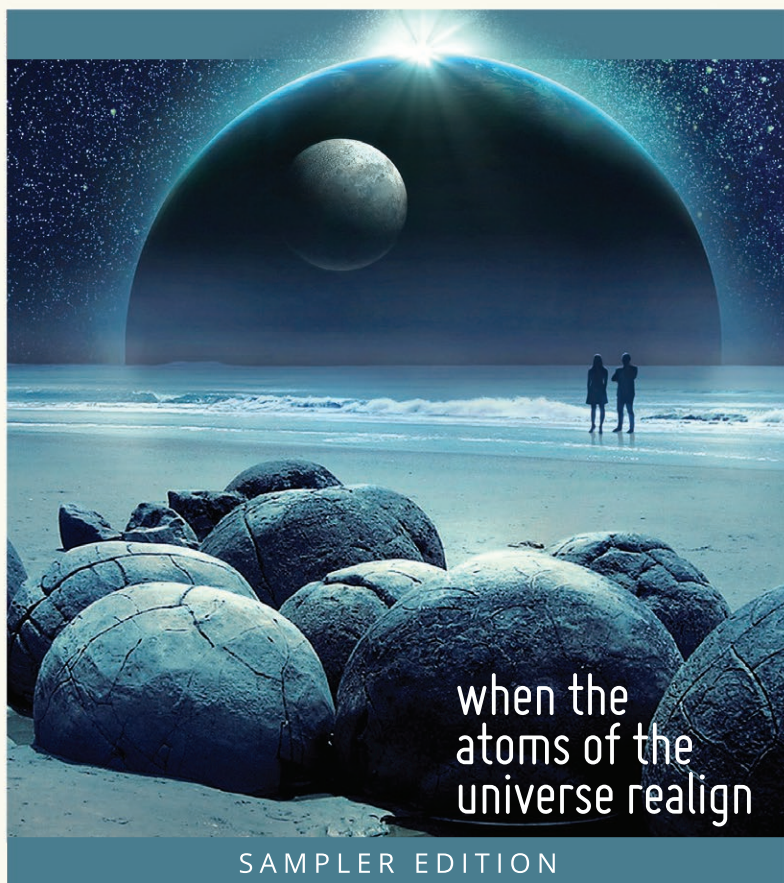


UNLOCKED

DAILY READINGS FOR TEENS



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universe realign

SAMPLER EDITION

UNLOCKED

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Unlocked—Daily Readings for Teens

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Help Us UNLOCK the Truth

Dear Reader,

You hold in your hands a sampler edition of UNLOCKED, a new devotional for teens created by Keys for Kids Ministries. We're preparing to launch the full devotional in 2019, and we need YOU to help us put the pieces together. How can you do that? By telling us what you think.

To do this, go to **www.keysforkids.org/teensurvey** and answer the questions. Your feedback is the key to making this devotional the best it can be.

Join us in our quest to help teens unlock the truth of God's Word.

In His grip,

Keys for Kids Ministries

Send us your thoughts on
this devotional. Go to:

www.keysforkids.org/teensurvey



Volleyball

READ: LUKE 5:1-11

I like to play volleyball. Being on the court fills me with joy. It's fun to be on a team, to work together and win the match. When things mesh, there's a regular rhythm to volleyball that feels so good.

Bump. Set. Hit.

I love to play volleyball. I try to play several times a week. My team is my squad. I'm an outside hitter, and I love to spike the ball. When I do, I feel strong. There's a driving rhythm to how I play that makes me feel powerful.

Bump. Set. Spike.

I live to play volleyball. I wish I could play every day, even twice: before school and after. Weekends too. My team is my family, even better than the one I live with. Each day I improve. I can block better, jump higher, and spike harder. And when I do, I often get a kill. I lead my team in kills. I'm their star. They rally around me. When I'm on the court, I'm alive. The exhilarating rhythm of playing volleyball lets me live life large.

Bump. Set. Kill.

I can't play volleyball anymore. I messed up my shoulder. I try to watch my team play, but it's hard to sit in the stands when I long to be on the court. I just want to cry. It hurts so bad. My former teammates mostly ignore me. Yeah, they still know who I am, but they don't talk to me so much anymore. No more fist bumps when I walk down the hall. I'm no longer a star. My bum shoulder took volleyball from me. I built my life on playing, and now it's gone. What's left? What can I do? What's my reason for living?

Bump. Set...Jesus. 🙏

- What things in life can get in the way of following Jesus?
- Do you think God ever takes something away from us to get our attention?
- Does focusing on Jesus mean we can't enjoy other things?
- How can we follow Jesus and still pursue what we're passionate about?
- Why is Jesus worth more than anything else?

*When they came to land with their boats, they left everything and followed Jesus. **Luke 5:11 (NLV)***



Liked

READ: ROMANS 8:38-39; HEBREWS 4:14-16

We've all done it. We've posted that picture or tweeted that thought...and then waited for the likes to roll in. We go back and check. And check. And check again. And when our posts don't get the likes we expected, our thoughts spiral from *No one likes my post* to *No one likes ME*. We see a lack of thumbs-up as a personal snub. And where we go from there can be dangerous.

Satan uses doubt to influence our hearts and minds. He can use a simple social media post as a way to create doubt, fear, and lies about who we really are. What starts as a tiny fear about no one liking a post can turn into an attack on who we are in Christ. Let's face it, not everyone is going to like us. It's a hard reality to face sometimes. But not everyone liked Jesus either, and He was perfect!

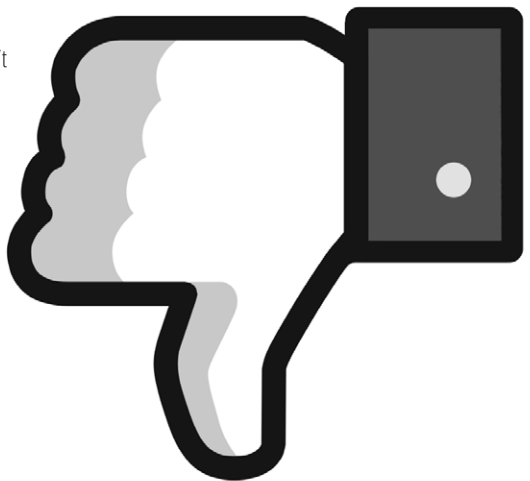
Jesus was abandoned by His friends and rejected by some of His own family members. He knows what it's like to feel rejected, ignored, and disliked, because He has walked this road too. And not only does He know the feeling, but He loves us with His incredible love right through our doubts and fears.

So friends, look to Jesus. Look to Him for what is true, and don't believe the lies being fed to you. You are loved. You matter. You have been saved by Jesus, and He has a purpose for you to fulfill in His eternal kingdom. He is a true friend, one who understands you and loves you no matter what. And He wants to walk the road with you. †

- Have you experienced negative feelings as a result of something that happened (or didn't happen) on social media?
- What lies might the Enemy try to feed you through these feelings?
- How can you remember that Jesus knows how you feel and is walking beside you when you experience negative feelings?

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)



Plans Turned into Chaos

READ: PROVERBS 16:1-3, 33; 19:21

The summer home was dark when they entered. “We’re the first ones here,” Matt said. Tim smiled. “Let’s order pizza.”

Matt flipped on the lights—and saw something small and brown dart across the carpet and out of sight. “Tim! There’s a chipmunk in the house!”

“We gotta get rid of it,” Tim said. “That thing will make a real mess in here.”

They searched the room, checking under furniture, but found nothing. “There’s one place we haven’t checked,” Matt whispered, pointing to the cabinet against the wall.

They slowly closed in. Tim peeked behind the cabinet. “I see him.”

Just then, the chipmunk scurried out and ran between them. Tim hollered and jumped out of the way.

The room soon turned into a war zone, with them crawling on the floor, lifting furniture, jumping onto the couch, and throwing pillows at the chipmunk as it darted around.

“Okay. Let’s get organized,” Tim said. “We need a plan. And we need to pray.”

Minutes later, they were ready. They moved the couch, chairs, and anything else to block the chipmunk’s routes of escape. Then they started hunting him again.

An hour later, the room looked like a tornado had gone through it, but *victory*. The chipmunk was caught and taken outside.

“That was”—Tim fanned his sweaty T-shirt—“chaotic.”

“Not exactly the night we’d planned.” Matt paused to catch his breath. “But quite the adventure, right?”

“It sure was.” Tim laughed. “God knew about this, didn’t He?”

Matt nodded. “Proverbs says we make plans, but God has the final word.”

“Yeah,” Tim said. “That’s why we need to trust Him and ask Him for wisdom. He knows what’s best for us.” He smiled. “Our plans sure changed, but I think I like His plans better. We’ll be talking about this night for a long time!”

“Just one question, Tim. Did the chipmunk scare you when you jumped?”

“Nope,” said Tim. “Not at all.” 🗨️

- Have you had plans change unexpectedly? Were you able to see God working through those unexpected changes?
- Why should we bring our plans to God—*before* we do them? (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- Can God give us deep peace, even though everything around us keeps changing and we’re surrounded by total chaos? (Philippians 4:6-7)
- If we truly believe that God is in control of everything in our lives, how should that encourage us? (Psalm 94:19)

*A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. **Proverbs 16:9***

Garden Heart

READ: GENESIS 1:26-31; JOHN 15:1-5; GALATIANS 2:20

*A warm wind blows through the trees,
And stirs the face of the water.
Wandering about the garden free—
Echoes of songs and laughter.*

*A soul, a smile,
A song to be sung;
The start of a fire,
His work had begun.*

*He bent on His knees
And sat in the dirt;
Tugged on the weeds
And toiled in the earth.*

*All of this work
Because He had treasured.
Though His job was not finished,
In this place He found pleasure.*

*This work was perfection
And beauty precise.
All love, no rejection;
Tears formed in His eyes.*

*Its glory so bright—
He loved, so he bought;
Completed and worthy,
This garden, her heart. 🕯*



- Where does our value come from? What kind of value did God create us with? (Psalm 139:13-16; Genesis 1:27, 31)
- What does it mean to be a new creation in Jesus Christ? How is our newness both instantaneous and a process? (2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:6)
- If our hearts are gardens bought and tended by Jesus, what does that say about our sin? Is any weed too big for the Gardener to pull up?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17 (CSB)

What Does Jesus Want Me to Do with My Life?

READ: JOHN 6:40; PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

Have you ever asked that question? I know I did. There's so much pressure to know what you're going to do before you even leave home. And at the same time—both a blessing and a curse—there are so many options.

It's honestly anxiety-inducing. *What if I make the wrong choice? What if I choose something outside of God's will?*

Good news: If you know Jesus, you're already in God's will. It's not some nebulous, ethereal, fountain-of-youth thing. It's living each moment of your life in light of what Jesus has done to free you from sin. (I'm so thankful for friends, writers, and teachers who spoke this truth into me during my college years!)

It means devoting the little and big things in your life to serving Him. You find God's will by understanding who He is. And that can be found in His Word, the Bible. If something isn't sinful, you can do it in freedom—and to the glory of God. That's the point, actually.

So seek to honor God in all your choices—the big future ones and the little everyday ones. Study His Word, and talk to Him about everything. In other words, get to know Jesus. The more you know Him, the more you'll know His peace. Some days will have you feeling more anxious than others, but He'll be with you every step of the way. ♡

- If you know Jesus, how does knowing you're already in God's will change your perspective about the future?
- What are some big decisions you are facing right now? Small ones? How does your faith in Christ fit into those decisions?
- What are your favorite Scripture passages to read when you feel anxious about upcoming decisions?
- What people in your life can give you Christ-centered wisdom about hard decisions?

*For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. **John 6:40 (CSB)***



Freed

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:3-13

Logan pulled his truck into the church parking lot and spotted Jessica leaning against her blue Volkswagen Bug. He pinched the bridge of his nose. *Focus, man. She's different.*

Jessica had given him his first Bible and had cheered at his baptism. She made him believe he could go to college.

When his phone vibrated, Logan clenched his jaw. He knew what to expect when he read Kyle's name. He glanced at the photo, then shoved the cell in his pocket. "Jessica's different, but I'm not," he said, smacking his palm against the steering wheel. He imagined Jessica's face and the woman from Kyle's message as he stepped out of the cab and slammed the door. *Why can't I stop wanting to look, Lord?*

Jessica met him halfway and wrapped her arm around his bicep. "You okay, handsome?" "I'm just...tired." It wasn't a lie.

Seconds after they strolled inside, a group of girls whisked Jessica away. Kyle slapped Logan's shoulder. "Did you get my dose of daily encouragement?"

"I told you to stop. I'm trying to do right by Jessica."

"Good luck with that." Kyle walked off.

After the service, Pastor Stevens approached Logan. "My car's in the shop and the kids aren't feeling well. Can I get a lift home?"

"Sure," said Logan.

As he parked in front of Pastor Stevens' house, Logan confessed his battle with pornography. "I can't seem to stop," he said.

"I know how hard it is," said Pastor Stevens. "I've struggled with similar issues in the past. The only way I was finally able to break the cycle was by realizing that every human being bears God's image and that their bodies and souls are sacred. When Jesus helped me understand that the women in those pictures were people He died to save, I was able to break free. It wasn't easy, and I needed an accountability group to help me set healthy boundaries. But Christ gave me the strength to do it, and He'll do the same for you."

Logan agreed to weekly accountability, and Pastor Stevens led them in prayer before getting out of the car. As he drove away, Logan thanked the Lord that he could be freed from his addiction with help from God and His people. 🙏

- Why is it sometimes hard to confess and ask God and others for help when we're battling temptation or struggling with sin?
- How can having a supportive group of people who offer prayer and encouragement help us?
- Who would you want to include in an accountability group like this?

*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. **1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)***

All I Ever Did

READ: JOHN 4:1-30

There was something about his eyes, the way he looked at her. It was unsettling. She thought she knew all about men, understood how they thought. But this was different. “Go and call your husband,” he said.

She hesitated, eyes lowered. “I have no husband.”

He nodded. “True. You’ve had five—and the man you live with now isn’t one of them.”

Her body tensed defiantly. “Since you know so much, prophet, tell me this. Is God’s chosen place of worship here, among my people, or in Jerusalem, where the Jews worship?” Her eyes flashed up to meet his, ready for the judgment and rejection surely waiting. What she saw took her breath away. An intense passion in his eyes matched by words washing over her in love. He said, “The Father is seeking worshipers in spirit and truth.” She heard, “The Father is seeking *you*.”

Her battered heart leapt for joy. It didn’t matter—it never had! What she’d done, where she’d been—her fruitless search for God’s hiding place. He’d been there all along, pursuing her, waiting for her to see Him. Her water pot forgotten, she ran into the city. The words burst out, a testimony that wouldn’t be held back. “Come and see a Man who told me all I ever did!” He knew her past, and He still wanted to give her a future.

Jesus gave Himself to save us. There is no greater love, no greater offering to be made. He went to the cross so we could have life with Him. This love, freely given, cannot be earned. But it must be accepted. Jesus knows all you’ve ever done...*everything*...and He loves you and wants you anyway. He loves you just as you are. †

- Do you believe that Jesus loves you just as you are?
- Is there anything preventing you from accepting His love?

*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ? **John 4:29***



Father to the Fatherless

READ: PSALM 10:14; JOHN 1:12; ROMANS 8:15-23

What do marshmallows and missing dads have to do with each other? As it turns out, dads may be the missing link in a famous study on what marshmallows teach us about making wise decisions.

In this study, researchers asked a group of kindergartners if they wanted one marshmallow right then or two marshmallows a few minutes later. Some kids snatched one marshmallow right away, and others waited so they could have two.

The researchers followed their subjects over the next several years. Turns out, the kids who waited for two marshmallows generally made better life choices than those who ate one right away.

Do you know the main difference between the one-marshmallow kids and the two-marshmallow ones? *Almost all the children who ate their marshmallows right away—and later made poorer decisions in life—didn't have a dad at home.*

If you don't have a dad at home, you may be thinking, "I make wise decisions all the time, thank you very much." I know. I get it. That study irritates me too, because I grew up without a dad, and I'd like to think of myself as wise. But the scary truth is, as an adult, I would make wiser choices if I'd had a dad at home when I was a kid.

In the novel *David Copperfield*, one of the characters makes a decision that costs him and another man their lives. When he makes that choice, he says, "It would have been well for me (and for more than me) if I had had a steadfast and judicious father!"

It would have been well for me too if I'd grown up with a "steadfast and judicious father." But I didn't.

Neither did two famous characters in the Bible—Esther and Joash. A cousin raised Esther, and an aunt raised Joash. But God chose Esther to become queen of a heathen nation and save her people from slaughter. God raised Joash to power as the youngest king of Israel ever, and he threw off the yoke of a tyrant. Esther and Joash may have lacked a father's guidance, but God entrusted them with situations that required extraordinary wisdom. You can read their stories in the book of Esther and in 2 Chronicles 22-24.

While having a father on earth is a tremendous blessing, having a heavenly Father is a better one. Through Jesus you can enjoy the guidance and blessing of a Father whose wisdom is available to all who ask...even to those who prefer their marshmallows now. 🕯

- Do you agree that having a dad in your life can help you make wiser choices than you might otherwise make? Why or why not?
- A man who was not Jesus' father raised Him, and Jesus frequently refers to God as His Father. Do you think Jesus understands what it means to be fatherless?

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. Psalm 68:5 (NIV)

Let Down

READ: 2 SAMUEL 12:9-10, 13; EPHESIANS 2:8-10; TITUS 2:11-14

At 9:15 on Friday night, Sophie received an explosion of texts from her church friends.

Do you know what's happening at the board meeting tonight?

I think it's about Pastor Jon.

This sounds bad.

Not Pastor Jon, Sophie thought. He was the world's greatest youth pastor. Her dad had been called to that emergency board meeting too. She hadn't thought much about it, but now she wondered.

When her dad arrived home, Sophie ran to meet him. "What's happening? Is Pastor Jon okay?"

She followed her dad into the kitchen, where he took two bottles of juice from the refrigerator. He handed one to her. "We need to talk, Sophie." He took a swallow of juice. "Some of the female students in Pastor Jon's college classes have made accusations that he acted inappropriately around them. I don't need to go into details, but he has admitted his wrongdoing."

"Dad." Sophie knew the tears were coming. "He's the best youth pastor ever. How could he do this?"

"We all have our old, sinful nature inside of us, Soph. When we let it have control, we do things we shouldn't do. Remember the story of David and Bathsheba? Look at all the people David let down. Not only did he ruin Bathsheba's marriage, but in the process he had her husband killed! Of course, David knew better, and Pastor Jon knew better too."

"Still..." Tears rolled down Sophie's cheeks.

"When someone we're close to lets us down, that's difficult. Pastor Jon taught you truth from God's Word and encouraged you to take a stand for Christ. But our faith can't be based on our youth pastor or anyone else. Our faith should be based solely on Christ. So don't let Pastor Jon's sin make you waver in your faith. Yes, he has disappointed all of us, and we grieve his sin. But our hope doesn't come from other Christians, because we're all sinners who make selfish decisions at times and let others down. Our hope comes from Jesus, who died to free us from sin once and for all. He'll never let us down." 🙏

- Has anyone in leadership let you down? Did that make your faith waver?
- Why do you think people make mistakes?
- What should our reaction be to someone's downfall?
- How can we let the new creation part of us—not our old sinful nature—have control? (Romans 6)
- How can we help friends who might also be feeling the effect of a leader's failure?

It is better to trust in the Lord than to trust in people. Psalm 118:8 (ERV)

Confession of Rage

READ: PSALM 51

*Have mercy on me, O God.
For I have sinned against You.*

*Will you rip up the rage
Within my heart of dirt,
And plant in its place love,
The nutrient of ruined earth?*

*Against You alone, against Your
image-bearers, I have injected venom,
Poisoning another's heart-soil
In casting seeds of seething words,
Reaping anything but Your truth.*

*Purge me of rage,
Clean me with forgiveness,
Clothe me in Your love.
Don't leave me an orphan,
Naked with sin festering in my blood.*

*For only when the poison,
a trail of infectious rage,
Is replaced by the cleansing
antidote of love
Can I proclaim Your truth,
Scattering seeds of Your
life-giving words. 🌱*

- Why is it important to confess our sins to God?
- Why do you think Jesus wants us to be honest with Him about our hurts and struggles?
- What sin or struggle are you wrestling with? Have you been honest with Jesus about your sins and shortcomings?

*My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. **1 John 2:1 (NLT)***



Dear Diary

READ: MATTHEW 5:13-16

May 14, 2018 Dear diary, my life seems like a waste of time. Surely there must be something more. Each day's the same. Boring. Repetition: Get up. Go to school. Trudge through the day. Head home. Do homework. Sleep. Repeat. The weekends are meaningless too, with their own dreary drudgery. Chores on Saturday; church on Sunday. And then trying to psych myself up for another meaningless week. Why? Is this all there is to life?

May 15, 2018 Dear diary, my life is empty. There's got to be more than getting good grades and trying to survive high school. I need answers.

May 16, 2018 Dear diary, when I focus on myself, I feel empty. I lack purpose. But what if I try to help others? Work to make their lives a little bit better? If I seek to give instead of get, will that give my life meaning?

May 17, 2018 Dear diary, I spent today looking for ways to help others. I found all kinds of ways to make a difference in their lives, and I feel better about myself. I'm tired, but I feel good.

May 18, 2018 Dear diary, so maybe my purpose in life is to help others. But why? So they can be a little bit happier in their own meaningless lives? That's not enough. I need more.

May 19, 2018 Dear diary, being self-absorbed left me empty, while focusing on others gave me something to shoot for, but it still wasn't enough. Maybe I need to focus on Jesus. I know He's the answer, but who have I told? I'm not good with words. I'm afraid I'll say the wrong thing. But maybe if I do everything with Him in mind, He'll use my actions—and maybe even my words—to point people to Him. That's something to try. That's a good reason to get up each morning.

May 20, 2018 Dear God, may my friends and the people I meet today see You through me. Use me to make a difference in Your world. In Jesus' name, amen. 🙏

- Does focusing on yourself make you feel empty?
- What can you do to help others?
- How might people see Jesus through your actions?
How can you point others to Him with your words?
- What does it mean to let our light shine?

*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. **Matthew 5:16 (NIV)***



What Do You Worship?

READ: EXODUS 32:1-8; PSALM 135:5-7, 15-18

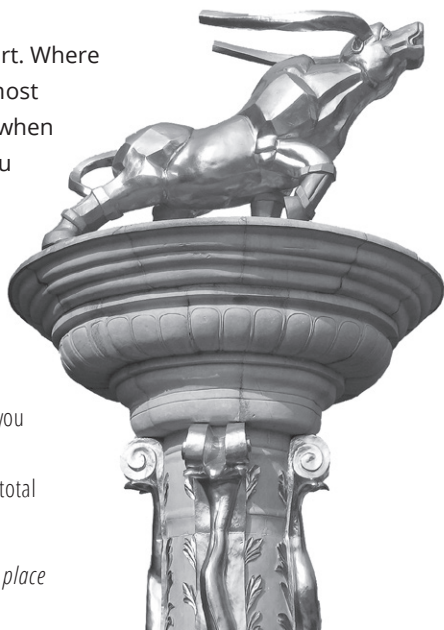
Over and over again, Scripture condemns the worship of idols. The Israelites, God's chosen people, struggled with idolatry. Even though they repeatedly witnessed God's power and saw Him work mightily on their behalf, they still turned to man-made images and worshiped them. They turned to statues and other false gods for protection, provision, or sometimes just a little extra "insurance" while they pretended to fully trust in God. It can sometimes seem silly to us as we read through the Bible. How could they put their trust in an object that has nothing to offer them? No personal relationship. No power. Nothing.

The truth is, God created us for worship. We have a yearning, a hunger, a deep desire within us to worship. And if we don't give our full worship to Him, we will find ourselves worshipping something else. The idols we bow down to are the things we cling to or value more than Jesus. They can set up shop in our hearts and distract us from our need for Him and the life He gives us. While we may think bowing before a golden calf or wood-carved statue seems silly, what might the Israelites say about how much time and affection we give our smartphones? Or the time and energy we spend trying to attain popularity, a prominent position on the team, or the starring role in a play? While it's not necessarily bad to spend time doing these things, the problem occurs when we give them our total devotion and turn to them first for our worth and comfort—when they become more important to us than our relationship with God.

So ask Him to show you the idols of your heart. Where is your attention and affection going? What is most important to you? Who or what do you turn to when life feels uncertain or hard? Jesus delights in you and wants to be first in your life. He is worthy of ALL your worship. 🙏

- Think about the questions in the last paragraph. Is there an idol in your life that you're turning to instead of God?
- What kind of trust are you putting in that idol? What are you hoping it will do for you?
- How can you turn away from that idol and give God your total trust and devotion?

*Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts. **1 John 5:21 (NLT)***



The Resurrection

READ: ROMANS 8:11; 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

In an instant, the atoms of the universe had been realigned. Particles that had separated centuries or millennia ago, drifting aimlessly through the cosmos, were reunited in one moment. Hearts beat again. Blood pumped. Eyes fluttered. Brains came alive with electrical activity.

Cemeteries, silent for years upon years, came alive with activity. Quiet fields where only birds and squirrels had lived now stood peopled. The desert sand was pockmarked by living people singing songs of joy. Far out in the deep oceans, hale bodies broke the surface, breathing for the first time in decades, centuries, millennia.

The faithful rejoiced, but those who believed in puny gods shuddered. Their trivial hopes in mechanistic systems fell to pieces at the sight of this power. This Power that knew no limits—that made the world and constantly, meticulously sustained every particle and followed each path with all-knowing eyes peering from the window of timelessness.

Each body, renewed in usefulness and health, looked like another body that had risen long ago in Palestine. That had been the first part of the great plan, and this was the second. As He descended to meet them, and the faithful rose to meet Him, the outsiders could see the resemblance. All of them were strong. All of them had two arms and two legs. All had two eyes and two ears, teeth and hair and nails, five fingers and toes.

Their faces were all the same. Not the same features or colors—those were all various, in the most extreme way. But they all wore the same expression of love, joy, peace, and good humor. There were no frowns. No internal conflict played across the sparkling eyes. They were content. They saw the one they had lived their lives for and would continue to do so forever. Their expressions mirrored His. ♣

- The God Christians worship is all-powerful. Would the resurrection be possible if this were not true?
- At the resurrection, believers will be made like the risen Christ (in his human nature). What kinds of changes in our bodies or personalities will this entail?
- Is it important that God raises the very same bodies that died?

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." **John 11:25 (NIV)***

