

**JUST LIKE**

**WESLEY**



## “A Heart Like His”—Chapter One

This chapter gets at what we Lutherans call “The Old Adam vs. The New Adam.” Do you know what that means? Let’s talk about “The Old Adam.” What does the terminology “The Old Adam” mean? Then what does the terminology “New Adam” mean? To better understand this concept, read **Ezekiel 36:22-27**. So...both “Adams” living in you? Doesn’t that sound like a daily war waiting to happen? Ummm...yep...doesn’t just sound like one, it is one!

So, in order to understand the “war” raging within the heart of every Christian (between the Old and New Adam) look at **Romans 7:13-25** and **Galatians 5:16,17**. How do those verses speak to the “Old Adam” and “New Adam” concept? Can you relate to what Paul writes there?

After reading **Romans 7/Galatians 5** above, consider these questions:

- What do these segments of Scripture say to you about your life as a sinful human living in this world?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Does Paul seem to be giving us an “out” for sin by blaming things on “the sin living in me”? In other words, is this just like saying “The devil made me do it!”? Why or why not?

- What curbs “sin living in” us? Talk about that first and then read **John 16:1-11** and **Hebrews 4:12,13**. By the way, don’t forget that the Lord has given a “curb” for sin to everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. Look that up in **Romans 2:14-16**. Talk about why God would do that. What’s the purpose of the “curb” placed in every person?

Look then at what God’s Word says about who you are in Christ: Read **Romans 6:1-4** and compare those words to **Colossians 2:6-15**...discuss what it means to “walk in newness of life” from **Romans 6** or to “...walk in Him” from **Colossians 2**.

Max gives us an apt illustration of God’s love for us through his daughter, Jenna, on pages 3,4. Does God love you less when you have “dirt in your mouth”? You know the answer. He loves you regardless...He loves you just the way you are. But as Max puts it, “he refuses to leave you that way.” That implies two things: 1) He is constantly working in your life and 2) He wants daily change to happen in your life. Talk about that.

But admitting that the Lord wants and brings change in our lives, also consider a very important passage for this discussion: **1John 1:8,9**. How does that passage inform our “Old Adam vs. New Adam” struggle and what is the “unsaid-said” in that passage? Let me ask it this way...is Jesus okay with you

clinging tight to your Old Adam? If there's any doubt about that, consider **Hebrews 10:26,27**.

Max writes "What if, for one day, Jesus were to become you?" page 3. Why is that the right idea but the wrong question? Talk about it first and then read **Galatians 2:20** and **Galatians 5:23-25**. So how does the presence of Christ play out in a person's life? Why don't some Christians act like they are Christians...what's going wrong in those instances?

# “Loving the People You are Stuck With”—Chapter Two

Have you ever experienced what Max Lucado calls “Stuckitis” or as he says it, felt “The Claustrophobia of Commitment”? Why is that “stuckness” especially an issue for Christian people?

Jesus loved some fairly unloveable people; people that frankly, others did not and would not love: “The Woman Caught in Adultery” found in **John 8:1-11** and “Zaccheus” in **Luke 19:1-10**. Notice particularly what Jesus says in **verse ten of Luke 19**. How do Christ’s words there speak to our topic for today? Let me ask it this way: If that’s what Christ came to do in our world and for us, then...what should we be doing for others?

Speaking of unlovable people...Jesus washed the feet of the often unlovable Apostles in **John 13:1-20**. Can you think of some instances where the Disciples themselves proved to be “unlovable?” After discussing those, consider a few stories: **Luke 9:51-56; Matthew 16:21-23; Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:24-27** (as you read the **Luke 22** segment, realize that they had just received the Lord’s Supper and they were discussing what?!!)

If the Disciples walked and talked with Jesus in person for three years and yet still acted in this unloveable way, what does that say about us, the Christ-followers of our day and time? Considering that truth however, remember again from the last chapter the words of **Galatians 2:20**.

In regard to this subject, why is it important to admit our own often unloveable nature? Why is it important to recognize your own sins and weaknesses and faults? Check **Matthew 7:1-5**.

While there are many nuances or facets to this discussion of being “stuck,” Max seems to make this whole thing about “Forgiveness.” That is certainly a major part of this discussion as it is something we deal with all the time. Check **Colossians 3:12-17** and the Lord’s Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-15**. When you read or say the Lord’s Prayer, recognize two things: 1) Jesus has us pray: “*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive...*” and 2) What does Jesus say about forgiveness then in **Matthew 6:14,15**? How serious is He there?

But besides the issue of forgiveness, I would suggest that the foot-washing event also speaks to the issue of our deep-seated pride. Why do you think I'd say that? After discussion, consider what Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:3,4**. Do we live like that?

Talk then about how hard it would be for a prideful person to wash the feet of someone else..especially someone they deemed lowly. After that...consider this passage: **1Peter 5:1-5**. Why is a humble spirit necessary for the Christian person to live "Just Like Jesus?" Go back to **Philippians 2** but to verses **five through seven**.

## **“The Touch of God”—Chapter Three**

This is one of those chapters that you'd have to be a very cold individual to not be moved by what Max wrote. While it's not Scripture, his description of how and what the leper would have felt was extremely moving. As you read it, perhaps you thought about a time when you felt like a “leper” or an “outcast”? Or perhaps you're thinking about someone else you've seen be treated that way?

On the flip-side, have you witnessed someone “being Jesus” for someone else? Have you seen someone act as Jesus did, reaching out to the person who no one else would reach out to? What did you witness? What difference did it make? Perhaps you've been Jesus for someone else...what were the circumstances?

Max rightly places an emphasis on the physical touch of Jesus. How have you witnessed the physical touch of a person making a huge difference? Do you think physical touch is a big deal? If so, how do we deal with the need for physical touch in a society that is paranoid and suspicious of our hugs, hand-holding, touch, etc.?



Jesus reached out to touch many people besides this leper. Check these stories and after you read each one, stop and discuss how the story highlights the touch of Jesus. What was He communicating through His touch? What other nuances to the touch of Christ do you see in them?

**Matthew 17:1-8:**

**Matthew 19:13-15:**

**Matthew 20:29-34:**

**Mark 7:31-37:**

**Luke 7:11-17:**

**Luke 22:47-53:**

**John 9:1-7:**

Jesus continues to touch people, touch us, yet today. Talk about how He does that and then consider these passages: **Acts 2:38-41; 1Corinthians 10:16; Hebrews 4:12,13.**

What you looked at in the previous question was what we call “Word and Sacrament Ministry.” The Lord Jesus really is still touching our lives through His Word and His Sacraments, Baptism and Communion. Having said that, Jesus also continues to touch people through us and our touch in their lives. I asked earlier “Have you ever witnessed a person being Jesus for someone else?” What about you? Have you been “Jesus” for someone else? When we reach out in the name of Jesus that is in fact what we’re doing, “being Jesus to them.” Read these passages: **James 2:1-5; James 5:13-15.**

Can you think of other ways you can reach out and “touch people” in the name of Jesus? How could you make a difference in your congregation this week? As you think about making a difference at your congregation...talk also about making a difference in your community too, not just your community of believers. How could you individually or collectively do something to “touch people” in the name of Jesus? Make a list in the space below:

Finally, can you think of someone specifically you need to reach out and touch personally...someone in your life who genuinely needs the love of Jesus in their lives right now? Pray for them and pray that God would order your steps to bringing healing into their lives.

## “Hearing God’s Music”—Chapter Four

Consider a time when you were talking to your children (or someone else’s if you don’t have any) and they weren’t really listening to you. How frustrated were you with them? What was your reaction to that situation? How did it make you feel? As you consider that...what does that say about the times we don’t listen to Jesus? How do you think the Lord looks at us when we do that?

In the study guide for chapter four we are told “We are to listen... like sheep.” What do you think it means to “Listen like sheep?” Talk about it as a group and then look at Christ’s words in **John 10:1-6; and vs. 27**. Talk about that section of Scripture: a) How do we hear Christ’s voice? b) How do we know the difference between His voice and Satan’s voice (or our own voice or the world’s voice)? Read **Isaiah 53:6a...** what does that say about us? Why, if we know our Good Shepherd, do we still run astray? As you think about going astray, consider the important words of **Romans 3:23,24**. Note, not just verse twenty-three, but twenty-three and twenty-four!

Of course one aspect of hearing the Lord is speaking to Him in prayer. Talk about your prayer life...how is it going for you? Good? Bad? Ugly? Wherever you are in your prayer life, what for you would make it stronger/better? After discussion, consider these texts about prayer...talk about each one individually:

**Luke 18:1-8:**

**Acts 1:12-14:**

**Acts 2:42-47:**

**Colossians 4:2-4:**

But talking to God is one thing...what about listening to God when you pray? Do you think you do that well? What would it be like if we held our tongue and simply “listened” to God as He speaks to your heart? Talk about that.

Now let's talk about God's Word speaking to us...Max asks some very pointed questions. Answer those questions honestly.

a) How's your Scripture memory?

b) How easy is it for you to locate a specific verse?

c) How well do you understand God's Word and how to apply it?

Look at **Psalm 119:103-105** now. What does that passage say to you about God's Word and its place in your life? As a group discuss what works well for you when it comes to keeping God's Word at the center of your life. After discussion read **Hebrews 4:12,13**. When you consider that passage, what are the benefits of God's Word for you? Talk about that.

Max talks about “letting God have us.” What do you think he means by that? Once you’ve discussed it, consider this text that speaks about “being had by God” and talk about how willing you are to live this text: **Matthew 16:24-26**.

**Read Romans 12:1-2.** What does Paul mean in verse two? What does it mean to be “transformed by the renewal of your mind” and how does our Lord do that for us? Talk about that. Paul makes an impressive list of those attributes that go along with a “transformed mind.” Read **Romans 12:9-20**. What “things” in those verses stick out to you?

## **“Being Led by an Unseen Hand”—Chapter Five**

Do you have a “closest friend,” one whom you either have now or at some time in the past? Talk about that friend, perhaps someone who knows you better than anyone else. What is your relationship like with them? How often do you think about them during the day and how much you look forward to seeing them? What does their relationship mean to you?

Perhaps needless to say, Max talks about a deep and intimate relationship in this chapter...but a deep and intimate relationship with...Almighty God. Think about that for a moment: You have a relationship with the Living God and Supreme Being of the Universe! What does it mean to have an “intimate relationship with God” and do you think you have that kind of relationship with Him?

Max’s study guide says this: “Have you ever found yourself feeling especially close to God on Sunday but miles away by Tuesday afternoon?” Talk about that...and answer his question, “Why does that happen so much?”



Okay, let's be inspired...look at these stories of believers who had very intimate relationships with the Lord and talk about the nuances of each one individually:

**Moses in Exodus 33:1-11:**

**Daniel in Daniel 6:1-10:**

**Hannah in 1Samuel 1:1-18:**

**Mary Magdalene in John 20:1-18:**

**Lazarus, Mary, Martha in John 11:1-44:**

How about this: Do you know someone in your life who has an intensely intimate relationship with Jesus? Talk about them.

Max uses three images to speak of our intimacy with the Lord Jesus: 1) Shepherd/Sheep, 2) Vine/Branch, and 3) Bridegroom/Bride. Let's look at these individually.

***Shepherd/Sheep:*** Read **John 10:11-18**. What does that text say about the relationship between our Good Shepherd and us His sheep? What great gospel is found in that text? What bold claim does Jesus make about laying His life down (**verse 18**)?

***Vine/Branch:*** Read **John 15:1-11**. What does this text say about the relationship between Jesus the Vine and us His branches? What does it say about an "intimate relationship?" The first few verses talk about pruning and bearing fruit? What does that mean for us as Christians living in relationship to Jesus?

***Bridegroom/Bride:*** Read **Isaiah 62:1-5; Ephesians 5:25-32**. Why would the Lord use this imagery with us? What does it say about His love for the whole church and what does it say about His love for you?

Of these three images, which one speaks most clearly to you and which one best defines the level of intimacy you have with the Lord Jesus? Talk about it, sharing individually and then pray for each other...pairing up perhaps... asking the Lord Jesus to increase your love for Him.

## **“A Changed Face and a Set of Wings”—Chapter Six**

In this chapter, Max talks about an excitement for “worship” or even a “longing” to return to God’s Word, preaching, singing and the Lord’s Supper. If you were honest, do you have an excitement and longing for worship every week? Are you excited for Saturday or Sunday to come? Are you in a “can’t wait” mode on weekends? Why or why not?

If I asked you what you felt was the single most important thing we do as Christians in our congregation...what would you say that “thing” was? Why would you answer that way?

If you asked me what the single most important thing that we do as Christians...I would answer “Worship.” Why do you think that would be the case for me, as Pastor? Why do you think I would I answer that way?

Max talks about a time that Moses' face glowed. Read that story found in **Exodus 34:29-35**. Talk about the nuances of that story and mine it for all it's worth. Why did his face glow/shine? What is it about God that caused that to happen? Why the veil and why was a veil "weird?" Think about this story in the same "light" ...**Luke 2:8-20** (especially **verse 9**).

Understand as you discuss Moses' experience that your face does glow after being in His presence in worship. How? Clearly not in the same way that Moses' face did...so how? After discussion, read **2Corinthians 3:12-18**. What does that text say and what does it mean? Max asks this great question: "Would anyone know by looking at you on Tuesday that you had been with the Master on Sunday?" What's your answer? And how would they know that?

An even deeper and more probing question would be, "Do you 'veil' your face during the week or do you let others see Jesus in you?" Are you hiding the glory of Christ at all? Talk about why we do that and how we can change that. **Read Matthew 5:13-16** and apply it to your daily life.

Max reminds us that the reason we may not be so enthused about worship is that our God isn't big enough...at least in our hearts and minds. One of the sentences on page 72 reads "We're sadly casual when it comes to meeting God." Do you think Max is right about that? Do we take God lightly? Take time to discuss that and then read that famous passage in **Isaiah 6:1-8**. Talk about the nuances of that passage.

Max gets at an important aspect of worship, namely that we may very well affect others in the worship environment with our lack of enthusiasm or joy. Do you think he's right about that? Does it matter? After all, that's just "Me and Jesus" time right? Think about the visitor. Think about the youth. Think about that person who came to worship with a lot of baggage and is sitting next to your "sour face." Talk about other aspects. Then read again Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:13-16** and apply them to your demeanor in worship.

**Read Psalm 34.** Max asks these questions, consider each one:

- How "big" does God seem in this passage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How many reasons are given for praising God? Make a list.

**Read Psalm 100.** You can't hardly read that Psalm without "the glory of the Lord" breaking out on your face! What reasons does the Psalmist give for praising God? There are at least two. Do you see others? Perhaps you could memorize this Psalm this week? It's not as hard as you think but at least memorize **verse five**.

## “Golf Games and Celery Sticks”--Chapter Seven

Max talks about playing golf with his friends and finding out that he was playing the wrong fairway and the wrong green. Ever found yourself in a situation like that? Think about one that is embarrassing but relatively harmless to you. What were the circumstances? What happened in the end of the “story”?

Now, messing up in a golf game (or something like it) is just a benign, harmless situation...have you ever been on the wrong track in a more serious way? What were the circumstances? What happened in the end of the story?

Okay, so Max is really getting at “being on track” by using your gifts, skills and abilities for the glory of God and the Kingdom of God. This brings up a very, very important subject: God intends that you are working for Him in His Kingdom...there are no spectators in the Kingdom work! Read the famous verses in **Ephesians 2:8-10**. What does verse ten say again? What are we created in Christ Jesus to do? What does that mean? BTW, what does the book of James have to say about “works?” Check **James 2:14-17** and talk about those verses.



Now, knowing that God has something for you to do, look at **Romans 12:3-8** and **1 Corinthians 12:4-11**. Without getting bogged down on the specific gifts named there, what are those two passages telling us about our individual lives lived in the Body of Christ? 1) What does it say about our individuality? And 2) what does it say about our connectedness in Christ?

Okay then, what's the purpose of our individual gifts? Talk about it and then look again at **1 Corinthians 12:7**. What? What did Paul say? You mean the Church doesn't exist for "ME, ME, ME, ME"? Consider Jesus words in **Mark 10:42-45**. What does that say to you today, especially **verse forty-five**?

What else are our gifts for? Talk about it first and then check **2 Corinthians 5:11-21**. What are we to use our gifts for? What does it mean to be an "ambassador" for Christ? What does it mean for us to "persuade" men and women and why do we do so? How do you...do we...do so? Talk about each of those.

Let me ask you two questions about being Christ's ambassadors:

1. Who have you invited to church recently? Remember, it is not the job of the Pastors to bring people to our church, it's Pastor's job to keep them when you bring them. Talk about that...(and as you do, consider who you'll invite to church next week).
  
2. Who have you shared the Gospel of Jesus with recently? All of us have different gifts, but all of us have the same job...sharing the Gospel of Jesus. Talk about a person you've spoken to about Jesus...but also talk about your struggles with that important task. What holds you back? What keeps you silent?

Read the story of Zaccheus again found in **Luke 19:1-10**. What aspects of that story speak to how we go about being ambassadors for Christ? If we are "Christians" or "Little Christs," what does verse ten say to us and our lives in this world?

Max writes a very important question: “When your heart and God’s heart comes together, what happens to your desires?” Talk about that...and perhaps think of it this way, “...what happens to your direction, your drive, your heart?”

## **“Nothing but the Truth”—Chapter Eight**

I am going to guess that Max may have just struck a chord with this chapter. Even though I doubt the folks reading this are a group of “forked-tongued-liars,” reality is, we have a habit of stretching the truth and exaggerating things to our benefit...ever caught a fish that was “this big” or for the golfers, ever said “put me down for a four” when you had a five or perhaps you’re a parent who’s embellished your child’s accomplishments to your friends? Why do we do that?

For those of you with children, lying is one of those non-negotiables. If our kiddos lie, we go through the roof! Yes? So, how come it’s okay for us to do so?...and we all do. So, how do you think it makes our Heavenly Father feel then when we do? Talk about that. Do you think God really cares about the little things like “fibs?”

Max talks about being a “witness.” Have you ever had to be a “witness” in court? What was that like and how is it similar to being a “witness” for Jesus?

At this point you need to know something...the word for “witness” in the New Testament is “martyr.” From what you know about the word “martyr,” talk about the implications of that word on your witness for Christ. After discussion, consider the fact that when you were confirmed you said “I will suffer all, even death, rather than give up my faith in Jesus.” How well does that sentence describe where you are right now in your faith? Talk about that and then read **Matthew 16:24-27** and discuss what a follower of Jesus or a witness is called to do.

Okay, since Max did...let’s talk some more about lying now. Max asks us to read **Ephesians 4:17-32**. He asks these questions...talk through each one:

1. Since Christians are members of one Body, is it worse to be dishonest with a fellow believer than those who are not?

2. How can you be dishonest with yourself?

3. Do you agree that lying should be linked with anger, theft, foul language, etc.?

Let me ask you this about the Ephesians section: What does it mean to “put off the old self” (**verse 22**) and how do you do that? What role does God play in the “putting off of your old self?” Talk about that and then consider these passages: **Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 5:19-24.**

Let’s talk about the consequences of lying. Max encourages us to read the story of Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5:1-11**. What is that story all about? Why would God do that to them? After discussion read another story about the consequences of lying found in **2Kings 5**. How are these stories similar? How are they different? What is at stake in each?

One of the kissing cousins of lying is gossip. Gossip is so horrible and so destructive and yet...so prevalent among God’s people. Why do we gossip about others? What is to be gained by doing so? Talk about that. Now, what can be lost by gossiping about someone? **Read Psalm 101** in this regard. In that Psalm, David is saying what...about lying or slandering? **Read verse 5a** again. How committed to putting a stop to gossip, slandering and lying is David?...and...how committed are you? Talk about it together.

Many of you have heard me say that I think God should make “green smoke” come from our mouths when we lie or engage in gossip. In other words, may Jesus make gossip and lying about and to one another as obvious and as abhorrent to us as it is to the Lord. Pray tonight that the Lord would make a bad taste in your mouth every time you do...a really bad taste.

Max talks about the green-house of the mind in this chapter. When we confess our sins we confess that we have sinned “in thought, word and deed.” Talk about these “big three” areas of sinfulness in your life. Which one is the most difficult for you to control and why? What one do you wish God would just take away from you?

I knew the answer to the above question, at least I think I know...it's your thoughts, right? You can keep your tongue more often than not. You can control your actions more often than not. But your thoughts...they just run rampant, yes? Since you're likely agreeing with me, let's think about what God's Word says about that: Look at **Genesis 6:5** and **Genesis 8:21a**. How bad is it according to those verses?

After reading the Genesis sections, consider this: Do you think that we sometimes soft-sell the depravity of our wicked hearts and thoughts? Do we sometimes either think it's "No big deal" or worse, think something like "Our thoughts aren't that bad." The answer is yes...we do soft-sell our sinfulness in general and thoughts specifically...why do we do that? Talk about it.



## “The Greenhouse of the Mind”—Chapter Nine

Max asks a very pointed question: “What kind of ‘seeds’ are you allowing to grow?” Consider this parable: **Matthew 13:24-30 and 13:36-43**. Now it’s not a parable about our thoughts...but what application to our thoughts could you make from it?

Max talks about having a “sentry” at the door of our hearts. In truth, every person, Christian or not, has a “sentry” at the door of their heart. Do you know why I’d say that? Consider the question first and then read this text: **Romans 2:12-16**. God has written the \_\_\_\_\_ on everyone’s heart...what goes in the blank? Why is that such an important gift from God, not just for the individual, but for the world?

But...you’re a Christian...so what other “Sentry” is on your heart? (This should be easy...yes?) **Read Romans 8:10-12; John 16:4b-10 and Ephesians 4:25-32**. In a sense, the “conscience” that we have been given from God is turbo-charged by the presence of the Holy Spirit within our bodies. Now, He makes you feel guilty and that’s hard...but it’s also very good for you...but He also does what for you? If He lives in you He will also walk with you, talk with you, motivate you, move you, mold you, shape you into the Christian He wants you to be. Talk about how that plays out in your life and how often you find yourself ignoring Him.

Max also makes an important point: “The Bible is the ‘checkpoint’ for your questionable thoughts.” Clearly the Holy Spirit within us is enough, but God is so good to us that He gave us His Holy Spirit driven Word too! Read an important set of verses in that regard: **Psalm 119:10-12 and Hebrews 4:12,13**. Talk about those verses and what they mean for you.

Armed with the Holy Spirit and God’s Word, what ultimately needs to happen in our lives? In other words, what do we need to do? After discussion, read **Proverbs 4:20-27**. What does that Proverb say about your responsibility here?

Okay, last but not least, you will ultimately have wicked thoughts and desires...it’s gonna happen! So, don’t forget these verses when it does: **1John 1:8,9**. As you consider how great those verses are, talk about what it means to you to be able to confess your sins and hear the forgiveness spoken to you by the Pastors and others.

## “Finding Gold in the Garbage”—Chapter Ten

In this chapter, Max basically gets at taking lousy things that come our way and turning them into positives...“Garbage to Gold” as he writes it. Talk about that. Are you good at doing that? Why or why not? Do you know people that can turn “gold” into “garbage”?

Max asks a couple of important questions that I think we should discuss:

1. Do you think you’ve had more or less troubles than the average person? Explain.

2. Why do you think we hang onto the pain and the hurt rather than look for the good in our troubles? Fully explore those questions.

Perhaps one of the single most amazing stories in the Bible is the story of Joseph and the coat of many colors. **Read Genesis 37:12-36.** Talk about that part of the story. What’s going on? Why did they do this to their brother? What did they think of him to do such a thing?

But now read “the rest of the story.” Remember that Joseph was imprisoned but ultimately was brought to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams and did so successfully by God’s Spirit. He proposes storing grain from the good years for the lean years and Pharaoh likes what he hears...now **read Genesis 41:37-57**. What did God do through Joseph? God made something good from something very bad...talk then about what you know about the rest of the story.

Now read **Genesis 45:4-15 (especially verse 8a)**. What? What did Joseph say? You see, it’s one thing to believe that God can make “gold from garbage” in our lives when you’re just talking about the “stuff” that comes our way. But what about when God brings the “stuff” or the “garbage”? What do you think about that? Do you think God does that? Once you’ve considered that, also think about what Jesus said concerning the man born blind in **John 9:1-3**... why was he blind? Why did that “garbage” come his way?

So...wherever you landed on that answer, consider the example that Max uses in the chapter, namely, the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus. In one sense it was human beings bringing this horrible stuff on Jesus...look at Christ’s words in **Matthew 26:1-5** and then the texts in **Matthew 26:14-16 and Matthew 26:47-56**. Sure sounds like the fault of the crucifixion lies with the people surrounding Jesus, yes? Talk about that.

After discussion though, read what Peter says in Acts at the Pentecost event: **Acts 2:22-24**. What did Peter say about the “delivering up” of Jesus? Who did it? Was it the men? Talk about the implications of that truth.

No matter where the “garbage” comes from, God can make “gold” out of it in your life. Satan can try to trip you up; the world might bring you sin-connected trials; God might bring things your way; but He can and He will make positive wonderful growth come from those things. Consider **James 1:2-4** and the famous verse in **Romans 8:28**.

## “When Heaven Celebrates”—Chapter Eleven

If you had to name the top three strengths of your particular congregation, what would they be? (You don't have to write them down necessarily, just discuss them) Okay then, what would be your church's top three weaknesses?

Of course I don't know what you wrote down, but I know what would top my list. Instead of giving you my own top threes...let me just challenge you on one of the greatest weaknesses in every congregation: Reaching the lost for Jesus Christ. Congregation strengths are generally things like: Family ministries; nurturing our own and physically taking care of hurting people; worship; Bible study; fellowship opportunities...but reaching people for Jesus in our personal lives isn't exactly our strength...regardless of the congregation. Agree? Disagree? Why or Why not?

I bring it up because Max gets at that in this chapter. But before we dive into the idea, let's remember where God's heart is on this subject: Read **1Timothy 2:1-7** (esp. **verse 4**). Talk about those verses.

So since this isn't generally our Corporate-Body of Christ strength, what do we need to glean from this chapter to get better at reaching the lost? Let me give you a few things to chew on:

1. First of all we need to remember that those we are witnessing to don't see Christianity as the "party" that Max describes it as. Check this truth in Max's own admission in the story as he tells it on page 131 and 132...talk about that part of the story. This is very important as it gets at what people think of the Christian faith in general...so...what do you think most people think of Christianity? Talk about that. After discussion read these stories and discuss what it seems the individuals thought about the Christian faith in their time but do your best to apply them to how people think about Christianity today: **Matthew 19:16-22; Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 9:46-48; Luke 9:49-58; John 11:17-27**. Can you think of other Biblical stories that speak to how people view Christianity today? Look those up if you come up with some.
  
2. We hesitate to witness our faith in Jesus for any number of reasons, yes? But consider these truths that you know but need to be reminded of: a) If we don't share Jesus with them, following their own pathways, they may never know Him as their Savior: **Matthew 7:13**...(sadly, people like easy paths, yes?) b) We know the great grace we've been given and that they need it: **2Corinthians 5:11-21**. c) We know that if they don't know Jesus they'll be separated from Him forever: **2Thessalonians 1:5-12**, particularly **verses 9,10**.

3. As you consider your hesitation, also remember these truths however:
  - a) We've talked about this before but God will speak through you: **Luke 21:10-19**.
  - b) You're not responsible to bring anyone to faith, God is. **Read 1Corinthians 12:1-3 and 1Peter 1:3**.
  - c) God's Word and the Gospel are powerful and active and alive: **Romans 1:16.17 and Romans 10:17**.
  - d) To the point above, the Lord also really, really wants them to be saved! Re-read **1Timothy 2:1-4** and this time add **2Peter 3:8-10** (esp. **verse 9**). In this regard think of who Jesus died for! Check **1John 2:1-2**.

Okay, Max asks some very important questions that we need to ask ourselves... take time to talk about them:

1. Is it your main purpose in life to bring others to the "party?" How many people have you introduced to Christ so far?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Think of someone you know who needs the Lord. How might you be used to introduce this person to Christ? Are you asking God to give you a new heart of love for this person? If not, why not?



## “Finishing Strong”—Chapter Twelve

This chapter from Max is very interesting. To begin with, he causes us to stop and look at our Savior Jesus and not only His own amazing “race” in our world, but His amazing ability to “finish” that race as Max says it. A couple things about that: 1) Remember, you’re not Jesus. Why do I need to give you that reminder? 2) Also remember, what Christ came into this world to do was going to be done regardless of what came His way. While Jesus was indeed fully human, He was also fully divine and was therefore going to finish His race no matter what. God did not send His Son into the world to fail. Talk about that.

Max does talk about the difficulties Jesus faced and that’s an important reality for us to remember. While what I said above is true, nonetheless Jesus really did experience the intense and unbelievable “press” of His duty as our Savior. Consider the Garden of Gethsemane in that regard: **Luke 22:39-46**. Why is that fact and event important to remember? Once you’ve talked about that, look at **Hebrews 4:14-16** as a reminder of who our Savior was for us.

All that said, what about you? What about you finishing strong? Let’s first admit that we will always struggle with our faith-lives in this world. Look at **John 16:33** and Christ’s words there. Inevitably, if we have “tribulations” we will have highs and lows in our faith-lives as well. We are called to be stable and steady, but the reality is we are often unstable and wobbly in our faith. Check **James 1:5-7** and talk about what that passage is saying and not saying all at the same time.

In order to gain biblical balance here, we need to remember what I call “the reality of our reality,” namely, that we are both sinners and saints. **Read 1John 1:8-2:2; Romans 7:7-20.**

The truth about this chapter of Max’s book is that he’s pointing to Jesus but pointing to Jesus as our “example.” Jesus isn’t just our “example.” In fact, that conclusion to his book is about “fixing your eyes on Jesus”, which is biblical of course, but betrays his “Christ as example” intent. Now, is Jesus our example? Yes, He is that, in fact look at Christ’s own words in **John 13:1-15**. But Jesus is way more than an example for us! He is the reason we are able to finish well! **Read Galatians 2:20** first and then check **Matthew 28:16-20** and Christ’s promise there.

Last but certainly not least, look at **Matthew 16:24-27** and be reminded of our calling as Christians but also what that calling means.



