



Abandoning Our Box

A 14-Day Search
for the Real Jesus



Thoughts, questions, and prayers to push us past
religious Christianity
and into a relationship with the God we've always wanted.

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Welcome!

I am on a hunt. It feels like the real Jesus has gotten lost in the midst of traditional and religious Christianity. We believe a lot of things about God, but have we actually met Him for ourselves?

I was raised in a conservative sub-group of evangelical Christianity. It was characterized by legalism and religious activity. I was a good girl following the rules until one day Jesus showed up and changed everything.

Too often we keep our ideas about God in a little god-box. That god is small, understandable and somewhat boring. We live good lives, doing the right things, to appease our god-in-a-box. It's time to abandon that box of lies and half-truths and search for the real Jesus.

I'm excited to have you join me!

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Day One

What If?

What if God cares more about your heart than your outward actions? What if He wants to heal your deepest wounds and messes more than He wants your behaviors to change?

What if He wants you to understand yourself...your deep needs and longings and the things that trigger you? What if He cares about ALL of you, the visible and invisible parts?

What if, instead of expecting you to get your act cleaned up, Jesus wants to sit with you in your mess? Sift through it? Sort it out? What if He is totally okay with that? What if that brings Him joy? Would that give you HOPE?

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” Luke 19:10 ESV.

Jesus, You are everything we could ever want. Our spirits know that. But we often believe crazy lies about You. Show us who You really are! Let us dare to hope that the God we long for really exists. Open our eyes as we seek You.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Luke 19:1-10
- ◆ What does Jesus do/not do in this story?
- ◆ What does He say/not say?
- ◆ What surprises you?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Two

True Grace

It's amazing to me how quickly we change the definition of grace. We agree that grace for salvation is free, but the grace we receive afterwards is often "earned." We follow the Godly Christian Checklist and try to win God's approval by good behavior.

It doesn't work like that! God likes us no matter what. Good or bad behavior aside, God sees our hearts. He reads our motives. He understands the depth of our brokenness, and He wants us anyway. He died for our messiest places, and He doesn't expect us to clean our act up before we enjoy Him. He longs for us to come to Him now...right now. In honesty and humility just come, because we can.

That's real grace. It's more than we can comprehend. It's insane, and it doesn't make any sense. But who cares? It's reality. Let's enjoy it!

"He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding" Ephesians 1:7-8 NLT.

Your grace doesn't make any sense, Jesus. But, You aren't like us, are You? To be loved and accepted like this, overwhelms me. It breaks me. And it makes me love you even more.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Ephesians 1:3-10. Pay close attention to all the words showing love and acceptance.
- ◆ Do you find yourself resisting or accepting this loving grace? Take time to process.
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Three

Our God-Box

It's easy to feel like we have God all figured out when life is going well. We keep our Christian beliefs all wrapped up in a pretty little box. Then real life hits. Uncomfortable and scary questions surface, and our god-box turns to dust in our fingers. It might feel like we are losing faith.

Can we be okay with a God that we don't understand? A God who doesn't make sense? A God who promises He is good and yet allows evil. A God who tells us that He is in charge of it all? Those are the questions we must ask. It's okay to ask them. He wants you to...

God has not abandoned you. He has not lost control. He still adores you. He just might not be who you thought He was. And that's okay...

"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make peace and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things." Isaiah 45:6-7

Sometimes life is so broken, Jesus. It hurts so much. But I know that You are in control, that You have a plan, and that You will never leave me alone. I know that You don't owe me an explanation. I choose to trust You even when I cannot see.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Isaiah 45:5-8
- ◆ Acknowledge your emotions as you read. Are you excited, angry, peaceful? What might your feelings be telling you about your god-box?
- ◆ What would it mean for you to believe in a God who is more than you can comprehend?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Four

No Condemnation

Contrary to the lies in our head, our mess doesn't shock God. He already knows. There is no point in trying to pretend we've got it together. It might work with other people, but it's useless in front of Jesus.

He loves and wants us right now. The truth is that God sees every bit of our mess and that is where He adores us. Jesus died for that mess. He is redeeming that mess. He doesn't worry about it.

Shame, guilt, and fear keep us from God, from freedom, and from the life we can have in Jesus. They are lies! Don't listen to them! There is no condemnation for the children of God. None. Zip. Zero. Zilch. Nada.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" Romans 8:1.

Jesus, help me to believe the truth about how much You love and want me. Help me to come to You freely and honestly. Let me delight in the freedom and grace You have given me because of the cross. You are ridiculously amazing! I can't help loving You.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Romans 8:1-4
- ◆ What was it that secured our freedom? Why is this significant?
- ◆ What would true freedom from condemnation look like for you?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Five

The Real God

Either God is real, or He isn't. That's where it starts and ends. Too often we say that we believe in Him, but then live like He isn't important. However, we also can't make it about our behaviors. This isn't a guilt trip to get you to act differently. I hate that kind of thing.

The problem we are facing isn't our behavior...it's our lack of belief. The tangible things around us are more real to us than the Creator who made us.

If we really believe that God is real, that He matters, and that we matter because of Him... If we believe that there is more than we can see with our eyes, and that this world is not our home... If we believe these things, we cannot keep living a normal life. It won't happen. Not because we are focused on our behaviors and all things we should do, but because we are focused on an all consuming, crazily amazing, ridiculously huge, Real God.

"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? Says the Holy One"
Isaiah 40:25. ESV

Jesus, open our eyes to Who You really are! Blow our minds! Show us the meaninglessness of the empty things that consume us, and let us become completely consumed with You!

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Isaiah 40:21-31
- ◆ What are some words we could use to describe the God in this passage?
- ◆ How does this God compare to the God revealed to us by Jesus Christ?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Six

Be Still

This broken world is full of trouble and pain. Relationships hurt, friends betray us, we are wronged, and we wrong others. I can tell you first hand that trying to fight for myself never works out. My perspective is warped and flawed. I'm too quick to justify myself and condemn others. It goes much better when I let Jesus do the fighting for me.

But Jesus's fighting doesn't always look like I think it should. Sometimes it's way slower and more gentle than I'd like. It's filled with significantly more grace. It's usually more about teaching and changing me than it is about winning the battle I thought I was fighting. Sometimes God does remove His grace and lets natural consequences happen. And sometimes He steps in and says "Enough!" However the Lord chooses to fight, we can trust Him. He's got this!

"The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" Exodus 14:14. NIV

It hurts, Jesus. Help me to trust that You are working on my behalf. You see the big picture. You know what is really going on. And, You have a plan. It's not my battle. Show me what to do or say, and show me when to rest and be still. I need You; I can't do this alone.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Exodus 14:10-14
- ◆ The Israelites were in an impossible situation. What was their response?
- ◆ What was Moses' response? And what was God's response?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Seven

Lies

If you are feeling like a failure today, like the only one who can't get it figured out, and the only one who is such a mess. That's a lie. If you think God can't possibly like you, that there's no way He wants to be around you, or that you are a disappointment to Him. Those are all big, fat, hairy lies! If you think that any of the things you do or don't do make any difference in how Jesus feels about you, it's another crappy lie!

Lift your head, child. You are loved, redeemed, forgiven, and wanted! God doesn't care about your mess, or your mistakes, or your inadequacies. He just wants you to stop pushing Him away. He wants to give you obscene amounts of grace...scandalous grace. He wants you to let Him love you right where you are. He wants to restore your heart. Then He wants to gently take your broken pieces and put you back together. You don't have to fix your mess. Jesus wants to heal you Himself. Will you let Him?

"For God so did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" John 3:17. ESV

Do You really love me right here, Jesus, in this mess? Help me to stop pushing You away and help me to accept Your love and forgiveness. I want to believe. Grow my faith.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read John 3:16-18
- ◆ These are familiar words. Slow down and see what jumps out at you.
- ◆ According to John 3:18, what is it that condemns us? Does that surprise you?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Eight

I Can't

You don't usually hear someone telling people to give up. We try and teach our kiddos at early ages that they can do anything if they try hard enough. But today I want to encourage you to say *I can't* and *I give up*.

The truth is that we can't live the Christian life described in the Bible. It is impossible. We can try hard, putting in lots of effort, but it won't ever work. Not until we stop trying. There is a mysterious and beautiful secret that begins when we give up and let Jesus take over.

Giving up takes humility; it takes brokenness and honesty. Declaring "I can't" and telling the Holy Spirit that "He can" is a frightening thing. Surrender might not seem like a nice word, but it's the only way to find true life. Reaching the end of myself and recognizing my desperate need for an eternal Savior and a daily Helper is the best thing that ever happened to me!

"But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" Galatians 5:16. ESV

Show me what surrender looks like, Jesus. What do I need to let go of? How do I let go? I need You! I can't do this, but You say that You will do it through me. Take over.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Galatians 5:16-25
 - ◆ What does this passage tell us to do compared with what the Spirit is doing?
 - ◆ What is significant about the answer to that last question?
 - ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.
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Day Nine

Too Small

I think that most of our spiritual problems start with a too-small understanding of God. We don't get Him. We have our god-boxes where we keep our idea of God. But the real One?

We are often told to find God by reading the Bible. But what do we do if the Bible has been used to abuse us in our past, and now we aren't sure how (or if we even want) to read it?

Can we discover God apart from the Bible?

Well, how do people discover God in other countries where Bibles aren't readily available? What about the Dark Ages when Bibles were written in Latin and only read by Priests?

We can look at creation and discover His character. When is the last time you sat quietly in a garden, or a forest, or a field and marveled at the created things? What they tell you about their Creator might surprise you!

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..." Romans 1:20. (NIV)

Jesus, show me who You are through Your creation. I want to discover your heart. I make You too small, too understandable. Blow my mind...blast Your way out of my box!

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Romans 1:18-20
- ◆ What might you be ignoring about God?
- ◆ Look out the window or go out to your yard. What does the creation tell you about God?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Ten

Eternal Life

We get so caught up in busyness, in doing one more thing. Our technological world is filled with convenient distractions. It's easy to forget that we have been given eternal life.

Eternal life seems like something that happens after we die. But what if that's not the case? If we have put our trust in Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection, if we believe that His death paid for our sins...then we have eternal life now!

What is eternal life? It's knowing God...experiencing Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. This kind of knowledge isn't just intellectual, and it isn't based on more things that we DO. We have been given eternal life, the ability to intimately know the God who created us and loves us more than we can imagine. And that reality changes everything!

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” John 17:3. (ESV)

Jesus, I don't want my relationship with You to be a religion...things I do in an attempt to appease You. I want to know You, intimately. I want to believe in the reality of things that I cannot see. I want to taste eternal life now. Show me Who You are.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read John 17:1-5
- ◆ What if eternal life doesn't just mean living forever? What might Jesus be referring to?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Eleven

A New Reality

If the real Jesus is more than religious Christianity, how do we live it? How do we move from focusing on things we do into a new level of relationship and awareness?

When the kids are fighting, and the job is stressful and consuming, and relationships with people are broken, and technology is distracting... How do we find time and energy to seek to know Jesus and experience the eternal life He offers?

Jesus isn't a checklist. He isn't waiting for you to sit down and spend half an hour reading your Bible. The real Jesus is a new reality. He IS no matter what we feel, or do, or believe. None of that affects Him or His kingdom. He invites us into His kingdom through faith. And that can happen anywhere at any time! It's that exciting?

"He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" Colossians 1:13. (NIV)

Jesus, I need more faith. This world often seems so real and spiritual things so distant and confusing. Help me to believe. Show me the emptiness of the stuff I let consume me. I want to know who You really are and become completely obsessed with You.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Colossians 1:9-14
- ◆ Paul is praying this beautiful prayer for his friends at Colossi. What descriptions does it give of the new reality available in Jesus' kingdom?
- ◆ Which part sticks out to you?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Twelve

God-Sized

Have you ever stood on the edge of the ocean or a Great Lake and watched the wind toss the waves? It makes me feel so small. Our Creator is beyond amazing. Yet so often we have far too big a view of our own intellectual ability and far too small a view of His.

We don't understand something in the spiritual realm? That doesn't make it untrue, it just makes us mortal. We struggle to grasp the nature of God? That doesn't mean He's not, it just means we are finite. If the real God wasn't dreamed up by people's imagination, then it only makes sense that He would be beyond our comprehension. Right?

I'm choosing to delight in my creatureliness today and live in awe and wonder of a very big God. I am okay with not being able to fully grasp the wonders and whys in my mind. He is more than me and it is good.

“For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD?” Psalm 89:6 (ESV)

I make You too small, Jesus. I try to stuff You into my box so that I can understand. It's scary to believe in a God who is so much bigger than me, One I cannot comprehend. But it is good for me to be small and let You be God-sized. Thank You for wanting me, loving me, and pursuing me. You are amazing!

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Psalm 89:5-9
 - ◆ What words are used to describe God?
 - ◆ How does this God compare with the way Jesus revealed God to us?
 - ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.
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Day Thirteen

Tired

Does spirituality ever exhaust you? Have you ever gone to a retreat and come back even more emotionally drained than when you left? I have. Why does that happen? Why is it so tiring to be spiritual? And is it okay to take a break sometimes?

It is. It's okay to be real! To step back from our own expectations for ourselves and relax. To rest in God's love and grace that still exists even when we aren't thinking about it.

We don't have to be on a spiritual high all of the time. I'm not even sure those emotional experiences are the real Jesus anyway. Our feelings, or lack of them, don't make Jesus and His Spirit more or less real. He is usually quiet anyway. He speaks in whispers not shouts.

The world around us has seasons and so do our own hearts. We have to stop beating ourselves up and feeling all this false guilt and shame. We need to accept the seasons of life. Jesus doesn't change. And He understands us better than we ever will ourselves.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28.

Jesus, help me to let go of my expectations and performance based ideas of spirituality. Help me to accept Your unconditional love and grace. I want to rest in You, in who You really are! I don't want my god-in-a-box anymore. I just want You.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Matthew 11:28-30
- ◆ What kind of a God wrote these words? Does He match the god in your box?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.

Day Fourteen

God of Hope

If the thought of your god doesn't fill you with hope, then he probably isn't the real God. How's that for a crazy statement? If your version of God is neat, compact, and understandable, then you are probably actually missing something. But if your God is wild, huge, and often seems slightly insane, then you are headed in the right direction!

We are so quick to make God into our own image...we imagine that He is like us. But He isn't. Far from it! We were just made to be a little like Him. God is real and wonderful. He is huge, powerful, and scary, but also good, passionate, and abounding in love.

We do not need to be afraid of the brokenness and pain within this world or even within ourselves. We can hold onto hope because the God of the Universe is faithful, and merciful, and loving. And He never changes.

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” Lamentations 3:20-22

Jesus, Your love never ends. It doesn't matter what I do or don't do. My failures have no power against Your mercy and faithfulness. That kind of love draws me, it woos me; it breaks me. I just want You...more and more of You. And I want to give You myself.

Digging Deeper

- ◆ Read Lamentations 3:20-22
- ◆ What are some of your god-box ideas that need to be abandoned?
- ◆ Respond to what the Spirit is showing you.
