

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH

Kansas City, Missouri

SIX-DAY DEVOTIONAL

Is It Just My Imagination?

When Faith Is Separated from the Word

JOHN 1:1, 14 (NIV)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Based on the sermon by Pastor Maurice Gadson

PREPARED FOR

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DAY ONE · JUST MY IMAGINATION: THE JESUS WE INVENTED

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 1:1–5 (NIV)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Sunday Pastor Gadson opened with an old song about a man who stood at his window day after day watching a woman he had never spoken to. In his mind he had already married her — the house, the children, the whole quiet life together — until he woke up and admitted that none of it had ever been real. He had built a complete relationship with an image. He had no relationship with a person.

That is the mirror he held up to us, and it is not a comfortable one. Many of us have assembled a Jesus the same way: from a distance, out of the pieces we liked, without ever going to the Word to find out who He actually is. The Jesus of our imagination only loves and never confronts. He never calls us to change or obey. He agrees with us on every issue and never once raises the demands of His kingdom. He lets us stay exactly as we are, because that is just the way we are.

So John begins where he has to begin. When he writes “in the beginning,” he is not marking a starting line on a calendar; he is pointing to the sphere of eternal existence. Before anything was, the Word already was — with God, and God. Everything that has ever been made was made through Him. In Him was life, not borrowed but original, and that life is the light of humanity.

“Many believers have created an image of Jesus that only exists in their imagination — a Jesus who only loves and never confronts, who agrees with them on every issue and never calls them to change.”

— Pastor Maurice Gadson

Sit with what that light does. Without it we would have no way of exposing darkness, no way of driving it out — and deeper still, no way of ever recognizing our own. Without the light of Jesus we would go on believing we are perfectly fine just the way we are. An invented Jesus can comfort you. Only the real one can show you yourself.

Faith that gets separated from Scripture does not usually die. It drifts — into something shaped by imagination rather than by the truth of God’s Word. The question this week is not whether you believe in Jesus. It is whether the Jesus you believe in is a Person you have met in the Word, or an image you assembled at the window.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Space is given below each question for journaling or small-group notes.

- 1.** *When I picture Jesus, where did that picture actually come from — the pages of Scripture, or things I have absorbed, assumed, and preferred? Which parts of it could I point to in the Bible?*

- 2.** *What does the Jesus of my imagination never ask of me? Name the one area where I have quietly decided He agrees with me and has no correction to give.*

- 3.** *If the light of Christ exposed one piece of darkness in me this week — something I have been excusing as just the way I am — what would it be?*

- 4.** *What specific passage will I open this week to let Jesus tell me who He is, instead of telling Him who I have decided He is?*

DAY TWO · THE WORD BECAME FLESH: YOU CANNOT HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 1:14, 17–18 (NIV)

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Just in case we missed it, Pastor Gadson said Sunday, John keeps going: the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He came down and decided to hang out with us. God did not send a message about Himself and stay at a distance. He expressed His nature through truth, through His Word, and finally through a Person who moved into the neighborhood.

Which gives us the sentence to carry all week. You cannot have Jesus without the Word, and you cannot have the Word without Jesus. It is not either-or. It is both-and.

Both halves matter because there are two ways to end up alone. An image without the Word leaves you to your own imagination — you can feel very deeply about a Christ you invented, and never once be corrected by Him. A word without the Person leaves you with information and no relationship — you can know the text, win the argument, quote the chapter, and still be a stranger to the God the text reveals. Two different ditches. The same loneliness at the bottom of both.

Notice the word John chooses: He made His dwelling among us. He pitched His tent. He did not visit and leave a card; He moved in. And what those first witnesses saw was glory full of grace and truth — not grace at the expense of truth, not truth stripped of grace. That pairing is almost always the first casualty of an imagined Jesus. We keep the half we prefer and quietly retire the other.

“You can have an image, but an image leaves you to your imagination. You can have a word, but a word by itself leaves you without a relationship with the Supreme God. So it is not either-or. It is both-and.”

— Pastor Maurice Gadson

John is careful about how he says the rest of it, too. No one has ever seen God — but the Son, who has always been in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known. That is the only reliable way any of us will ever know what God is actually like. Not by guessing from our circumstances. Not by assuming He is a larger version of our own instincts. He has explained Himself, in a Person, and He left us the record.

So when you open the Bible this week, understand what you are doing. You are not completing an assignment. You are meeting the Person who made everything you will touch today, and who came close enough to be touched Himself.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Space is given below each question for journaling or small-group notes.

1. *Which ditch do I lean toward — a Jesus I feel strongly about but rarely read about, or a Bible I know well and a Christ I rarely speak to?*

2. *If someone only watched how I handle Scripture in an ordinary week, what would they conclude about my relationship with Christ?*

3. *Grace and truth arrived together in Him. Which of the two do I habitually edit out of my picture of how God sees me — and what has that edit protected me from facing?*

4. *What one change this week would move Scripture from a task I complete to a Person I meet?*

DAY THREE · GOING STEADY: ABIDING AS A FIXED POSITION

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 8:31–32 (NIV)

“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Sunday Pastor Gadson reached back for a phrase some of us grew up with and admitted it dated him: going steady. When two people went steady, the question of availability was settled. You were positioned with one person, and everybody knew it. That, he said, is exactly what Jesus is asking for when He says, if you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples. To abide is to fix your position.

But before there can be a position, there has to be a settlement. We have to settle it in our hearts that God’s Word alone is the reliable, perfect, unflawed source for life. Until that is settled, we will never be fixed — we will be shopping. Scripture calls it being tossed back and forth by every wind of teaching. Every generation offers somewhere else to take our questions; the names change from psychic hotlines to online gurus, and the promise never does: one more word that will finally make us feel settled.

Watch the order in Jesus’ sentence, because most of us want it the other way around. Abide first. Then you will know the truth. Then the truth will set you free. Freedom is not offered on the front end as an incentive. We would rather sample the truth, verify that it works, and then commit — and it simply does not run in that direction. Staying is how you find out.

Notice, too, who He is speaking to: those who had already believed Him. Believing was the beginning of the conversation, not the end of it. Faith got them in the room. Abiding is what proved the room was home.

“If you don’t settle it in your heart that God’s Word alone is reliable, you will never be fixed. You will just be wayward — going to this place and that place, trying to find somewhere to hang out that makes you feel good.”

— Pastor Maurice Gadson

And hear what abiding actually costs, because it is not complicated — it is just exclusive. Going steady meant closing some doors that were still open. Abiding means the same thing. It means there are questions you will no longer take to three places before you take them to one, and answers you will not go shopping for when the first one is not what you wanted to hear. A fixed position is not a limitation. It is the only way anything ever grows deep.

The test of this will not come on Sunday. It comes Thursday night when you are holding a question you cannot settle, and you already know exactly which voice you are going to reach for first.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Space is given below each question for journaling or small-group notes.

1. *When a hard question comes, what is the first voice I actually reach for — and what does that reveal about what I have truly settled?*

2. *Have I settled that Scripture is reliable, or do I still weigh it as one opinion among several and keep the final vote for myself?*

3. *Jesus put abiding before knowing, and knowing before freedom. What would it look like for me to stay in one passage this week before I demand that it make sense to me?*

4. *What competing voice will I stop consulting this week — and what will I put in the time and attention it has been taking?*

DAY FOUR · NO SIDE TRUTHS: THE COST OF A DIVIDED HEART

SCRIPTURE READING

JAMES 4:7–8 (NIV)

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

James starts out nice, Pastor Gadson observed Sunday, and then he gets loud. Submit — fix your position with God. Resist the devil — and notice James does not say flirt with him, because the enemy can say some things to you. He will offer the sun, the moon and the stars, none of which are his to give. He has a great deal to offer and nothing at all to deliver.

That is worth pausing over, because flattery does not usually work by convincing us. It works because being flattered feels good, and we linger in it instead of resisting it. Everything that shines is not gold, and everything that sounds good is not good. Resistance is a decision made early, before the conversation gets interesting.

Then James stops being polite. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double-minded. We prefer softer words — a mistake, a slip, a rough patch. Scripture calls it what it is, and it does that not to shame us but to get us to the place where something can actually be cleansed.

Some people keep a relationship on the side. Some of us keep truths on the side — a standard we consult when God’s Word is asking more of us than we want to give. But whatever is on the side is never the priority, and neither is the truth we keep there. That is why the double-minded are unstable in all their ways: divided loyalty means nothing ever gets a hundred percent of anything.

“Some folks have side truths. But remember — if you are a side-truth seeker, you are not the priority, and neither is your truth. A relationship with Jesus Christ calls for undivided loyalty.”

— Pastor Maurice Gadson

And that instability is rarely dramatic. It shows up as a life that will not hold still: convictions that soften whenever they become expensive, commitments that survive until they are inconvenient, a devotion that is real on Sunday and negotiable by Wednesday. We tend to blame it on our season, our schedule, our circumstances. James puts the blame somewhere closer to home.

And right in the middle of all that confrontation sits the gentlest promise in the passage: come near to God, and He will come near to you. Wherever you are this week, whatever you are carrying, the person who sincerely draws close finds that God has already started moving toward them. The cleansing is not the price of admission. It is what happens once you get close.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Space is given below each question for journaling or small-group notes.

1. *Where am I keeping a side truth — a standard I turn to whenever God's Word asks more of me than I am willing to give?*

2. *What flattery am I most vulnerable to, and what does my lingering in it rather than resisting it tell me about what I am actually hungry for?*

3. *The double-minded are unstable in all their ways. Where is instability showing up in my life that I have been blaming on circumstances rather than on divided loyalty?*

4. *"Come near to God and he will come near to you." What is my one specific step of drawing near this week — and on what day and at what hour will I take it?*

DAY FIVE · LOVE THAT GROWS: HOW JESUS MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 14:21, 23 (NIV)

“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them... Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Somebody asked Pastor Gadson not long ago whether meeting his wife was love at first sight. He said yes immediately — mostly because she was sitting close by — and then told us the truth. It was not love. He liked what he saw. Call it desire. He knew how she looked and knew nothing else about her. Love came out of the years that followed: learning her ways, her values, the things that make a person who they are. Forty-eight years later, he said, they continue.

Continue is the word Jesus keeps using, too. Whoever has My commands and keeps them — keeps, continues, remains, abides, dwells. This relationship is not a drive-by.

Which raises an honest question. Does the Father not already love me? He does. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, and that love was not earned and cannot be lost. But there is a difference between the love that saved you and the affectionate, daily, walking-with-you love of a Father who is in open fellowship with a child in open fellowship with Him. And Jesus adds something more: I will show Myself to them. The more you love His Word, the more He reveals of Himself inside it.

That quietly answers a complaint most of us have made — I just do not understand the Bible. Some go looking for secret books and lost books, but God has not lost anything. He has promised to manifest Himself to the one who keeps His Word. Understanding is downstream of abiding, not a requirement for starting.

“It was not love at first sight — I liked what I saw. Love came out of continuing, and forty-eight years later we are still continuing. A loving relationship with Jesus is bred out of a growing affection for His Word.”

— Pastor Maurice Gadson

It also explains why some believers seem to see so much in a passage the rest of us read straight past. It is not that they are smarter. They have simply been keeping His Word long enough that He has been showing Himself to them the whole time. Depth in Scripture is not a gift handed to a few; it is what continuing produces in anyone who will stay.

Then the promise turns domestic: we will come to them and make our home with them. He is not asking for Wednesday and Sunday. He wants to walk with you through an ordinary day. So this week, take one verse into an ordinary Tuesday and keep it — not study it, keep it — and watch what He shows you.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Space is given below each question for journaling or small-group notes.

1. *Is my love for Jesus measured mostly by how I feel about Him, or by what I keep of His Word when no one is watching?*

2. *Where have I been waiting to understand Scripture before I obey it — and what has that delay already cost me?*

3. *Jesus promises to show Himself to those who keep His Word. What is one command of His that I understand completely and simply have not obeyed?*

4. *What would it look like to give Jesus more than Wednesday and Sunday this week — one concrete place in my ordinary day where I invite Him to make His home?*

DAY SIX · FROM HOROSCOPE TO CHRIST-SCOPE: LETTING TRUTH SHAPE YOUR VIEW

SCRIPTURE READING

ROMANS 12:2 (NIV)

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

There was a day when the opening line was, what’s your sign? Pastor Gadson told us that for a long stretch the question offended him, and now he welcomes it — because he no longer lives by the horoscope. He lives by what he calls the Christ-scope. Instead of studying stars that were only ever hung there to light the sky, he studies Jesus Christ, who tells him who he is compatible with, how to speak to people, and how to live. He tried it, he said, and found out it was right.

That is Romans 12 in plain clothes. Conformity is nothing more than fitting in with whatever everyone else is doing, and the world changes its shape every decade. Conform long enough and you end up looking like a dozen different things and no longer knowing which of them is you. Transformation runs the other direction — not by fitting in, but by the renewing of the mind.

His computer had quit cooperating, and the technician told him the problem was that he was running new work on an old system. He needed the update. That is the believer’s assignment: stop running the old operating system of sin and download God’s Word into heart and mind, until testing it and applying it produce clear judgment about what is good, pleasing and perfect. The psalmist said he had stored up God’s Word in his heart so that he would not sin — internalized until it becomes reflex, built in before the temptation arrives.

“I don’t go by the horoscope anymore. I go by the Christ-scope. I am no longer an observer of the stars — I am an observer of Jesus Christ. I tried it, and I found out it was right.”

— Pastor Maurice Gadson

Then he left us three questions, and they are the honest ones. Who is shaping my thinking? Who is shaping my values? Whose approval means more to me than anyone else’s? Most of us will answer Jesus. But whatever is truly influencing you is what you sound like, what you value, and whose approval you chase.

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. Without the Word, faith loses its foundation and its direction — there is no substance under your feet. So in your parenting, in your marriage, in your finances, ask it plainly this week: am I engaging Him, or am I imagining?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Space is given below each question for journaling or small-group notes.

1. *Who is actually shaping my thinking, my values, and whose approval matters most to me? Answer with real names and sources, not with the answer I wish were true.*

2. *Where am I still running an old operating system — a pattern of thinking I carried into faith and have never allowed God to update?*

3. *Faith comes by hearing the word about Christ. Where have I been calling something faith when it is really strong feeling with no Word underneath it?*

4. *In one specific area — parenting, marriage, money, or work — what will I take to Scripture this week instead of assuming I already know what Jesus would say?*

CLOSING PRAYER

A prayer gathering the week

Lord, we come to You this week with a confession we would rather not make. Some of what we have been calling a relationship with You has been built at a window — an image assembled from a distance, out of the pieces we liked, never tested against Your Word. We have loved a Jesus who never confronts us, never contradicts us, and never asks us to change. Forgive us. We do not want an image. We want You.

You are the Word who was in the beginning, the Word who was with God and who was God. Everything that exists was made through You. In You is life, and that life is the light by which we finally see our own darkness. And then, astonishingly, the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. You did not stay at a distance. You moved in. Teach us to stop choosing between the Book and the Person, because we cannot have one without the other.

Settle our hearts, Lord. We have been shopping — taking our questions to every voice that promises to make us feel resolved, tossed back and forth by every wind of teaching. Fix our position. Let us abide in Your Word until we know the truth, and let the truth make us free. And search out the side truths we have kept in reserve, the standards we reach for when Your Word asks more of us than we want to give. Cleanse our hands. Purify our divided hearts. Teach us to resist what flatters us and to draw near to You instead, trusting the promise that when we come near, You come near to us.

Grow our affection for Your Word. We confess that we have wanted to understand before we obey, and we have called that honesty when it was really delay. You have promised to show Yourself to the one who keeps Your commands — so meet us there. Make Your home with us. Do not let us settle for Wednesday and Sunday when You have offered to walk with us through every ordinary hour in between.

Renew our minds, Father. Take out the old operating system we keep running and write Your Word into us until it becomes reflex — stored up in our hearts so that we do not sin against You. Show us honestly who has been shaping our thinking, forming our values, and holding our need for approval. And where we have been living by every other scope but Yours, turn our eyes to Christ.

So here we are, Lord — in our parenting, in our marriages, in our finances, in our work. We do not want to imagine You. We want to know You. Let our faith come from hearing, and our hearing come from Your Word, and our living come from You. Be more real to us this week than anything we could have dreamed up on our own. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.