go away the same or if this time you will be forever changed.

Steven Curtis Chapman is one of my favorite Christian recording

artists. Not only is his musical talent incredible, but his lifestyle is also consistent with his message. I appreciate many of his songs, but my favorite is a song about the radical differences that should characterize a Christian's life. It is called "The Change." The song talks about how transformation is a choice. It's a lifestyle that boldly broadcasts to the world, "I am changed." Who cares about all the Christian paraphernalia we own and wear if we don't have the lifestyle to back it up? Why wear Christian t-shirts if our hearts underneath are not sold out for Christ? What difference does a Christian bumper sticker make if the person driving is as angry and bitter as everyone else on the road? What good is our Christianity if we are not different while here on earth? There should be some tangible, genuine evidence of a transformation. And when you and I encounter Jesus and recognize His hand moving in our lives, we should experience this radical change!

### *Our Primary Calling*

Our life's calling is to be different, to be changed. When you and I encounter His hand moving in our lives, there should be some physical evidence of His manifest presence. God's presence always brings about a transformation.

One of the most familiar pictures of the miracle of transformation in nature is a caterpillar. And if a caterpillar does have a life calling, what do you think it is? Well, it's certainly not to remain a caterpillar! The caterpillar's ultimate reason for living is to eventually become a butterfly. In preparing to write this book, I researched the process of metamorphosis—how a caterpillar changes or is metamorphosed into a beautiful butterfly. It's fascinating to learn how the caterpillar spends its life feeding; the more it consumes, the larger it grows. Each time it molts, or sheds its skin, it grows even larger until it is mature enough to begin to spin silk into a cocoon. A caterpillar may do many things in its lifetime—eating, molting, and learning to spin silk. However, all of that

activity is for one central purpose: to prepare to spread its wings one day and fly.

The Bible teaches that our primary calling in life is fellowship with God. “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (1 Corinthians 1:9). You were created for




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the express purpose of living a life that is pleasing to and brings glory to God. Therefore, nothing you do that is not in line with that mission will bring you satisfaction, fulfillment, or freedom in this life. Even Jesus Himself knew this, and while He was here on earth, He neglected to do certain “good” things if they were not in direct keeping with His Father’s specific instructions. We may play a number of different roles throughout the day—from caring for elderly parents, to balancing our children’s after-school schedules, to meeting our spouse’s needs and supervising a staff at work. However, those are all secondary call-

ings. Our primary calling in life is a love relationship with Jesus. God is calling you to focus on your primary calling. Encountering Him. Experiencing His presence in your life. Knowing Him. Falling more and more in love with Him. And when we do this, we can’t help but be changed.

### *Preparing Our Hearts*

We don’t have to invite God to encounter us; He is at work in our lives all the time. Showing His power. Showering us with grace. Sharing His love. The question is whether or not we’ll open our eyes and recognize our encounters with Him. Many of us float through life and encounter God at different places, yet we are completely unaware of the miracle of His presence. It is only those who open their eyes and recognize the

encounter with God who truly benefit from these everyday occurrences and know what it's like to be changed.

What is their secret, the key to a transformed life? How do some bold believers pursue Christ with such passion that they receive the fullness of all that God is offering them in each encounter? I have discovered that it starts with preparation. People who encounter the Lord are those who take time to prepare their hearts to recognize and benefit from an encounter with God. We must cultivate our contact with Him on a daily basis in order to recognize His hand in an encounter. If we really want to change, we must seek God first, turn our attention to Him, and show Him we are serious about our relationship with Him. Mary and Martha had prepared themselves to encounter the Master. They were ready to receive from Him and experience true transformation.

*Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."*

*When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.*

*John 11:1-6*

Lazarus had become sick, and Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus of their brother's illness. When their brother got sick, they went straight to Jesus with their situation. A heart that has learned to recognize

and respond to an encounter with God has learned to seek Him first.

Notice the significance of the fact that Mary and Martha did not exhaust myriad other options before they finally decided to call on Him. He was their first and only option for help. When placed in a situation of fear and helplessness, their default position was that of calling out to God. They knew He was the only One who could truly answer them, so they didn't waste time looking for alternatives. Why would they waste time telling their problems to people who, at best, would be sympathetic to their circumstances but unable to do anything about them? They decided time was of the essence; they went straight to the only true Source of help: Jesus.

What is your Lazarus today? What situation in your life seems sick even unto death? Is it your marriage that is hanging on by a thread? Or maybe your children or other family members are spiritually sick and in need of a touch from Jesus? Whatever your situation may be, let me ask you, "Who is your source of help?"



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Often when we are in the midst of hard circumstances, we exhaust every option imaginable before we go to the One who not only hears and sympathizes with our plea but can also do something about it. Mary and Martha went to Jesus with their problem because they expected Him to come through for them. An expectant heart is one that calls out to the Lord first in times of need. It shows complete reliance on God. Expectancy is at the beginning of an encounter with God. I am convinced that the reason most of us don't go to God first with our problems is that we really

don't expect Him to come through for us. We don't fully believe that He will show up and act on our behalf.

When situations arise in our lives that leave us fearful and bewildered, we often find that instead of going to the Lord we revert to some natural tendency or a specific habit to soothe us. A businessman might become introspective and unconsciously isolate himself from his family, or a woman in turmoil may immediately call a friend to share her thoughts. Often the sound of thunder during a rainstorm will make spouses huddle together in bed or a child run to his parents' bed in the middle of the night. In situations that stir our fears, each of us reverts to different habitual reactions. This is what Satan wants. He wants us to fill our place of need with every conceivable comfort except the Lord. In these comfortable places, we find some sense of security.

Unfortunately, we don't even think twice before we head to our default positions. Before we are aware of what we are doing, we have picked up the phone, snuggled next to our spouse in bed, or eaten that whole carton of ice cream! We need to learn to seek Jesus first. This must become our default position. I have decided that when I have a need in my life, I don't want to waste time. I want to see some results! That means I need to go to Jesus—better now than later, for time is too short.

### *Making Time*

Not only must we seek Jesus, but we must also be deliberate in our approach. I am often amazed at how rushed and hurried the congregation seems when they come into Sunday morning service. I have done it myself. We come to church so tired from our week at work and worn thin from struggling with our families that morning. With sweat on our brows, it seems all we can do is collapse in the pew and await the sermon. We dread any part of the service that requires our participation because we just want to sit and soak. We have not taken the time to quiet our hearts or spirits. We are not prepared for the worship of a great Lord. We are just glad to be able to sit down. How dare we rush in to

worship the King of kings and Lord of lords in this manner! He deserves better than that, doesn't He?

I recall my mother asking me on several occasions when I came to worship half-prepared, "Priscilla, would that be your attitude if you were going to visit the president of the United States? If that is not how you would treat the president, then that is certainly not how you should treat the Lord." This principle applies not only at church but in our private worship as well. Is your quiet time something you fit in at the tail end of the day, if you are not too sleepy? Is it something you do in your car on your way to work, one eye on the road while the other is on a verse or two for the day? Or maybe you justify your lack of personal study by listening to your favorite radio pastors throughout your work-day. Their ministry is pertinent and extremely beneficial to the body of Christ, but Jesus wants personal time alone with you. I enjoy writing books and speaking, but I would never want this book or any other to take the place of your own personal study. You might incorporate reading materials into your special time with Him, but it should never replace your firsthand experience in the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit's job is to reveal very specific things to you through the Word that will "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Personal Bible study gives the Spirit a chance to work God's truth inside you. Do not allow the ministry of others to serve as your crutch. It's time for you to stop depending on "hand-me-down truth"—listening to and depending on what He has revealed to someone else. You have a spiritual right to receive firsthand revelation straight from the Lord. In order to make this happen, you and I have to prepare. You are going to have to schedule time with the Lord. Time to be still and quiet and clear your thoughts from the day. Time to make your way slowly and deliberately into the presence of the Lord, affording Him your full attention.

About four mornings a week, I arise at 5:30 A.M. to meet some friends for a morning run. I get up out of my warm, comfortable bed and brace myself for the cold, uninviting winds outside. I deliberately and

cautiously set my alarm clock so that I wake up on time to exercise my body before the sun even rises. I do all of this work because I like the benefits of exercise. I like these benefits enough to make sure that exercise is a part of my day. In fact, it is so important to my friends and me that we don't schedule it at the end of the day; rather, we make it the first item on our list of things to do. We know that if we wait for the afternoon, we may be too tired or consumed with other things to remain committed.




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You and I always make time for what is important to us, and we let other things slide. If you make time to spend with your significant other, make time for a meeting with your boss, make time to read your favorite novel or read to your kids before bed, then you have time to spend with Jesus. You just have to decide what is more important.

### *Turning Our Eyes upon Jesus*

If we are really serious about our relationship with Jesus and His work in our lives, we must give Him our full attention, as Mary and Martha did. This lifts the veil from our eyes so that we can behold the encounters that we have with Him every day. Hundreds of years before Jesus even walked the earth, King Jehoshaphat had the right idea. When he was king over Israel, he found himself in a precarious position that caused him great anxiety. He was surrounded on all sides by an army that wanted to destroy the entire Jewish nation. As militarily strong as Israel had been in the past, he was still conscious of his inability to fight this war alone. He knew that unless Israel received some supernatural help, it was all over.

When Jehoshaphat heard the news of the impending danger, he did not withdraw from the masses, call a friend, or find refuge by snuggling up to his spouse for comfort. His default position was on his knees. “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 20:3). Just as Mary and Martha did centuries later, his natural tendency was to turn his attention to God. Here was the greatest man in Israel, the king, with anything and everything at his disposal, yet the Lord was the first and only thing that captured his attention in a time of fear. He sought the Lord because he knew God was the only one who could rectify his situation. He had incorporated his communication with God into the fabric of his life so that it was immediately on his mind when he became afraid. Years of complete reliance on God had formed this habit. It wasn’t a spur-of-the-moment decision. He had formed the habit of turning his attention to God early, so it was a natural and normal tendency for him during a crisis.

What a lesson we can learn from this man who chose God over all else! We should always go to the Lord in prayer to show our complete reliance on Him. We should go to Him first, not after all of our other resources have been tried and have failed. We must be desperate for God and seek Him earnestly. King Jehoshaphat and Mary and Martha resorted to a default position on their knees, calling out to the Master for help.

### *Desperate for God*

Jehoshaphat was so serious about his desire to see the Lord supernaturally come through for him and the people of Israel that he even went a step further. Second Chronicles 20:3–4 says, “He proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD.”

Fear draws us to the point of total desperation. We have to be so desperate for the Lord to work in our lives that we not only turn our attention toward Him, but we also do whatever is necessary to make

sure that He turns His attention toward us! To fast is to deny the needs of the flesh for a greater need of the spirit. It shows the Lord that you are serious about your request for His help and that you are willing to

give up something you desire to ensure God's hand in your situation. It's time for us to be hungry for God. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled (Matthew 5:6).




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Traditionally, Christians give up food, but you can also give up television, movies, certain books, or even chocolate for a season.

The point is to give up something that you long for to show the Lord that you do not take His involvement in your situation for granted.

The Lord declares that when you and I proclaim a fast in our lives, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I” (Isaiah 58:8–9). The Lord takes it seriously when His children fast. If you want to encounter God like never before, then show the Lord that He is indeed more important than another priority in your life.

My husband, Jerry, recently made a decision that humbled me. He said he felt the Lord calling him to fast about a few things, such as our family, clear direction in the future, and upcoming career decisions. Most important, he wanted the Lord to galvanize a healthy fear and love for Him in his life. I told my husband that he should do it, thinking he meant a normal fast of food for three days. However, what my husband told me next startled me. He said that he felt the Lord calling him to fast not only food but also to fast his “life.” He felt the Lord calling him to get away from his job, the comfort of his home, telephone,

television, computer, food, and me too! He sensed that God wanted him to go to an undisclosed location where there were no comforts, no distractions, and no food for three days just to spend some time alone with the Lord and to hear His voice.

I must admit that I tried to make sure he had really heard the Lord on this! I thought that surely twenty-four hours would be sufficient. Three days seemed a little excessive. For a people-oriented person like me, that seemed like an impossible task. No connection with the outside world for three whole days?! However, Jerry was steadfast in his decision, and for three days he spent time alone with the Lord.

Jerry wanted to capture the Lord's attention, and the depth of his desire to hear from Him meant taking extreme measures. He was desperate! It was tough, but he was willing to give up all of those things because of his greater desire to hear from God. I am still humbled by this man who so loves the Lord that he was willing to do whatever it took to capture His attention. Jerry didn't want to waste time talking to anyone about his problems; he just wanted to hear from his Master. And hear from Him he did.




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Upon my husband's arrival at the hotel where he chose to stay for those three days, he was surprised to hear a knock on the door. He was shocked since he hadn't told anyone where he would be. He opened the door to find that the hotel had sent up a complimentary basket of fruit. They left that tempting and succulent basket outside the room of a man on a three-day fast! It was apparent to my husband that the devil was doing his best to keep him from fasting and thus receiving the fullness of what the Lord had to offer him. Please be aware that Satan

also knows the power of prayer and fasting, and he will do anything to detour you from doing so. He doesn't want you to be prepared to encounter the presence of God in your life. Satan knows that if you ever see the Lord in His fullness you will be changed and useless for him.

When I am afraid in life's battles, I desire that my unconscious habit will be to call out to the Lord and to allow all else to fall by the wayside as I look expectantly to God for answers. Whenever we have Lazarus situations, we must be confident that the Lord will want to do something in our lives to demonstrate His power. We must live expectantly. Life becomes so exciting when we realize we are on the cusp of an experience with God.