

Session 1 The Magnificence of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

My life goal is to be obsessed with Jesus Christ. I know that's the life goal of many of you in this room. As the IHOP–KC community, we want to have a ministry obsessed with the glory of the Man Christ Jesus. He's fully God and fully Man.

Paragraph A. Page one. Knowing Jesus as our magnificent obsession is the theme of this conference. The afternoon sessions we'll devote to this theme in a really specific way. For Jesus to be our magnificent obsession almost sounds like an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. An obsession is almost always destructive. There's one obsession that's liberating, that will bring us into our destiny. It will fill us with spiritual pleasure. It will make our spirit fascinated.

Paragraph B. The basic premise of this series I'll be giving in the afternoons—six sessions in the afternoons. The basis premise is this: there is no aspect in the grace of God that more powerfully transforms the emotions and satisfies the heart than when God reveals God to our spirit. I want to say that again. There is no aspect of the grace of God that more powerfully transforms us and satisfies us than when God reveals God to our spirit. That is, God the Holy Spirit revealing God the Son to our spirit. Oh, that our spirit would be exhilarated with this Man!

Christianity is much more than an escape from hell. It's much more than obeying a code of conduct. I often hear people talk about Christianity. They present it as a way to get out of hell. It's true, but Jesus is far more than fire insurance. He's more than a code of conduct. Christianity is more than a ministry assignment. Other people say, "If you follow Jesus, you'll have something relevant in your life." That's true, but it's more. It's more than receiving kingdom benefits. Christianity is actively pursuing a person. That's what the core of Christianity is. Not just escaping trouble, not just having a successful life; it's actively pursuing and encountering a Man who is fully God and fully Man. I want to give you a vision for the revelation of Jesus, the Magnificent One. Not just the Savior who forgives, though I love forgiveness. Not just the Healer that heals, though I love healing. Not just the One who provides, though I love economic provision; I love when the Lord supernaturally provides, but there's more. He is the Magnificent One.

Many believers don't know this facet of Him. They have no vision to encounter Him in this way. They want forgiveness, they want healing, they want direction, they want anointing for ministry. Those are good. I love those things. Beloved, I want to give you a vision tonight of the Son of God, the Son of Man, as the Magnificent One who will exhilarate your spirit in this age and forever in the age to come. I want to be lost in the splendor of this Man. I want to be lost in encountering the majesty and splendor of this Man.

The best-kept secret in the Church today, in my opinion, is the magnificence of Jesus. We don't want that to be a secret that's kept, but the most neglected glory of the kingdom is the magnificence of this Man, who He is to us. Yes, I love forgiveness, I love healing, I love provision. I love a ministry that makes an impact that changes others. Beloved, I'm not satisfied with any of those subjects, though I love them all. I want more. My spirit longs for more than power for ministry, though I want more power in ministry. I don't neglect those, but I want more.

IF WE COULD SEE WHAT PAUL SAW, WE COULD LIVE LIKE PAUL LIVED

I have good news: there is more. I don't just mean more power. There's more encounter. Paul understood this. He gave up everything. Why? Not just so he could have a better ministry. Look at what he said in his own words: "I . . . count all things loss" (Philippians 3:8). In other words, "I'll give up everything." Why? "For the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (ibid). Paul said, "I want to experience the magnificence, the excellence of this Man. I will remove everything that gets in the way that I could experience more of Him."

It was because of this verse, some years ago, that I began to pray a prayer: "Lord, if I could see what Paul saw, I could live like Paul lived. Let me see what he saw about Jesus and I know I could live dedicated like he did."

There's a direct correspondence to what we see in Jesus and how we respond in our dedication. Many believers are content to live with compromise in their spiritual life. When I look at those believers, I don't say, "Oh, how terrible." I look at those believers and say, "They see so little of Jesus; that's why compromise makes sense to them."

I have mercy. I understand. Without seeing more, there's no way I would give myself to Him. They don't have a problem with sin just in and of themselves. Of course they do, but there's a bigger issue: they have a problem with revelation. It's a lack of revelation. They don't even have an idea that this Man is this magnificent.

THE SPIRIT SEARCHES THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD'S HEART

Paul knew about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here's how he described the Holy Spirit: "For the Spirit searches the deep things of God's heart" (1 Cor. 2:10, paraphrased). That's an interesting concept: that the Holy Spirit searches or discerns the deep things of the heart of the Father and the Son.

Why? To give them to you. Beloved, the One who lives inside of you, the Holy Spirit, knows more about Jesus than you can imagine. He loves Christ Jesus and He knows Him so well and He wants to reveal Him to your spirit in a greater way.

In John 16, Jesus said essentially the same thing. He said, "The Holy Spirit will guide you. He will escort you into the truth about Me" (John 16:13, paraphrased). "He will glorify Me" (v. 14, NKJV).

Here's Jesus; He knows the Holy Spirit so well. He says, "Trust Me. He'll take the things that are Mine and reveal them to you. He loves it. I know Him so well and He knows Me so well."

Beloved, we need this guide, this escort. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to lead us, to take us hand-in-hand into the deep things of the heart of God. He will only reveal as much of God as you're hungry for. Are you hungry for more? For real? To where you would make time for it? Because the Spirit gives us more of Jesus based on hunger—not on gifting. Someone may have a far greater intellect than you, but you have a far greater capacity to encounter God if you're hungry for God. He won't force feed you. Jesus is too precious for Him to force feed you, even as the Body of Christ.

A lot of believers think, "If I'm forgiven, if I get a little healing, a little money, a little direction, and a little anointing on my ministry, I'm set! That's all I need."

The Holy Spirit says, "I won't force feed you, but I have so much more to give you than that."

THE MOST POWERFUL, PLEASURABLE REALITY ANYONE CAN EXPERIENCE

Paragraph H. Again, we'll do six sessions in the afternoon to go along with this one tonight, making seven total. The other speakers will address some of these themes as well. Here's what I want people to know. These are my goals. If you leave convinced of these things and you set your heart in a new way, then this has been a successful conference. Some of you are already convinced, but some of you are not.

Number one: the most powerful, the most pleasurable reality anyone can experience is the knowledge of God, the magnificence of Jesus. That's a cool thing to say, but I want to assure you it's real. I'm speaking soberly. The most powerful, pleasurable thing that will ever touch your heart is the excellence, the magnificence, the knowledge of this Man given to you by the Holy Spirit in this age and in the age to come. I'm basing my life on that point. There is nothing more powerful or more pleasurable. I've committed my life to that truth. I challenge you to settle it tonight: "I'm going for that for the rest of my days."

Number two: it's not only powerful and pleasurable; it will be the most costly thing you ever do. It will cost you everything. I mean it. Literally. Salvation is free: you can receive the gift of righteousness as a free gift, in one moment, not because of what you did, but because of what He did. To go pursuing the deep things of His heart, the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, will cost you everything. Paul said, "I gave up everything for the excellence, the magnificence, of knowing and getting more of Jesus."

THE MOST NEGLECTED SUBJECT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS GOD

Number three. I want you to be convinced of this: it's the most neglected issue in the kingdom. Why would I want you to know that? Here's why. In the kingdom of God, we teach many things. We teach relationship skills. Good. We teach ministry skills. Good! We teach economic principles. That's good. The most neglected subject in the kingdom of God is God. I'm serious! God is talked about less than any other subject in the kingdom. I don't mean a reference to Him; I mean talking about Him with clarity and depth.

The reason you need to know it's the most neglected subject is because, when you begin to go after it, one year turns into two years, and two years to five, and five to ten. You'll be surprised if you don't believe this how many people who love Jesus will roll their eyes, shake their head at you and say, "Poor thing. Why is he wasting his life after this?"

If you don't know this, it will trip you. It's not common in the kingdom to pursue Jesus this way. The people in the kingdom will wag their head at you more than the people in the world. If you know it's neglected by so many, you won't be tripped when they criticize you.

THE MOST EMPHASIZED TRUTH OF THE SPIRIT IN THE FINAL GENERATION

Number four: it's the most emphasized truth of the Holy Spirit in the generation the Lord returns. I believe it's very possible that we're in the early days of that generation. I don't know by revelation. No one knows the day or the hour. I believe it's possible there are people alive today—maybe it's the two-year olds, I don't know—who will see the Lord with their eyes. If that's true, in the generation the Lord returns, whether that's now or a short way down the road, the Holy Spirit is going to emphasize Jesus more than any other subject—more than ministry, more than any other kind of topic in the kingdom. He's going to put a spotlight on Jesus. Right now, again, Jesus is referred to as the way to get saved, the way to get healed, the way to get happy, the way to get money, the way to get power, but there's not as much emphasis on encountering Him as a man in a relational way.

I believe this is the most relevant subject: the knowledge of God, the revelation of Jesus. Today everyone wants to be relevant. That's good. It's kind of a buzz word in ministry. Be relevant. Let me tell you this; I say this with great respect. There are a million voices in our nation that are preaching on evangelism, on how to get saved. That's good. We need two million. I don't know the real number. There are a million voices telling us about healing. I like that; I'm one of them. There are a million voices telling us that we can transform society. There are a million voices talking about how Jesus will give us more money, if we but believe Him for prosperity. I like those themes. Let's believe for another million.

I tell you this: there are very few voices in the land speaking the deep things of His heart. So speak those other things, but don't stop there. Go on. Set your heart to be a voice, to be a messenger that says what the millions say, but beloved, if you want to be relevant, those subjects are relevant for sure, but the great vacuum, the great need in the Body of Christ, is to encounter Jesus in His magnificence. So much of the Body of Christ is living spiritually bored with a dull, defiled spirit. They love Him; but the Bible is boring, prayer is boring. They'll do ministry, but they're bored with Jesus. I understand that. I've experienced that. It's easy for that to happen.

I'm asking God, "God, raise up 10,000 messengers—messengers who will evangelize, heal the sick, transform society, believe for supernatural economics; but they won't stop there. They will go deep into the deep things of God's heart and they will speak of the treasures of Jesus to their generation."

I'm calling you to be one of those voices. I don't mean something that you decide for a summer. I mean something you'll be going after for decades.

HOW DOES JESUS EXPECT THE CHURCH TO MOVE IN VICTORY AND POWER?

Top of page two. Jesus emphasized this truth. Matthew 16 is such a significant teaching of Jesus. Verses 13-19. This is the first teaching and the first prophecy in the New Testament about the Church. It's through the lips of Jesus. Jesus is explaining how the Church would function, how the Church would have victory: the foundations of the Church. This is from the lips of Jesus. Pay very close attention to what Jesus is saying here. He's talking about how the Church will move in victory. He's talking about how the Church will move in power.

Notice what He emphasizes. He's talking to the apostles whom He knew would be the first leaders of the Church. He asked them a very, very important question. It's the same question the Holy Spirit is speaking to the leaders of the Church today. He starts off in verse 13, kind of leading them up to the main point. I picture them standing around the campfire one night. Jesus says, "Hey, who do the people say that I am? I'm the Son of Man. Who do they say that I am? What do they think about Me" (Mt. 16:13, paraphrased)?

One speaks up in verse 14 and says, "They think You're John the Baptist."

Jesus says, "I can understand that. Why?"

"They hear You preach and you're so fiercely dedicated to God like John was. They think You're John. They think You're a holiness preacher. They think You preach on dedication to God."

Jesus says, "I do, but I'm more than John."

Again in verse 14, another guy interrupts: “They don’t think You’re John, a holiness preacher. They think You’re Elijah. They think You’re the prophet with supernatural power to raise the dead. They saw You raise the dead. They think You’re Elijah with power, healings, and miracles.”

He says, “I do that; I raise the dead, but I’m more than Elijah.”

One guy says, “No, they don’t think You’re a holiness preacher and they don’t think You’re a signs-and-wonders prophet. They think You’re Jeremiah.” Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet with tender compassion. “They see the way You deal with people in their sin. In Your tenderness, You’re so kind. Surely You’re Jeremiah.”

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

Then we come to verse 15. It’s the critical moment. He says, “OK.” This is the foundation of the Church that Jesus wants to be laid in a proper way. “Who do you say that I am? Not the people. In the secrecy of your heart, what do you think about Me” (Mt. 16:15, paraphrased)?

Beloved, that’s the number one question Jesus asked the apostles, and that’s the same question the Spirit is emphasizing today. He’s not just the Savior who forgives. In the entirety of who He is, what do you think of Him? Is He only a forgiver? Only a healer? Only a provider? Only One who gives direction? What else is He to you?

“YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD”

In verse 16, Peter said, “You are the Christ” (Mt. 16:16). That’s the word *Messiah*, or, “Anointed One.” “You’re the Anointed One from the Old Testament. You’re the Son of the Living God.”

Jesus answered, “Peter, you didn’t learn that from a Bible study. No one taught that to you. My Father in heaven taught that to you” (Mt. 16:17, paraphrased).

What Peter was saying is this: “You’re the fulfillment of the Son of Man prophecies from the Old Testament, fully God, fully Man, King of the nations, transcendent God; the God of eminence who condescends to come near us. You’re all of those things,” is what Peter is saying. Some people read verse 16 and they think Peter said, “You’re the One who forgives us for our sins.”

That’s not what Peter was saying. When he said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” he was saying, “You’re the fulfillment of all of those descriptions of the Messiah in the Old Testament, fully God and fully Man and everything that’s involved.”

THE CHURCH WILL BE VICTORIOUS ON THE ROCK OF THE FULLNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

In verse 18, Jesus gives the application: “Peter, on this rock of truth, on the rock of the truth of who I am in My fullness, not one facet of My ministry, but who I am in My fullness, is the foundation of a church that the gates of hell will not prevail against” (Mt. 16:18, paraphrased).

We preach a lot on the victorious Church, that the gates of hell, the authority of hell won’t win against the Church. Many preach on the victorious church. That’s good. The Church will be in full victory before the Lord returns. Here’s the point I want to make: the Church isn’t going to walk in victory in a vacuum. The Church is

going to walk in victory—verse 18—as it builds upon the rock of the truth of who Jesus is in His entirety as is revealed in the Word of God. Jesus the Forgiver alone will never produce a victorious church. You have a lot of people going to heaven living spiritually bored with a dull spirit between now and then. Jesus the Healer by Himself won't produce a victorious church. Jesus the One who gives supernatural wealth for the increase of the kingdom isn't enough; it's the entirety of what the Word says about Him that must be in place for the Church to walk in victory. We need preachers, teachers, singers, musicians, who are going deep in the revelation of the majesty of who this Man is. It won't happen on the run. It won't happen with a false "cheap grace" message that empowers us to live in compromise and feel good about it. We'll never have the kind of revelation and understanding of the rock of truth for which the Church will be built on in victory without going deep.

I want to be a person that goes deep. I want to be part of the answer, not part of the problem, of the compromising church of our nation.

Verse 19. He says, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 16:19). "I will give you the power to operate in supernatural power," is what He was saying. Beloved, that doesn't happen in a vacuum. That's related to knowing Jesus who is the Rock of truth. We can have a bit of ministry, a bit of power, a bit of victory without going deep. I see it all the time. The grace of God is so abundant, people can live spiritually superficial and still lead people to the Lord, have a little blessing of God, have a little favor of God, heal the sick a little, and they're happy.

I'm not happy. I want more. That's never going to be the answer to change the church in our nation to the point where we walk in victory. It must be built upon the issue of, "Who do you say that I really am?"

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IN YOUR LIFE

Paragraph E. The most important question in our lives, your life right now, your young life. Most of you in this room are in your early twenties: twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. The most important question of your life now, in your twenties, will be the same question when you're in your fifties and your eighties. What do you think about Him? Not what He'll do for you, though that's important, too. I'm not minimizing that; that's important. That's not enough. When you stop and think about Him, what do you really think about?

I'm not asking you, "Do you like Him?" I know you like Him. You wouldn't come to this conference if you didn't like Him. What do you imagine Him to be like? In His majesty, in His humanity, in His splendor, what kind of being is He really? Yes, He's fully God, fully Man, but what does that mean? Our thoughts of Him are too few and too low. A low view of Jesus, simply because we haven't gone deep, will keep us in bondage to a dull spirit. We'll be trapped in spiritual boredom. There are more believers who love Jesus who are spiritually bored with Jesus. They're doing their best to serve Him, and I appreciate that; I don't criticize that, but I want to tell them: Christianity is more than a ministry assignment; it's aggressively pursuing and interacting with a person forever. It begins in this age. He's a glorious person, but so few of His people enjoy interacting with Him in any kind of deep way. He's so exciting, so interesting, so intriguing, but most of His people don't find Him enjoyable to be with long periods of time.

I'm not saying that as a criticism. I'm not saying, "Oh you're bad if you don't enjoy Him." I'm saying it takes time to develop a spiritual capacity and it takes time to grow in spiritual understanding, and it takes a tenacity to go after it. He won't force feed you. He'll only give you more on the basis of hunger.

“YOU’LL NEVER GROW WITHOUT GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD”

Paragraph G. I’m going to tell my own story of the journey to know the excellence of Christ Jesus. I know so little of it, but I’m addicted to the pursuit of more. I’m obsessed with getting more. There’s no big ministry, no amount of money, no power in ministry that can satisfy my hunger for more of this Man.

It began when I was about eighteen years old. I’m fifty-six now. That’s almost forty years ago. Go ahead, twenty-year olds, say, “Forty years?! That guy is old!”

My youth pastor’s name was Richard. I was on my way to college. I might have been seventeen. He said, “You’ll never grow as a Christian without growing in the knowledge of God.”

I said, “OK. What do you mean, ‘Grow in the knowledge of God?’” That was the weirdest term I had ever heard. “Grow in the knowledge of God?” “I love Jesus.”

He said, “I know you do, but you’ll never be a mature man of God if you don’t grow in the knowledge of God.”

That struck me like an arrow. That bothered me. I didn’t even know what he meant. He said, “Here’s a book. It’s called *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer.” It’s a small book, only about 100 pages. I kind of thumbed through it; I said, “It doesn’t look like much.” I had never heard of A.W. Tozer.

He said, “Read it.”

I said, “OK.”

“Understand it. It will change your life.”

I was beginning one of the most significant journeys of my life. I didn’t know that at the time. The reason I’m telling this story to you is because I want this to be your story—even if you’re fifty. You don’t have to be eighteen or twenty to begin this journey. It’s never too late. I read this 100-page book. I’ve promoted it for thirty years. I tell everyone about this book. I’m a satisfied customer. I read it at eighteen years old. Honestly, it was boring. I read it: I didn’t get changed; I didn’t even find it interesting. That was part of the problem, but I liked this guy Richard so much. He was about ten years older than me. I trusted him, so his words bothered me: “You’ll never grow without maturing in the knowledge of God.”

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

I had this little book, so I read it again. Here’s what Tozer said. Tozer went to be with the Lord in the 1960s. I’m guessing he wrote this book in the 1950s. Here’s what Tozer taught in the introduction of the book. This was interesting to me. Almost forty years later, I believe this much more than I did even then. Tozer said this: “What we believe about God is the most important thing about our spiritual life.”

I remember saying, “What I think about God? Well, He saved me. I’ve got it. He’s powerful. He saved me. He’s the Boss. He created the earth. I think I have God down. I got it! I’m ready to go now and change the world for God.”

That sentence bothered me. What you think about God, in the deep place of your heart, is the most important thing about your spiritual life. This is the same thing Jesus said: “Who do you really think I am? Really?”

THE MOST REVEALING THING ABOUT THE CHURCH

He went on to say—this isn’t a direct quote, but I’ve read it so many times—“The most revealing thing about the Church is found in her ideas about Jesus.” That will reveal more about the Church—what she says or leaves unsaid about Him.

A lot of big ministries, a lot of giant, growing ministries, don’t talk too much about Jesus. That’s none of my business. I’m not here criticizing those ministries; that’s not my point. My point is this: the most revealing thing about any ministry is what they say or leave unsaid about Jesus.

He went on to say, “A hundred lesser evils are caused by this one great lack of the knowledge of God.” There are a hundred lesser evils: lust, ambition, bitterness, complaint, competition, lethargy, passivity. There are a hundred lesser evils we struggle with because we don’t have this one issue right.

“THAT I SHOULD PREACH THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST”

Top of page three. Paragraph B. Ephesians 3:8. I love this verse. I want to challenge you to make Ephesians 3:8 and Philippians 3:8 some of your foundational verses for your life and your ministry. Remember Philippians 3:8: Paul said, “I gave up everything because I wanted more of the excellency, the magnificence of Jesus” (Phil. 3:8, paraphrased). “I wanted to see more, encounter more, understand more,” is what he meant.

“To me grace was given that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8, paraphrased). Let’s read that verse again: “To me grace was given.” Instead of the word *grace*, write the phrase, “Anointing of the Holy Spirit.” “I was anointed in ministry for this reason: to preach, to focus on, to lock into one great theme, the unsearchable riches of this Man.”

IF WE TALKED MORE TO HIM, WE WOULD TALK MORE ABOUT HIM

Beloved, your anointing, now and in the future, isn’t mostly just to grow a ministry, but to proclaim the glory of a man. I determined, “I will seek to grow in the anointing; not to grow my church or IHOP–KC”—because I pastured for twenty-five years before IHOP–KC. “That I could make the riches, the splendor of this Man clear to others.” We talk so little about Jesus. We talk about forgiveness, we talk about money, we talk about transforming cities, we talk about prophetic direction. I’m talking about something more specific than that. We talk so little about the splendor of Jesus. We talk so little about it because we talk so little to Him. If we talked more to Him, we would talk more about Him. We study so little about Him; that’s why we think so little about Him. We think about our ministry. We think of networking. We think of marketing. We think of connecting. We think of getting messages down, writing new songs. All of those are good, but we think so little about the splendor of this Man. That’s why we talk so little about Him. We talk about ministry much more than we talk about Jesus. And I like ministry!

Roman numeral IV. Proverbs 2. About thirty-five years ago, I had an encounter with the Lord. He surprised me from Proverbs 2. I’ll share it with you.

My youth pastor, Richard, gave me this little book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, when I was eighteen years old. “You’ll never grow deep in God if you don’t understand the knowledge of God.” OK. That means the splendor

of Jesus, the magnificence of Jesus. I read the book; it was boring. I read it again, and it wasn't so bad. This whole conversation was a divine setup.

TEACHING CONFRONTS YOU WITH THE REALITY THAT YOU DON'T KNOW GOD

A year or two went by. I was reading the book, trying to stay with it. Not because I liked the book, but because I trusted my youth pastor. I thought he was such a good guy, he was so smart, I had better do what he said. I went to the University of Missouri, a big state university with about 30,000 students. Again, I was about eighteen or nineteen years old.

He told me, "When you get to college, start a Bible study."

I said, "Start a Bible study? A freshman?"

"Yeah."

"OK. How?"

"Make a little flyer."

I made a little flyer: "Tuesday night, 9:00pm, Bible study." I didn't put my name on it because no one ever heard of me. I made a few thousand copies and walked around campus and passed them out. I was a peewee freshman: "There's a Bible study!" They didn't know I was the leader, because I was too afraid to tell them.

He said, "Go do that. Start a Bible study." It's a little scary. The reason it was scary—well, there are a bunch of reasons. I didn't have any messages. I didn't have anything to teach. He told me to do it, so I did it. It grew to 100 or 200 students. I was very impressed with my ministry... at least for a while. I played on the college football team at the University of Missouri. A bunch of the players came, then a bunch of the girls came, then a bunch of guys came. I thought they were coming to hear me. They were coming to meet each other. I figured that out later. That's another story for another time.

So I have 100 students and I'm sweating bullets. Every Tuesday night at 9:00pm was the dreadful hour. One hundred students would show up. The guys on the football team showed up and I would give them a Bible study. I didn't know the Bible; I didn't read the Bible. I didn't know anything. My youth pastor told me to do it. I didn't even want to do it.

What did I do? I took the book by A.W. Tozer. I figured, "If it's good for me and I need it, then they need it." I didn't exactly memorize it, but I took chapter 1, broke it down, and almost memorized it. Almost. I mean, I learned it ferociously. Then I would get up in the Bible study. I had twenty-five pages of notes because I didn't know it at all. My very first sermon—this is true! I said this. I had my notes. I said, "Hello. My name is... Mike Bickle! I'm... very glad to be here!"

It was very terrifying. Notice, I still have my notes. I preached everyone else's messages. I had nothing to say of my own. I made the mistake of picking the Tozer book, the hardest book in the world to preach. Why? Because I trusted that youth pastor. Oh my.

So I gave these sermons, week by week, on the attributes of God. It was extremely boring.

The guy asked me afterwards, “What did you mean by this point?”

I said, “I don’t really know! I just read it in the book last night. I don’t know what I meant by that point.” It’s funny now; it wasn’t funny then. It was a divine setup. Because by teaching this book, I became confronted with the reality that I knew nothing about God. I thought I knew God. I had a really outgoing personality. I talked a lot and evangelized a lot. I thought I knew God. I preached on salvation a lot. But after five minutes, I had nothing to say. I had nothing to say about the person of God. I could talk about forgiveness. “He loves me. He loves you.”

Someone says, “What does that mean?”

“You know, He loves you.”

“What does that mean practically?”

“You know, just a lot of love.”

“Yeah, I got that point, but what does that mean?”

“You know, He just really wants to be with you.”

I didn’t even know what to say about it. That’s not so bad when you’re young. It takes a while to develop the understanding. I became aware that I knew nothing about God. I was an on-fire believer. I was really a radical believer in the eyes of my friends, but I knew nothing about God. I didn’t know I didn’t know anything about God. I just assumed I did.

Preaching this book tortured me. I was desperate. I would go talk to older believers. I would say, “How do I find the knowledge of God?”

I was nineteen years old. These older believers were in their thirties. They said, “What do you mean?”

I said, “I want to know the knowledge of God.”

“That’s kind of a weird question. I thought you were saved?”

“No, I know I’m saved. I know the Savior. I want to know more.”

I couldn’t get anyone to give me good answers. I read books on it. They all seemed boring. I read a lot of biographies. I would read these biographies of radical believers. I would teach in my Bible studies about the lives of other radical believers. J. Hudson Taylor was my favorite. I read three of his biographies when I was seventeen and eighteen. He was a doctor, a missionary to China. “J. Hudson Taylor! He married his wife, Marie, they went into the interior of China, and they did this and they did that.” I could talk about J. Hudson Taylor for hours.

Then I read Charles Finney, then John G. Lake, then Jonathan Edwards, then Whitefield, Wesley, and Brainerd. Oh, I loved biographies. I love the stories of men and women who knew God.

Then one day it hit me: “It’s not enough for me to know the stories of men that knew God. I want to know God myself.”

It was a critical hour. I said, “I’m not content to know a man who knows God, or to read about a man who knows God.” Here I was, nineteen or twenty. I remember the day I slammed my hand down on the table and said, “I WILL know God! I’m going all the way. I won’t just be a biography reader; I’ll become one.” I didn’t mean being famous in ministry, but going deep in God. It was exciting; it was terrifying. Because the men in these books I read gave up everything for real. They lived hard lifestyles. I said, “I’m going all the way. I will know the knowledge of God.”

I asked everyone I met. I was so desperate for the knowledge of God. When I would read these books or read about God, it would hit my heart and bounce off. Nothing took. The Bible was boring, prayer was boring, and I hated fasting. The only thing I really liked was meetings. I liked to go to meetings. I could go to meetings every night. I never got tired of meetings.

When it was just me and God and the Bible I said, “God, if Your Book wasn’t so boring, more people would read it.” It was actually my lack of capacity to understand that was the problem.

“WILL YOU SHOW ME HOW TO READ THE BIBLE PERSONALLY?”

Paragraph B. We went on a college ski trip over Christmas break. That was back before they had onething Conferences over Christmas break. That’s a good time to say, “Amen!”

Over Christmas break, we went on the college ski trip. We brought the 100 from the Bible study at the University of Missouri. We would ski all day and have Bible studies at night. It was kind of cool, but not as cool as this. I was there one morning before we went skiing. I was having my Bible study time, my quiet time.

A young believer came up to me. I mean, I was eighteen, so I was a young believer, too. He said, “Will you show me how to read the Bible personally?” I didn’t really like reading the Bible, but I didn’t want to tell him that. I did it everyday. I said, “I will read Proverbs 2.”

He said, “Why?”

“Because it’s January 2 and I read one proverb everyday. Thirty-one proverbs, thirty-one days of the month.” Some guy told me to do that, so I did it.

“IF YOU RECEIVE MY WORDS, AND TREASURE MY COMMANDS. . .”

He said, “How do you do this?”

I said, “Sit down. Let’s turn to Proverbs 2.” I read verse 1: “If you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you. . .” (Prov. 2:1). Here I was, so skilled at Bible study. That’s a joke, by the way. I said, “Notice the word *if*.”

He said, “Yeah?”

I said, “There’s coming a *then* in a few minutes.”

He said, “Wow, you really know the Bible.”

I said, “Well, I’ve been around for a while. Whenever you get an *if*, then say, ‘Oh, good!’ because a *then* is on its way—a promise.”

“IF YOU CRY OUT FOR DISCERNMENT. . .”

We read to verse 3, and there was another *if*: “If you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding. . .” (Prov. 2:3). Then again in verse 4: “If you seek her as silver. . .” (v. 4). I said, “You know, in all my years of reading the Bible”—a couple of months, actually—“I’ve *never* seen three *ifs* in a row!” This was the first time I had ever seen it; I knew the *then* was going to be amazing.

He said, “Wow.”

Finally, in verse 5, we hit the *then*: “There it is!” I was stopping at every phrase to show him how well I knew the Bible.

“. . . then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:5).

I said, “Oh my goodness.”

The man said, “Whoa, what’s wrong?”

I began to tear up, and I *never* teared up while reading the Bible.

He said, “What? What? What?”

I said, “Then you find the knowledge of God.”

He said, “Yeah, yeah, what does that mean?”

I said, “Oh goodness. . . I need to be alone.” I said, “Something just happened.” It was a huge encounter, though it was that simple. There were no fireworks, but it was like the arrow struck my heart. I said, “God, this is it.”

Praise God for that man who told me about reading the Proverbs! On December 28, you read Proverbs 28; it’s that simple. At least I knew where to start. I didn’t read the Bible; many times I didn’t know where to start. That guy came along and said, “Read ten chapters a day, six days a week. You’ll read the whole New Testament once a month. Do it for a year.”

I said, “OK.” In those days, when some leader told me to do something, I just did it when it was something like that. I did it for a year. It changed my life. It was radical. The first month or two was very boring. I said, “I’ll do it because that guy seems like he knows God; I’ll do it anyway.”

Let's go through these really fast. Corey Russell has a book on these five conditions. "If you receive my words" (Prov. 2:1). We set our heart to fully obey, to receive, not reject. It's a heart of obedience.

Paragraph E. "Treasure my commands within you" (Prov. 2:1b). We have to take time to meditate. Don't just read it and underline it; talk to Jesus as you read it.

Paragraph F. We dialogue with a person, Jesus. When we read it, we have conversation. As I read line by line, I talk to Him about that. I have more on the Internet on how to do this in a practical way if this is new to you. The Bible gives us the conversation material. You read it. You commit yourself: "I'll obey this." Or I read this about Jesus and I say, "Thank You, this is true about You; reveal more to me." I have a few different ways to respond to different verses.

"INCLINE YOUR EAR TO WISDOM"

Top of page four. Condition three. "Incline your ear to wisdom" (Prov. 2:2). That's called having a teachable spirit. We so easily pick up our biases of our Christian background. We have to lay our biases down and commit to believe whatever it says, even if it's not what our Sunday school teacher taught us. You have to incline your heart: "Whatever it says, I'll say yes, even if it's unpopular."

Incline your heart. Number four: cry out for more discernment or more revelation. We actually ask Him, "Holy Spirit, give me the spirit of wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of Jesus."

Look here. Ephesians 1:7 is the prayer I have prayed more than any other prayer in forty years. It's the prayer that's prayed most at IHOP-KC. We don't limit it to that, but if we added it up, then it would be number one on the list over twelve years. We want the revelation of the knowledge of Jesus.

"SEEK FOR HER AS SILVER"

Condition number five. "Seek for her as silver" (Prov. 2:4, paraphrased). This is where a lot of people get off the journey. Pay any price. Turn things off. Pull away from so much involvement in so many things. Seek for it like silver. If I told you there was a million dollars of silver hidden in some house, some mansion, and you could tear every single wall down, dig up the foundation, tear up the attic, "You can have the million if you can find it; it's there and it's yours," I assure you, most of you wouldn't rest until you found it.

The fifth condition: seek for the revelation of God with that kind of zeal. Turn off your video games. Turn off your this and your that. Take your time. Shut the phones down. Take some hours and go after this like for silver. I tell you this, it won't just come automatically.

YOU GROW IN REVELATION TO THE DEGREE THAT YOU HUNGER FOR IT

God will give it to the hungry. I remember a pastor asked me a question once. This was the strangest question from a pastor. He said, "When I hear you teach, it sounds like you make a correlation between the amount of time you spend with Jesus and the measure of the encounter you have with Him."

I said, "It seems like I'm saying that?"

He said, "It seems like it to me."

I said, “Good. I’m glad you’re listening.”

He said, “Well that’s heresy. That’s legalism.”

I said, “So you don’t put any connection between the amount of time you have with the Lord and the measure of your encounter.”

“No, it’s all by the grace of God.”

I said, “You’re living in a false doctrine of grace.”

That was a shocking statement to him. I was more shocked than he was: that a pastor couldn’t even understand the fundamental principle of the grace of God.

I said, “Your salvation is for free. You grow in revelation to the degree that you hunger for it.”

He said, “Maybe that’s why I don’t have any. I don’t spend any time with the Lord except to find a message for Sunday.”

It hurt my heart to hear that. I thought, “Ouch. What a miserable way to live.” Really.

YOU’LL HAVE TO TURN ASIDE SOME OPPORTUNITIES IN ORDER TO GO DEEP

Paragraph J. Look at Job 22:24: “You will lay your gold in the dust” (Prov. 22:24). Don’t spend all your time making money. Beloved, I have drawn back from many opportunities to make money, increase my ministry, a lot of things, in order to go deep in God. I’m not saying that like some hero. I’m saying this is to twenty-year olds: “You have to turn aside some opportunities in order to go deep.” Jesus is worth it. I’m a satisfied customer. I just want more.

He says in verse 25, “Yes, the Almighty will be your gold” (Job. 22:25). I love what Corey Russell says: “There’s gold in them there hills.” I would say it a little differently than that, but I like the feeling of it. There’s gold to be found in those hills called “the knowledge of God.” It’s the glory of God to hide a matter. It’s the glory of God to hide things; it’s the glory of kings to search them out (Prov. 25:2). The Lord says, “I will hide the deepest things, but to those with a kingly spirit who can’t live without them, search for them and I’ll give them to you. I will become your gold.”

Then you will understand the fear of the Lord. Then you will find the magnificence of the excellence of the glory of Christ Jesus. Amen.