

# The **RED** Letters

edited by Joel F. Hoyer 9/13

“I love Jesus, but not the church.” In recent years, a number of Christian authors have diagnosed this sentiment at work in our post-Christian culture. The following arrangement of the words of Jesus is your opportunity to encounter the real Jesus through the words He actually spoke. Today it’s not uncommon to hear somebody say: “My Jesus wouldn’t say that.” Or “My Jesus isn’t like that.” How do you know? Do you have the right to create Jesus in your own image, or is it instead our privilege, to get to know the Jesus Who actually came into this world for us? And what better way to do that than through His own words? Printing the words of Jesus in red has been a feature of Bible translations for over 100 years. It was inspired, as you might expect, from the symbolism of the **blood** of Christ shed for you. As others have said before, I pray that the “**Red Letters**” might become the “read letters.”

In the **Red Letters** you are going to find that Jesus makes absolutely exclusive claims. He is not content to be known as a good moral teacher or a prophet. He is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is the One Who has the authority to forgive sins and retain sins; to challenge church leaders and to redefine commandments; to lay down His life and to take it up again. You must examine His claims, the reliability of the New Testament writers who recorded His claims, how the **Red Letters** connect to what you experience in life and ultimately decide what to do with them.

If you are reading this on your own, I would encourage you to find somebody else to experience it with, whether with a spouse, your family or a small group. I’ve organized the **Red Letters** into various categories that seemed to stand out. Where we have duplicate accounts in the different gospels, I’ve attempted to choose the clearest one. Of course, many of the **Red Letters** could cross into multiple categories, and many would stand on their own. Some will surprise you. Some may shock you, horrify you, challenge you. Others will comfort you, strengthen you, and give you hope.

Warm up thoughts and questions will begin each session and discussion questions will be sprinkled throughout each section, as well as questions for personal and congregational evaluation. I encourage you to take the **Red Letters** slowly and deliberately. Jesus is speaking to you. What if He really meant the things He said? What if you decided to live your life as if He did?”

### **Notes for those hosting a small group**

Our good God promises “where two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them.” Hold God to His promise as you open His word and meet with His people. God will be with you. As you prepare to facilitate your group, here are a few helpful tips to keep in mind.

1. Before each class session read slowly and prayerfully through all the **Red Letters** of that section, and become familiar with the questions presented in the session. Don't worry if you don't have time to cover them all. Let people finish on their own.
2. It may be helpful to listen to Pastor J's sermon on that **Red Letter** section which will be posted at: [www.gracecoopersville.org](http://www.gracecoopersville.org)
3. Make a commitment to start and end each session at an agreed upon time to honor each other's schedules. These materials are designed for approximately 1½ hours.
4. When you ask a discussion question, be patient. Don't answer it yourself. Let the group think it over for a minute or two. These questions are designed to get discussion going as we respond to the words of Jesus, not necessarily to produce “correct” answers.
5. Don't try to “know it all.” If you don't have the answer to someone's question, admit it. Promise to search for the answer later and follow through, perhaps asking your pastor and/or doing research in Bible commentaries and the internet. Understand that sometimes there are no clear answers to all our questions.
6. Ask for God's help in your preparation and for your group. Make sure to open and close your meetings in prayer. Offer the opportunity as you close the meeting for others in the group to pray out loud if they are comfortable doing so.

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## Letters of Repentance

*“Repentance” isn’t exactly a concept well received in our culture today. It requires the admission that you are doing something wrong, and of course it requires a change of behavior and a change of heart. As you get started, spend some time talking about examples of public figures who have recently had to publically “repent” of their bad behavior. What did you think about the sincerity of their repentance? Did they truly apologize, or did they blame others and make excuses?*

“20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you. 25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” (Matthew 11:20–25 NIV)

Do you think the average person’s image of Jesus includes His denouncing of cities that did not repent and believe in Him?

Why do you think Jesus praised the Father for hiding things from the wise and learned?

“14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”” (Mark 1:14–15 NIV)

What is the “Good News”? And why must it always include repentance?

“1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

6 Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

8 “ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” (Luke 13:1–9 NIV)

What do you learn here about the patience of Jesus?

1 Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

8 “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’

20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

31 “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” (Luke 15:1–32 NIV)

<p>What does it tell you that God throws parties in heaven for those who repent? What was the older brother’s problem? How is he like some church people today?</p>
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19 “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 1:19–2:7 NIV)

12 “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it” (Revelation 2:12–17 NIV)

The “Nicolaitans” were a gnostic sect in the first and second centuries that taught that the law of God was no longer binding and that we could basically behave however we wanted as long as we believed in Jesus. As the early church was getting started, can you imagine how Jesus might have felt about that kind of teaching creeping in? Do you see it creeping in today?

18 “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): 25 Only hold on to what you have until I come.

26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—  
27 ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ — just as I  
have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give him the morning star. 29 He who has  
an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 2:18–29 NIV)

1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven  
spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but  
you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your  
deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and  
heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not  
know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me,  
dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I  
will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my  
Father and his angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”  
(Revelation 3:1–6 NIV)

14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful  
and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor  
hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor  
cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth  
and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and  
naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and  
white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes,  
so you can see.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at  
the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with  
him, and he with me.

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame  
and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit  
says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:14–22 NIV)

The Greek for repent is literally to “change mind.” In what ways is Jesus asking us to change  
our minds in these **Red Letters**?

What are the consequences of not “changing our minds” about life?

What gets in the way of our repenting?

What are the rewards of repentance?

What do you think needs to change about your  
life if you were to take these **Red Letters**  
seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your  
church if we are to take these **Red Letters**  
seriously?

## Letters of Forgiveness

*We love to receive forgiveness. And we have it because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Are we ready to give it? 77 times? Talk about a time when you have received or given forgiveness of an extraordinary nature. What came from that event?*

“1 Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. 2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “**Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.**”

3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”

4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “**Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? 5 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .**” Then he said to the paralytic, “**Get up, take your mat and go home.**” 7 And the man got up and went home. 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “**Follow me,**” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, “**It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**” (Matthew 9:1–13 NIV)

Do you think Jesus would have been content to forgive the paralytic and not heal him physically if the teachers of the law had not been there?

Which do you think would have been more comforting to the paralytic?

Why did Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?

12 “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:12–18 NIV)

Why is it sometimes easier to post our brother’s sins on Facebook than to have a private conversation with him/her?

How did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors?

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”” (Matthew 18:21–35 NIV)

What makes it so hard to forgive? What sometimes makes it hard to receive forgiveness?  
Does your image of Jesus include this uncompromising treatment of those who refuse to forgive?

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely not I, Lord?”

23 Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”” (Matthew 26:20–29 NIV)

What do you make of the fact that Jesus went on to offer His Body and Blood to Judas? That betrayal was happening on the night of the instituting of The Lord’s Supper?

“36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

40 Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.

41 “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”” (Luke 7:36–50 NIV)

“Who is this who even forgives sins?”

In what way(s) can you see yourself in this woman? In what way(s) can you see yourself as Simon?

“1 Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.

3 So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”” (Luke 17:1–4 NIV)

Have you ever personally forgiven your brother seven times in one day? The limit of the Jewish teachers at the time was three. What’s yours?

“Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.” (Luke 23:34 NIV)

Do you think even with Jesus example before your eyes, that you would be able to speak forgiveness out loud to someone who had just nailed you to a cross? Would you even think of it?

42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

43 Jesus answered him, “**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.**” (Luke 23:42–43 NIV)

Can you imagine repentance and forgiveness asked for and given in a more simple and complete fashion? Do you think most people see it in this way? Have you?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Truth

*Jesus came to “testify to the truth” – not your version or my version; THE TRUTH. Are we willing to receive it? “Postmoderns” are notorious for not believing in absolute truth. What makes it so difficult for people today to do so?*

“20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (John 3:20–21 NIV)

They say “Nothing good happens after midnight.” Can you give some examples of that truth? Give some other examples of the connection between truth and light.

“16 Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. 17 If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18 He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. 19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?”

25 At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? 26 Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? 27 But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from.”

28 Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, 29 but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.”

(John 7:16–19, 25–29 NIV)

How does Jesus suggest we find out whether or not his teaching comes from God? (v. 17) In what ways is this ultimately the best judge?

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

33 They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

34 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. 38 I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

39 “Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.

41 You are doing the things your own father does.” “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not

believe me! 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? 47 He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

48 The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

49 "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. 50 I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

52 At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

57 "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:19-58 NIV)

As you can see, Jesus' relationship with the Jewish leadership was often shall we say, somewhat contentious... Try, if you can, to put yourself in Jesus' sandals. Being "The Way, the Truth and the Life," how hard would it be to come to your people and be received by them the way He was?

In what way(s) can you really not "know the truth" until you hold to the teaching of Jesus?

Jesus and the Jewish leaders exchange accusations of demon-possession here. In what way(s) is lying a demonic activity? Does that help to explain some of the lying you've encountered in your life? Does it help to explain why the Truth of God's Word is not being accepted in our day?

"I tell you the truth,..." (Matthew 5:18, 26; 6:2,5,16; 8:10; 10:15, 23, 42; 11:11; 13:17; 16:28; 17:20; 18:3, 13, 18; 19:23, 28; 21:21, 31; 23:36; 24:2, 34, 47; 25:12, 40, 45; 26:13, 21, 34; Mark 3:28; 8:12; 9:1, 41; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30; Luke 4:24; 9:27; 12:37, 44; 18:17, 29; 21:3, 32; 23:43; John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24, 25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20, 21, 38; 14:12; 16:7, 20, 23; 21:18)

The Gospel writers recorded over 75 instances of Red Letters saying, "I tell you the truth..." Do you think that was just a figure of speech with Jesus? Did the people understand it that way (Matthew 7:28-29)?

12 “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:12-15 NIV)

How does it feel to know that the Holy Spirit guided the disciples and the Gospel writers “into all truth”?

““You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”” (John 18:37 NIV)

Why did Jesus come into the world? What does that mean?

Surveys continually say that less than 30% of the American people believe in absolute truth. What does that say about how Jesus is being received today?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Invitation

*Jesus invites us to receive his love and forgiveness. He also invites us to His mission. When is the last time you got an invitation through the mail? How did it make you feel? Did it include an RSVP? Did you?*

“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. **“Follow me,”** he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.” (Matthew 9:9 NIV)

Jews who cooperated with the Romans to collect taxes from their own people were reviled beyond any other group. How do you think Matthew felt about his tax collector’s job? How do you think he felt about the invitation of Jesus?

How did observers think about it? What did Jesus think about their thoughts?

“4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, **“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”**

5 Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, **“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”** 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.” (Luke 5:4–11 NIV)

What’s comforting about the invitations of Jesus? What’s frightening?

Have you sensed any life-changing invitations from Jesus? What did you do with them?

“38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, **“What do you want?”** They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” 39 **“Come,”** he replied, **“and you will see.”** So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

40 Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).

42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, **“You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas”** (which, when translated, is Peter).

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, **“Follow me.”**” (John 1:38–43 NIV)

What do you make of the simplicity of these first invitations?

“16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, “**My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.**” 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 19 Jesus gave them this answer: “**I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.**” 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. 22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. 24 “**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.**” 25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.” (John 5:16–27 NIV)

Not all invitations are created equal. Jesus is giving eternal invitations that even the dead cannot ignore. Where does life come from? How do we get it and keep it?

We get a peek into the Trinity here. What specifically do you learn about the relationship between the Father and the Son?

How did the Jewish leaders feel about these **Red Letters**?

How absolute a statement is v. 24? How comforting is it to know that we can have eternal life starting even before we die?

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**”” (John 8:12 NIV)

What are the benefits of answering the invitation of Jesus?

In what specific ways does following Jesus keep you out of the darkness?

“4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

5 He called out to them, “**Friends, haven’t you any fish?**” “No,” they answered.

6 He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, “**Bring some of the fish you have just caught.**”

11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

22 Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”” (John 21:4–23 NIV)

What a fascinating repeat of one of the first invitations of Jesus to these fishermen. To what is Jesus inviting Peter? To what specific end?

Tradition says that Peter did not think himself worthy to die the death of Christ, so they crucified him upside down. If Jesus invited you to join in His death of crucifixion, would you consider it an honor?

Could you ever see a day where Christian citizens of the United States could be persecuted for following Jesus?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these Red Letters seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these Red Letters seriously?

## Letters of Confrontation

*Confronting is difficult for many of us in a permissive society. Not so for Jesus.  
Can you think of a time as a child when your parents confronted you with something you did  
wrong? How did it feel? What did you learn from the experience?*

1 He then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. 6 “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 7 “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” 10 Haven’t you read this scripture: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” 12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.” (Mark 12:1–9 NIV)

Can you wonder why the Jewish leaders got angry at Jesus? They were clearly the tenants left in charge... of what? What was their job? How did they do at it? How did they handle confrontation? How do we?

“18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” 24 Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” (Mark 12:18–27 NIV)

Why do you think Jesus didn’t ever seem to make an attempt to “go easy” on the Jewish leaders in their confrontations?

Does it bother you that marriage isn’t going to be quite the same in heaven? Can we trust God to take care of those details?

“22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

23 Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

24 “I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”

(Luke 4:22–30 NIV)

To the Jewish leaders who felt themselves privileged simply because of their race, Jesus pointed out that race was never what God was about. Do you think U.S. Christians have similar conceits that need to be confronted? Your particular Christian brand?

“39 Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give what is inside [the dish] to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

42 “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

43 “Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

44 “Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it.”

45 One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”

46 Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

47 “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. 48 So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. 49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.”

52 “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”

Luke 11:53 When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, 54 waiting to catch him in something he might say. (Luke 11:39–54 NIV)

What issues was Jesus specifically confronting with the Jewish leaders?

Did Jesus tell us in v. 42 that we don't have to give God a tenth of our income?

What unnecessary "burdens" do religious institutions sometimes lay on their members?

What is the "key to knowledge"? How do you "enter" into it?

Knowing that this confrontation would result in fierce opposition by the Pharisees and teachers of the law, why do you think He bothered?

54 He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. 55 And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. 56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"

57 "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.'" (Luke 12:54–59 NIV)

What should the Jewish leaders have been about to interpret about their present time?

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

45 Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. 46 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

47 Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. 48 Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words." (Luke 19:37–48 NIV)

In this sad confrontation, Jesus was prophesying the complete destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans that took place in 70 A.D. What was Jesus ultimately saying to the Pharisees?

“3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “**If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**” 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “**Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?**” 11 “No one, sir,” she said. “**Then neither do I condemn you,**” Jesus declared. “**Go now and leave your life of sin.**” (John 8:3–11 NIV)

<p>How many style points do you give to this confrontation of Jesus with the Church leaders? With the woman?</p> <p>How do you think this woman responded to Jesus’ invitation to a different kind of life?</p>
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<p>What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these <b>Red Letters</b> seriously?</p>	<p>What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these <b>Red Letters</b> seriously?</p>
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## Letters of Relationship

*Only from Jesus are we going to get “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”  
What kind of prayers do you usually pray about those who persecute you?  
What is the closest relationship you have ever had with anyone? How does it compare to your  
relationship with Jesus?*

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

31 “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:21–48 NIV)

Talk about the radical difference in thinking Jesus is introducing regarding:		
Murder	Who is responsible for starting the process of reconciliation?	
Adultery	Divorce	Oaths
Revenge	Enemies	Court cases

“48 He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”” (Matthew 12:48–50 NIV)

In what ways is your church family like your real family? Better? Worse?

“3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

7 “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

8 Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

10 The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

11 Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”” (Matthew 19:3–12 NIV)

Here our society runs into some great big **Red Letters** when it comes to marriage. How does Jesus define marriage? On what does He base His definition?

Jesus spoke these **Red Letters** in the days of the Roman empire when homosexual relationships were quite common. Why do you think He doesn’t leave room here for gay marriage?

If marriage is to be for only two, what do you do with the polygamous relationships of many of the patriarchs? (hint: v. 8?)

In what ways does “hardness of heart” still go hand in hand with divorce today?

“3 Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

4 Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”” (Mark 6:3–4 NIV)

Why might it have been difficult for folks in Jesus' hometown and some of his own relatives to believe in Him?

“4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

6 “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”” (Mark 14:4–9 NIV)

Once again, this prophecy of Jesus has just been fulfilled. What does the gracious reception of this gift say about Jesus? What does the indignant attitude say about the others?

“48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

49 “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:47–51 NIV)

These are the first recorded **Red Letters** of Jesus. How did He use them?

“23 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? 26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 27 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”” (Luke 9:23–27 NIV)

Are there any crosses that we actually bear for Christ? If not, why not?

“3 When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

4 “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”” (John 2:3–5 NIV)

This is just a fascinating exchange. If Jesus’ time had not yet come, why did He go ahead and perform a miracle? Why **did** Mary involve Jesus?

“26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “**Dear woman, here is your son,**” 27 and to the disciple, “**Here is your mother.**” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:26–27 NIV)

Talk about:

The honor showed to John.

The selfless love to take care of this detail while hanging from the cross.

The relationship between Jesus and his mother Mary.

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters that Rock the Boat

*Jesus was “anti-establishment” way before it was cool. In what ways must Christians be “anti-establishment” in our culture today? What is the most difficult thing about standing for things the rest of society no longer stands for?*

“14 Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

15 Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

16 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:14–17 NIV)

In a religious culture that was constantly looking back, how threatening are these **Red Letters**?

“1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

3 He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. 5 Or haven’t you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. 7 If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

11 He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.” (Matthew 12:1–14 NIV)

Separating the grain from the chaff was considered “work” by the Pharisees, and so a sin against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment. Was there a bigger way for Jesus to rock their religious boat than to take it upon Himself to redefine one of the Ten Commandments?

In what way(s) does the principle “it is lawful to do good” change the way the Sabbath Day can be observed?

“1 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

3 Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ 5 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ 6 he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8 “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. 11 What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”

12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

13 He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

15 Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

16 “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. 17 “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean.’” (Matthew 15:1–20 NIV)

How important was “tradition” to Jesus? How important was the “Word of God”?

Can you identify any “traditions” that you or your church might be holding onto a little tighter than Jesus would want us to?

“12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 “It is written,” he said to them, “ ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’” (Matthew 21:12–13 NIV)

What does it mean that Jesus claimed the authority to tell the Jewish leaders how to run the temple?

“38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42 NIV)

Jesus was not afraid to rock the boats of personal friends. What was Martha's problem/problems? How do you think she felt about this exchange?

“15 The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”” (Luke 13:15–16 NIV)

“3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”  
4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.  
5 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” 6 And they had nothing to say.” (Luke 14:3–6 NIV)

Why do you think the Sabbath issue got rocked so often by Jesus?

“9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

14 “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”  
15 The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”” (Acts 10:9–15 NIV)

Along with the Sabbath, and important traditions, there were many rules that had been laid down in the Old Testament for the Jewish people about what kind of animals they could eat and what kind they couldn't eat. These important Red Letters come to Peter from Jesus after His Ascension. Why do you think Jesus was ready to set us free from those restrictions?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these Red Letters seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these Red Letters seriously?

## Letters of Stewardship

*“A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Do we need to hear that truth in our possession-obsessed culture today? What possessions are you especially happy to have? What do you think you’d miss most if Jesus asked you to give it up?*

1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1–4 NIV)

In the early Greek culture, a “hypocrites” was an actor. By the first century, the word had come to represent those who only pretended to be something. Why do you think it’s so hard for people to give to the needy without getting recognized for it?

A trumpet is only blown once. How often is a plaque that declares who gave the item?

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Matthew 6:16–24 NIV)

Does Jesus seem to think it might be a good thing to fast? In what way?

In what ways can we store up treasure in heaven?

In what ways have you “served money”? How can you make sure you don’t?

“16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

17 “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

18 “Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied, “ ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

20 “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

21 Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

26 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”” (Matthew 19:16–26 NIV)

What mistaken ideas did the rich man bring to Jesus?

Again, why do you think Jesus was so hard on him?

Why is it so hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God?

Are you rich? How can you be saved?

“2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 3 “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”

9 Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables

12 so that, “ ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”

13 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy.

17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”” (Mark 4:2–20 NIV)

These **Red Letters** seem to be talking about our Stewardship of the Word of God. Are there things we can do to make our hearts more receptive to the Word?  
What is it about wealth that is deceitful?  
What kind of crops can we produce when we hear the Word and accept it?

**“15 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”**

**16 And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’**

**18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’**

**20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’**

**21 “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”” (Luke 12:15–21 NIV)**

What is the “American Dream”? Is it God’s dream for you?  
Why do you think it’s so important to Jesus that you learn how to be “rich toward God”?  
In what ways have you been rich toward God?  
In what ways have you stored up things for yourself?

**“9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.**

**10 “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?**

**13 “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”**

**14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight. 16 “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. 17 It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.” (Luke 16:9–17 NIV)**

Give some examples of things that are “highly valued among men” that are “detestable in God’s sight?

Talk about the fact that Jesus connects “worldly wealth” with “very little.”  
What are true riches?

14 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19 “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

21 “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

22 “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

23 “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

24 “Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

26 “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

28 “ ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 25:14–30 NIV)

A talent is the huge measure of 75 lbs of gold. (Just for kicks, if somebody has a smart device, look up the current price of gold per ounce, then extrapolate to see how much a talent of gold might be worth today.) This is not chump change Jesus is talking about. What are the principles he wants us to glean from this parable?

Why does Jesus call the servant who buried his talent “worthless”?

“26 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.’” (John 6:26–27 NIV)

What would Jesus say to the prosperity gospel preachers today?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Discipleship

*“Disciples” are those who learn from their master and do what their master says.  
What is the most “disciplined” thing you’ve ever done? How did it make you feel?*

“1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:1–12 NIV)

Which of these “blessed”s is the most difficult to reconcile with the world you see around you every day? Which is the hardest for you to do as a disciple of Jesus? Have you ever been insulted, persecuted or slandered for the sake of Jesus? If not, why not?

6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6 NIV)

These seemingly disconnected **Red Letters** fall in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. What do you think they mean?

“12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. 13 Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:12–14 NIV)

In what ways have you benefited when you have lived by the “golden rule”? In what ways has it cost you?

What emotions do you feel when you hear that “only a few” find the “narrow road that leads to life”?

“5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. 9 Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; 10 take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

11 “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. 12 As you enter the home, give it your greeting. 13 If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. 15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. 16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

17 “Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. 18 On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

21 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

26 “So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32 “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn ““a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— 36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’

37 “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

40 “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”” (Matthew 10:5–42 NIV)

So, “All men will hate you because of me” etc. Who wants to sign up? Everything Jesus describes here has been happening to and through Christians in every generation since He came. We have been extremely fortunate to escape most of it in the United States up to this time. Do you see that changing? In what ways?

In what ways are we not worthy of Christ? In what way are we worthy?

33 “No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. 34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.” (Luke 11:33–36 NIV)

What kind of light is Jesus talking about?

What kinds of darkness try to invade the light of Christ in our lives? How do we stop it?

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

8 “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. 9 But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

11 “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.” (Luke 12:6–12 NIV)

What kinds of things might Christians be facing in the years to come that might cause us to be afraid? Why shouldn’t we be afraid?

Once again, what kind of claims is Jesus making for Himself here?

Why is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit unforgivable?

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

31 “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

34 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Luke 14:25–35 NIV)

Isn’t this a little extreme? Have you given enough thought to laying the foundation of your Christian faith and what it would cost to be a disciple of Christ?

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:1-8 NIV)

In what ways is a statement like this WAY beyond anything a simple rabbi or teacher would convey to his disciples?

In your experience, can you connect the unfruitful times in your life with times you have disconnected from Christ, the vine?

18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates me hates my Father as well. 24 If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25 But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’ 26 “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” (John 15:18–27 NIV)

If the average person actually read all these Red Letters about discipleship, do you think he would still be inclined to “like Jesus” and be His follower?

What does Jesus think about a casual commitment to Him?

What comforts you about the thought that the Counselor, the Spirit of truth, is testifying to you about Jesus?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these Red Letters seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these Red Letters seriously?

## Letters of Mission

*A commitment to Christ is a commitment to the cause of Christ.*

*Have you ever been part of writing a “mission statement” for any organization? What was it like? Have you ever written a personal mission statement? What kinds of things might you want to include?*

**13** “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. **14** “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13–16 NIV)

How comfortable is it for you to be seen as shining the light of your discipleship from a high stand that all can see?

Have you or Christians around you gone underground in your discipleship in any way?

**36** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. **37** Then he said to his disciples, “**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**” (Matthew 9:36–38 NIV)

What motivates Jesus to want more disciples?

What motivates you?

**17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** Then Jesus came to them and said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” (Matthew 28:17–20 NIV)

How much authority does Jesus claim?

Do Christians have the option of not making disciples?

What is the most intimidating part of the “Great Commission” for you? What is the most comforting?

**5** When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “**Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.**” **6** So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

**7** All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

**8** But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

**9** Jesus said to him, “**Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.**” (Luke 19:5–10 NIV)

According to these **Red Letters**, what was the reason Jesus came into this world? Why do you think the Jewish leaders had lost that purpose?

“31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

33 Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.” (John 4:31–38 NIV)

Who has done the hard work Jesus is talking about? What is the harvest?  
How would Jesus “finish the work” of God the Father?

“4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

6 So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:4–8 NIV)

What does a “witness” do? How is that term a little less intimidating than an “evangelist”?  
Do we have a choice whether we are witnesses or not?

9 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth...

13 About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

15 “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. 16 ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” (Acts 26:9, 13-18 NIV)

What was the mission Jesus gave to Saul? Is it any different from the mission of any disciple of Jesus?  
What exactly is happening when someone believes in Jesus?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Warning

*There are more **Red Letters** in this category than any other. Why? Have you ever disobeyed a warning sign and gotten in trouble for it? What did you learn from the experience?*

15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ 24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:15–27 NIV)

What “false prophets” have we seen in our day? What kind of “bad fruit” have they born?

What is the ultimate warning Jesus is giving here to those who are only outwardly religious?

“36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.”

39 He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:36–42 NIV)

Do you think most people think about having to “give account for every careless word” when they open their mouths to speak? Do you?

Who is Jesus to claim He is greater than Solomon? That He knows intimate details about the Day of Judgment?

37 He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

40 “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:37–43 NIV)

If Jesus knows what He’s talking about and there are some at the end of the age who will be “...thrown into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” and Christians know this, but don’t proclaim it, what kind of people are we?  
If Jesus was not afraid to give this warning, why are we?

5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. 6 “Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

7 They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

8 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? 9 Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 11 How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” 12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:5–12 NIV)

Knowing what you know about the Pharisees, how was their teaching like yeast?  
What is so dangerous about it?

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:21–23 NIV)

Why did Peter need this warning so badly?  
When do we need it?

42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

43 “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” (Matthew 21:42–44 NIV)

Is there any “little Lord Jesus” in this passage?

Why do you think the Jewish leaders didn’t get the message? Wasn’t it clear enough?

“1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:1–14 NIV)

Does God the Father have the right to be enraged about the Jewish leaders rejecting His invitation to heaven through His Son Jesus?

What do the “wedding clothes” represent (Matthew 6:30)? Why is it so important that we are wearing them?

“3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

4 Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

15 “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in

winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time.

26 “So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. (Matthew 24:3-28 NIV)

Have “many” come claiming to be Christ? How do we know they aren’t the real Jesus?

Talk about the things that will happen before “the end”. Are there any of these that haven’t happened yet?

There is no question that Christians are the most persecuted group in the world today. The Vatican has reported that over 100,000 Christians are violently killed annually because of some relation to their faith. According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith. Of the 100-200 million Christians facing persecution, the majority live in Muslim-dominated nations. Do you think any of this qualifies for the description we see here?

Is there anything that keeps that type of persecution from coming to the United States?

29 “Immediately after the distress of those days “ ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

30 “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

32 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

36 “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. 47 I tell you the truth, he will put him in

charge of all his possessions. 48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. 50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 24:3–51 NIV)

What was the ultimate purpose Jesus had in mind for giving us all these indications of the end?

Did Jesus believe in a literally Noah and a global flood?

According to Jesus, what will happen to wicked servants of the Master?

1 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

7 “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

9 “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10 “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

12 “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

13 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (Matthew 25:1–13 NIV)

Does Jesus believe that “all roads lead to heaven”? That God will eventually let everyone in?

It’s been said that Christians should live as though Christ died yesterday, rose today and is coming tomorrow? In what ways might your life look different if you did?

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

45 “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31–46 NIV)

God warned the Old Testament leaders of His people: “When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.” (Ezekiel 33:8 NIV) Can Jesus be held accountable for the blood of anyone? Was He?

Talk about the difference between trying to “earn” a place with God and receiving an “inheritance” from God and bearing fruit for Him.

Do you think most people have an impression of Jesus warning people away from “eternal punishment”? How long is “eternal”?

“31 Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: “ ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

34 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

35 But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.” (Matthew 26:31–35 NIV)

Why do you think Jesus took the time to warn Peter even though He knew it wouldn’t change what happened?

14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. 15 But some of them said, “By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.” 16 Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. 18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. 19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

21 “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

23 “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.

24 “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.” (Luke 11:14–26 NIV)

What is the most troubling thing you learn here about demons and demon possession?  
Who/what are demons (Revelation 12:9)?

A 2009 Barna survey of Christians showed that 78% believed in God, but only about 35% believe in the devil as a living being, not just a symbol of evil.  
Do we need this warning from Jesus today?

35 “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

41 Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

42 The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

49 “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! 51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.” (Luke 12:35–51 NIV)

In terms of servants waiting for the return of the master, do you see us in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> watch of the night? 4<sup>th</sup> watch? Earlier?

Probably doesn’t matter one way or another, but why do you think Jesus doesn’t seem to pay attention to Peter’s question in v. 41?

Will there be levels of punishment in hell (v. 47-48)?

Do you think Uncle Ben’s quote in Spiderman: “With great power comes great responsibility,” originated here?

19 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

25 “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

27 “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

29 “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

30 “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19–31 NIV)

According to Jesus, what kind of place is hell? How far apart are heaven and hell? What does Jesus think about converting people with miraculous appearances vs. the Word of God?

“30 The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

34 To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

36 “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

37 Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

38 Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

41 Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” (John 9:30–41 NIV)

In this chapter, the Pharisees actually interrogated this man who had been healed from blindness by Jesus. They didn’t like his answers, so they kicked him out of the temple. What did Jesus think about that?

Give some modern day examples of those who claim to see but are really blind.

1 “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

5 “Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6 Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. 7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

16 “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

17 Some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” 18 They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”

19 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’? 20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. 21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. 22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. 23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

25 “Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. 27 No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. 28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

(John 16:1–11, 16-28 NIV)

Just as Jesus warns us about the end of the world and His second coming, He warned the disciples often about His coming death and the suffering they would face, but also the joy that would never be taken away. How do you think they processed all of this at the time? Is there anything in this reading that hits you in a special way?

“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” (Revelation 16:15 NIV)

Again, what kind of clothes must we keep with us? What would our “nakedness” represent?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Faith

*Jesus continually challenged His disciples to greater faith. What would His challenges be to us? What is the greatest step of faith you have ever taken? Have you ever placed your faith in someone or something that let you down? How did that feel?*

“5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.”

7 Jesus said to him, **“I will go and heal him.”**

8 The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, **“I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, **“Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.”** And his servant was healed at that very hour.” (Matthew 8:5–13 NIV)

Was Jesus more concerned with race or with faith?  
What are the dangers of being special or feeling special?

“27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, **“Do you believe that I am able to do this?”** “Yes, Lord,” they replied.

29 Then he touched their eyes and said, **“According to your faith will it be done to you”;** 30 and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, **“See that no one knows about this.”** 31 But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.” (Matthew 9:27–31 NIV)

Could Jesus heal people without them believing? Why did He prefer to connect the two? (See Matthew 13:58)

“25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”**

28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

29 **“Come,”** he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. **“You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”**” (Matthew 14:25–31 NIV)

Would you call someone who had just gotten out of a boat and walked on water someone of “little faith”?  
What do you like best about this account?

22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

24 He answered, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”**

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

26 He replied, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”**

27 “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

28 Then Jesus answered, **“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”** And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” (Matthew 15:22–28 NIV)

Most women I know don’t like to be compared to “dogs.” Why do you think Jesus was so tough on this woman?

What insight do you get on the disciples from their comment here?

14 When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. 15 “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. 16 I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

17 **“O unbelieving and perverse generation,”** Jesus replied, **“how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.”** 18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

20 He replied, **“Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”**” (Matthew 17:14–20 NIV)

At this point in His earthly ministry, Jesus has been with the disciples for almost three years. Does that help you understand His seeming disgust with their “little faith” and inability to heal the man’s son?

Have you ever tried to move a mountain? I usually try it a shovelful at a time.

Many things seem impossible to us, even when we sincerely follow Jesus. How do you explain that: Do we also have too little faith? Did Jesus mean this only for the disciples at that time? Or is there some other explanation? Do we need to know?

18 Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, **“May you never bear fruit again!”** Immediately the tree withered.

20 When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

21 Jesus replied, **“I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”**” (Matthew 21:18–22 NIV)

In Mark’s Gospel he tells us that “it was not the season for figs.” Isn’t Jesus being a little harsh on that particular tree?

If we really believe in Jesus, what kind of prayer requests will we bring to Him?

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, **“Let us go over to the other side.”** 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, **“Quiet! Be still!”** Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”**

41 They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”” (Mark 4:35–41 NIV)

Who is this who has given to us His **Red Letters**?

Have you ever been on the big water in an open boat during a furious squall, with waves breaking over the boat? Can you imagine sleeping through such an event?

Do you think the disciples were more terrified during the storm, or after they had witnessed Jesus speak to the storm and make it go away?

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, **“Who touched my clothes?”**

31 “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, **“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”**

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher any more?”

36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, **“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”**

37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, **“Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.”**

40 But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, **“Talitha kum!”** (which means, **“Little girl, I say to you, get up!”**). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old).” (Mark 5:30–42 NIV)

In what ways does faith dispel fear? In what ways does faith connect with healing?

Can you imagine laughing at Jesus?

19 **“O unbelieving generation,”** Jesus replied, **“how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”**

20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

“21 Jesus asked the boy’s father, “**How long has he been like this?**” “From childhood,” he answered. 22 “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

23 “**‘If you can?’**” said Jesus. “**Everything is possible for him who believes.**”

24 Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “**You deaf and mute spirit,**” he said, “**I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.**”

26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

29 He replied, “**This kind can come out only by prayer.**”” (Mark 9:19–29 NIV)

Do you really believe that “everything is possible for those who believe”? Why/why not? Do you think anybody will ever write a children’s book about a little train struggling up the tracks saying, “If I can, if I can, if I can...”?

Is there a better response to our faith struggles than that of the boy’s father: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief”?

“25 He said to them, “**How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?**” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25–27 NIV)

“Slow of heart” might be the perfect description of Jesus’ disciples generally. In what ways does that describe us?

Why is it important that we don’t restrict our Bible reading and believing to the New Testament?

“47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “**Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.**”

48 “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “**I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.**”

49 Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

50 Jesus said, “**You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.**” 51 He then added, “**I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.**”” (John 1:47–51 NIV)

This is a powerful moment in time as Jesus is beginning His public ministry and calling the first disciples. How do you explain the abrupt insight and faith of Nathanael?

How do you think the first disciples reacted to this awesome comment about the angels “ascending and descending on the Son of Man”?

“61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65 He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”” (John 6:61–65 NIV)

How does it make you feel to know that some disciples of Jesus (maybe of the 12 or a wider circle of disciples) did not really believe in Him?

Why then were they disciples?

Are there any similarities with Jesus’ disciples today?

“Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”” (John 20:27 NIV)

The Greek here might be more literally translated: “Stop being an unbeliever and start being a believer.” In what ways does that need to happen in your life?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Hope

*These are the **Red Letters** we're used to associating with Jesus: letters of comfort, peace and rest. Let them wash over you and bring you hope.*

*What kinds of things do you generally hope for in life? What is the difference between most of our hoping, and a life lived in the hope of the Lord?*

**25** “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? **26** Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **27** Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

**28** “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. **30** If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:25–34 NIV)

If you are a teenager or have ever been a parent of one, does this “why do you worry about clothes?” comment hit home?

How does “the pagans run after all these things” accurately describe our culture? Besides food drink and clothes, what kinds of things are we “running after” today?

How reassuring is this passage for you?

**2** A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

**3** Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “**I am willing,**” he said. “**Be clean!**” Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. **4** Then Jesus said to him, “**See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**”” (Matthew 8:2–4 NIV)

Try to picture yourself with leprosy... You’ve asked “...if you are willing...”. Can you imagine what it would feel like to hear Jesus say: “I am willing”?

What kind of hope do we have in Jesus when we are ill? Should we shoot for something higher?

**28** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”” (Matthew 11:28–30 NIV)

What kinds of things truly bring “rest for your souls”?

Has your impression of Jesus in these **Red Letters** so far led you to see Him as “gentle”? “Humble in heart”?

In what ways is the “yoke” of a Christian easy? In what ways is it hard?

“25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “**Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.**”” (Matthew 14:25–27 NIV)

“Immediately” is one of my favorite words when it is associated with Jesus. Why do you like it here?

“5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. “**Get up,**” he said. “**Don’t be afraid.**”” (Matthew 17:5–7 NIV)

“8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. “**Greetings,**” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “**Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.**”” (Matthew 28:8–10 NIV)

You may have heard that there are 365 different “fear not” passages in the Bible. Depending on how you put them together, there are at least that many. Why do you think the disciples needed those kind of **Red Letters** so often? Why do we?

“16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

**18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, “**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**”” (Luke 4:16–21 NIV)

“42 At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said, “**I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.**”” (Luke 4:42–43 NIV)

These last two passages could easily fit under “Letters of Mission.” Why do they also fit so well here?

What was Jesus saying when he declared the Isaiah prophecy fulfilled?

“33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”” (Luke 24:33–49 NIV)

Yes, they should have been ready for this, but really, how would you feel if someone you loved died, then three days later waltzed through locked doors and stood there in front of you?

Ultimately, is there any real hope in Christ apart from the resurrection?

1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”” (John 14:1–4 NIV)

Is your heart often troubled? Why?

In what ways does this passage give the Christian a secret weapon of hope?

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:25–27 NIV)

33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NIV)

“21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”” (John 20:21, 26 NIV)

You can see from these passages that we are bringing lots of things into the category of Hope. Peace and rest and freedom from fear. In what ways is having the peace of Christ the most hopeful thing you can have?

11 Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"" (John 20:11–17 NIV)

For many Biblical characters, the greatest times of hope seem to come in the midst of the greatest times of despair. Has that been your experience?

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:7–9 NIV)

How does Paul's experience with physical pain and Jesus' Red Letters to Him, help give you hope that you can endure those things if you must?

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” (Revelation 1:8–18 NIV)

How might these **Red Letters** from Jesus to the early Church been particularly hopeful as they began to face persecution, first from the Jews and then from the Roman Empire?

8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” (Revelation 2:8–11 NIV)

We sometimes use v. 10 as a confirmation verse in our churches. What is frightening about this passage? What is hopeful?

7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:7–13 NIV)

What is the most hopeful part of this passage for you?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Love

*“For God so loved the world...”*

*What do you love about the world? What do you not love?*

“48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.”

49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

50 Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51 With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

52 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

55 At that time Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.” (Matthew 26:48–56 NIV)

Where is the love in this passage?

Would you have placed it in a different category?

“1 During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 2 “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”” (Mark 8:1–3 NIV)

This is one of those times when it’s kind of fun to know the Greek. The word for compassion here is “splagnisthomi.” It kind of sounds like what it means. Jesus was “moved in his gut” for us. How does it feel to know Jesus felt this kind of love toward people? Toward you?

“28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28–31 NIV)

Can you honestly say that you have consistently tried to love the Lord with ALL your heart, soul, mind and strength? In what ways would you be better equipped to love your neighbor if you did?

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:16-19 NIV)

v. 16 most of us know. But how are 17 & 18 in some ways even more comforting? Unfortunately, love and light is not always well received. Why not?

“30 As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

31 When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.

32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

33 “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”” (John 13:30–35 NIV)

What does it say to you that Jesus saw His glory in the suffering and death He was about to endure?

Do disciples of Christ have a choice as to whether or not we love other human beings?

Are most churches and families you know known for their love of one another? Is yours? If not, why not?

15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”” (John 14:15–21 NIV)

The intimacy of a relationship with the Triune God is here in these **Red Letters**. How much of it can you grasp? What is the coolest part of the love Jesus is describing here?

What is the implication for those who have Jesus’ commands and do not obey them?

9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.  
(John 15:9-17 NIV)

Remember once again, this is Jesus speaking directly to you. List the things He is saying to you here.

Circle the word command(s) in this section. Do “love” and “command” go together? In what ways does it fit in this case?

“May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (John 17:23-26 NIV)

In this part of Jesus’ “high priestly prayer,” we see again His desire to wrap us within the love relationship of the Triune God. Have you ever really taken the time to think about not just loving Jesus, but God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, three-in-one? Or does it make your head hurt too much?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters From God

*Some poorly informed people have said: “Jesus never claimed to be God.” Read these **Red Letters** and see if you reach that conclusion.*

*Have you ever known someone who had a “God complex”? Any famous people that might qualify? What’s the difference between them and God?*

**“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”**  
(Matthew 11:27 NIV)

We’ve already seen numerous times where Jesus claims that God is His Father. Dogs have puppies, humans have human babies; if God has a Son, what is the nature of that Son?

Are you getting a picture of the intimacy that exists between God the Father and God the Son within the Trinity? How does it make you feel to know that Jesus wants that same intimacy with you?

**“24 After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”**

**25 “Yes, he does,” he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak.**

**“What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own sons or from others?”**

**26 “From others,” Peter answered. “Then the sons are exempt,” Jesus said to him. 27 “But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.””** (Matthew 17:24–27 NIV)

What are the letters Jesus is writing beneath these **Red Letters**?

**“1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”**

**4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:**

**5 “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”**” (Matthew 21:1–5 NIV)

Nothing subtle about “...the Lord needs them.” How do you think the people who heard these **Red Letters** perceived them?

**“15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”**

18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “**You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax.**” They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, “**Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?**”  
21 “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “**Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.**” (Matthew 22:15–21 NIV)

Not only was Jesus always able to slip out of the traps of the Jewish leaders, He absolutely knew about “what is God’s” and did not hesitate to let them know it.

Do you think most folks think of “their money” as in any way belonging to God?

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**” (Matthew 28:18 NIV)

How much authority is that?

25 “**Be quiet!**” said Jesus sternly. “**Come out of him!**” 26 The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” (Mark 1:25–27 NIV)

Who can give orders to evil spirits?

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

4 Jesus answered, “**It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’**”

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”

8 Jesus answered, “It is written: **‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’**”

9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here.

10 For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

12 Jesus answered, “**It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’**”

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.” (Luke 4:1–13 NIV)

In what ways does Jesus fight this battle as a man?  
In what ways does he fight it as God?

“17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

18 He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”” (Luke 10:17–20 NIV)

When did Satan fall? How could Jesus see it? What conclusions should the disciples be making about their Rabbi?

67 “If you are the Christ,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68 and if I asked you, you would not answer. 69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

70 They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am.”” (Luke 22:67–70 NIV)

Satisfied?

“So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”  
“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.” (Luke 23:3 NIV)

Nothing needed to be kept secret at this point...

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”” (Luke 23:46 NIV)

Jesus once said of His life: 18 “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:18) He spoke truly, as in all things. In what ways can we prepare now to commit our spirits into the hand of God?

“7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.  
8 Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.” (John 2:7–9 NIV)

Who has the power to change water into wine?  
Why do you think He did?

“14 In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

17 His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

18 Then the Jews demanded of him, “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

19 Jesus answered them, “**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.**” (John 2:14–19 NIV)

Who has the authority to kick people out of God’s holy temple?  
What kind of temple was Jesus talking about in v. 19?

“35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” 42 They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

43 “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. 44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

53 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” (John 6:35–58 NIV)

Is there any way you can read these **Red Letters** – or really any in this section, and not understand that Jesus believed He was the Son of God and had the authority of God?

Many feel these **Red Letters** are a partial explanation of the Lord’s Supper that Jesus would institute later. Others feel its just symbolic. What does it look like to you?

What is the Father’s will?

“19 Then they asked him, “Where is your father?” “You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” 20 He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

21 Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

22 This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?”

23 But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins.”

25 “Who are you?” they asked. “Just what I have been claiming all along,” Jesus replied. 26 “I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.”

27 They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. 28 So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” 30 Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. (John 8:19–30 NIV)

Did Jesus leave a middle ground beyond believing in Him or rejecting Him?  
Why do you think so many people only dabble in a loyalty to Jesus today?

“24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

25 Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”

31 Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

33 “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

34 Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’? 35 If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— 36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? 37 Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. 38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” 39 Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.” (John 10:24–39 NIV)

“9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” (John 14:9–11 NIV)

Does it surprise you to find that Jesus said so much about the fact that God was His Father?  
Do you think that was kind of important to Him?  
Would Jesus be content for us to just believe in Him and not concern ourselves with the Triune nature of God?

How comforting is it that “No one can snatch us out of the hand of Jesus, or out of the Father’s hand”?

“1 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. 6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. 20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me.” (John 17:1–23 NIV)

Do you think most Christians walk around with “the full measure of the joy of Jesus within them”? Why doesn’t it leak out more often?

How does it feel to know that Jesus also prayed for us here? That He wants us to be one with Him and with God the Father?

10 “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

11 Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”” (John 19:10–11 NIV)

Do you think those witnessing this scene recognized the power within Jesus? After his scourging?

In what ways can you have great power in weakness?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of the Kingdom

*“My Kingdom is not of this world.” Said Jesus. True. Where and what and how is it?  
Do you think you might like to run a Kingdom? Why/why not?*

“24 Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

27 “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

28 “ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

29 “ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” (Matthew 13:24–30 NIV)

When do you feel like a weed in life? When do you feel like wheat?  
Will anyone ever be able to create a completely godly kingdom here on earth?

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

47 “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51 “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied.

52 He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” (Matthew 13:44–52 NIV)

Can you remain neutral to the Kingdom of God?  
Do people who want to write Hell out of the picture have the support of Jesus? If there is a Hell and people go there, are we doing anybody any favors by not teaching it?

27 Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. 1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ 5 So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ 7 “ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ 8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ 9 “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ 13 “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”” (Matthew 19:27–20:16 NIV)

In my experience, many Christians still grumble about this example of the kingdom today. Why do you think this rubs them the wrong way?

Is there anything to be gained by “sneaking into heaven at the last minute” vs. living as a faithful disciple of Christ all your life?

18 Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.”

20 Again he asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”” (Luke 13:18–21 NIV)

In what ways does the kingdom of God start small and get big?

“20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”” (Luke 17:20–21 NIV)

In what ways do you feel like the kingdom of God is within you? In what ways, not so much?

“36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:36 NIV)

How do you think the church overlooked these **Red Letters** when they launched the crusades?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Prayer

*The prayers of Jesus were for you. Who/what are your prayers for?  
What have you found helpful in advancing your prayer life?*

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ 14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:5–15 NIV)

What do you think of the simple prayers said at the end of each Duck Dynasty episode? Do they fit in any way with these **Red Letters**?

What does it tell you that Jesus gave us this prayer starting with “Our Father” instead of “My Father?”

Read slowly through each petition of the Lord’s Prayer again. Is there anything that stands out in a new way for you?

“39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”” (Matthew 26:39–46 NIV)

What is the most remarkable thing to you about this prayer of Jesus?

Do you ever fall asleep while you’re praying? Do you feel badly about that? Should you?

“5 Then he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’

7 “Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:5–13 NIV)

“2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’”

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:2–8 NIV)

Do these Red Letters mean that we need to pester God before we can get His attention?

Do you feel that you have prayed with boldness or timidity in your life?

How often have you prayed to have the Holy Spirit in your life?

When The Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Will any of it be because of your efforts?

“41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (John 11:41–42 NIV)

This scene is from the raising of Jesus’ friend Lazarus. What do you make of the fact that after this, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus (John 12:10)?

27 “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

28 Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. (John 12:27–29 NIV)

The way John records these **Red Letters**, they would seem to have been spoken on Palm Sunday as Jesus was coming into Jerusalem with the large crowd around Him. How might this have ramped up the celebration?

Which did Jesus see more clearly: the celebration, or His Passion which would follow?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these **Red Letters** seriously?

## Letters of Humility

*Once again Jesus turns everything on its head. “The greatest among you will be your servant.” Did He mean it? When have you been served in a completely unexpected way? How did it feel? Would you rather keep getting that feeling, or take part in giving it to others?*

1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1–5 NIV)

Some folks claim that “their Jesus” doesn’t want us to judge anyone’s behavior, since He said in Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge or you too will be judged.” Yet in the same chapter He instructs us to judge false prophets and recognize them by their fruits. What kind of judgment is he really talking about here?

A BIG complaint against Christians today is that they are too judgmental. How can you avoid being seen that way? Is there any way to avoid it completely?

“7 As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: “ ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 11:7–15 NIV)

Does John the Baptist get enough credit? Do you? Does it matter?

How do you reconcile the need to be humble and “least in the kingdom of heaven” with “forcefully” laying hold of the kingdom?

“1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 “And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. 6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:1–6 NIV)

Why do you think the disciples kept trying to figure out which of them was the greatest (Mt. 18:1; Mark 9:34; 10:37; Luke 9:46; 22:24)?

What is the humility of a child?

**“1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 “Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’ 8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:1–12 NIV)**

Have you heard of the reality TV show, “The Preachers of L.A.”? (premiering 2013 on the Oxygen Network) The show follows the lavish lifestyles of six prosperity gospel preachers of mega churches in Los Angeles. “P. Diddy, Jay-Z - they’re not the only ones who should be driving Ferraris and living in large houses,” says Bishop Ron Gibson.

In what ways might a show like that advance the kingdom? In what ways might it tear it down? Would anybody ever air a show more like Jesus describes in the **Red Letters** of this section? Would anybody watch it?

**“33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.**

**35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”**

**36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,**

**37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”” (Mark 9:33–37 NIV)**

Is there anything more natural than hearing Jesus take a little child into His arms?

Is there anything more typical than hearing about the disciples arguing about their greatness?

In what ways have you been like the disciples? In what ways have you been “the very last, the servant of all”? (Careful, no bragging about your humility...)

**“35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”**

**36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.**

**37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”**

38 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

39 “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John, 42 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:35–45 NIV)

Mother Teresa is always sighted as someone who fit this description. Why?

Talk about the dangers that might be inherent in being the pastor of a megachurch.

Do you see the people in your church maneuvering to put themselves into servant positions? If not, why not?

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

12 Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:7–14 NIV)

Have you ever experienced anything like the wedding feast example Jesus uses here? If so, how did it feel?

Do you entertain many people at your home? Even if you don’t have the gift of hospitality, is this something you could do from time to time? Who might you invite?

7 “Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? 8 Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:7–10 NIV)

Should servants in the Church demand recognition? Should we give it?

If you have a position of service in your church, do you feel as though you are working for God and not for men? If not, why not?

“9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Luke 18:9–16 NIV)

In what ways do you sometimes feel/act like this Pharisee?

In what ways do you feel like the tax collector?

Would you rather humble yourself or be humbled?

Why do you think the disciples didn’t want people bringing babies around Jesus?

Why didn’t Jesus mind?

“4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

10 Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:4–17 NIV)

Some Christian churches take these Red Letters literally and practice footwashing during worship. How might it make you feel to have someone wash your feet? How might it feel to wash someone else’s feet?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take these Red Letters seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take these Red Letters seriously?

## Letters of Life and Salvation

*Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Every **Red Letter** is there to draw you to Him.  
Have you ever been saved from death or serious injury? How did it feel?  
How does that compare to the eternal salvation won for you by Jesus?*

“17 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 18 “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!””  
(Matthew 20:17–19 NIV)

Matthew records that right after this statement:

“20 Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 “**What is it you want?**” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”” (Matthew 20:20–21 NIV)

What do you think of the timing of such a request?

“Mocked, flogged and crucified” was all part of God the Father’s plan for the salvation of the world. The church phrase that is sometimes used is “The Vicarious Atonement” of Christ – that He was punished in our place to atone for our sins. Could God have found another way to save us? If so, why didn’t He?

“As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” (Matthew 26:2 NIV)

Mosaic Law declared: “...anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” (Deuteronomy 21:23 NIV) What kinds of things do you think would be going in in the minds of the disciples who heard these **Red Letters** from Jesus?

“33 At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “**Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?**” —which means, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”” (Mark 15:33–34 NIV)

Naturally, all the **Red Letters** Jesus spoke from the cross are letters of life and salvation. Theologians have argued about what exactly these might mean for 2,000 years. What do **you** think it means? Did God the Father truly forsake His Son, or did it only feel that way to Jesus in His human nature and in His suffering?

“3 In reply Jesus declared, “**I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**”

4 “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.**”

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “**You are Israel’s teacher,**” said Jesus, “**and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.** (John 3:3–14 NIV)

These are the **Red Letters** with Nicodemus that come before the familiar John 3:16. How do they compliment that verse?

Who is the Author of life? Who is the Author of re-birth?

“7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “**Will you give me a drink?**”  
8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, “**If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.**”

11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”

13 Jesus answered, “**Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**”

15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

16 He told her, “**Go, call your husband and come back.**”

17 “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “**You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.**”

19 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

21 Jesus declared, “**Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.**”

25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”” (John 4:7–26 NIV)

Do you think Jesus would involve Himself in the “worship wars” of the Christian Church today? What is dangerous about Christians trying to play the Jesus card and put Him on their side of a contemporary vs. traditional worship style? What kind of worship does He want regardless of the style?

1 “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”

6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

7 Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”” (John 10:1–18 NIV)

List the ways disciples of Christ are like sheep to the Good Shepherd...these and any other examples you can think of.

Why are verse 17 & 18 so important to understand as you go on to consider the Passion of Christ and what He suffered for us?

“31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. 34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?”

35 Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. 36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.” (John 12:31–36 NIV)

What is so comforting about the fact that Jesus will “draw all men to Himself” instead of force them or compel them? The way He chose to do it?

In what ways can disciples of Christ be “sons of light”?

“6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”” (John 14:6–7 NIV)

Talk about the exclusivity of Christ. Do any other religions claim to have the exclusive way to God?

When somebody makes a claim that he is right and everybody else is wrong, how do you have to evaluate it?

“28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:28–30 NIV)

The **Red Letters** “It is finished,” are some of the most important Jesus ever gave us. It is one word in the Greek, and it means that the work of salvation is has now been completed, it remains completed and it always will remain completed. What errors should this keep us from making as we resolve to be disciples of Christ?

12 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

14 “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:12–20 NIV)

Does it seem to you as if Christ is coming “soon” (2 Peter 3:8)?

What is comforting about these last **Red Letters**?

What is frightening?

Talk about some of the things you’ve learned overall by studying the **Red Letters** this closely.

Is there anything new you’ve learned about Jesus?

Anything you had to “unlearn”?

What do you think needs to change about your life if you were to take ALL of the **Red Letters** seriously?

What do you think needs to change about your church if we are to take ALL of the **Red Letters** seriously?

“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25 NIV)



