



## **Week Two: Spiritual Confusion**

Over 4 billion people (2/3 of the world's 7.2 billion population) have yet to put their hope in Jesus Christ as their personal savior and the answer to a world in crisis. Where there is no hope, there is no motivation for the pursuit of solution. In a world without hope people live for the moment and for themselves, abolishing any vision for a better world. The only antidote to a defeated spirit is one that has been regenerated with authentic faith in the creator. The solution, therefore, to all world crises hinges upon the proclamation of the gospel both through words and action.

## Daily Reflections | i61 | Spiritual Confusion



**MONDAY**

### Confused and aimless

#### **Reflect**

Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, healed their diseased bodies, and healed their bruised and hurt lives.

When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke.

So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd.

“What a huge harvest!” he said to his disciples.

“How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!”

Matthew 9:35-38 |MSG

#### **Receive**

The kingdom of death and hopelessness was no longer in charge when Jesus entered the scene. He brought truth, light, grace, and resurrection power to all those he touched. And his realization of the expansive need all around him motivated him to invite others into the vast work of the kingdom. It was a matter of life and death; a battle between truth and a lie. And the truth of his love for the lost won every time.

Our Creator causes the fields to produce a harvest of souls through Jesus and we are invited to partner with him in the joy and toil of that harvest, partnering with the Holy Spirit in restoring broken people to the healthy people God intended. People are lost. People are dying... separated eternally by the fall (Genesis 3) from their Creator.

But there is hope because of Christ. Through him, we can plant seeds of the Gospel, and nurture them as a loving farmer does his crop. It's a beautiful agrarian picture that takes time, work, trust, many hands, and partnership with God's natural life-giving power.

Spiritual darkness is at the root of every crisis on earth. Not knowing their Creator or the Messiah who saves, naturally leaves a vacuum of emptiness and longing for something more. Like aimless sheep, they are lost in this dark and hopeless state devoid of any lasting fullness or redemption. They wonder without knowing their Shepherd. In the farming analogy, we can see the outward weeds or barren fields of no fruit, and realize there's a death that has to happen for there to be any life. In the dark depths of the soil, if the seed dies to itself and receives the life of

Christ's Gospel, it can it begin to break open with new life and grow towards the light, full of hope and eternal fruit. Spiritual truth allows the seed to break through darkness into the glorious light.

Jesus is moved with compassion when he sees aimless and confused crowds with hands, arms, and hearts flailing in panic and despair like so many lost sheep lying helplessly on their backs. The original expression for compassion in such contexts is to be "moved in one's bowels." Today, perhaps a better translation would be that he "was pained in the heart." He was pained enough to send out his twelve companions as "harvest hands" in an unending field of need; pained enough to ask, "How are we going to feed all these people?" When those same harvest hands just want to send the hungry crowd away in all their wearying messiness, he is moved enough to use a little boy's biscuits and sardines to make his point.

And that's when the miracle happens. Jesus is calling for the workers to **Rise Up**. He's calling for us to rise like Lazarus and see our feeble hands reap a field of eternal harvest, in his power.

### **Relate**

Are you moved with compassion when you see the lost living in spiritual darkness without the hope of Christ? How is God calling you to rise up, where you are at right now, and reach out to them? How is he calling your church to rise up for the lost?

### **Respond**

*Jesus, thank you for taking me out of the darkness and the confusion of this world, and saving me from myself. Thank you for your love and light that eternally transformed me. Help me feel your compassion for the lost. Help me to see your harvest in front of me and give me the courage to be your hands and feet, to labor in the fields, and spend my life so that others may know you and live in your hope and transforming power.*

Share your testimony with someone today. Let it motivate you to share what hope you have received from Jesus and pray for opportunities to be part of someone else's salvation story.

## TUESDAY

# Headwaters

### Reflect

<sup>1</sup>The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal God had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the Garden?”

<sup>2-3</sup> The Woman said to the serpent, “Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the Garden. It’s only about the tree in the middle of the Garden that God said, ‘Don’t eat from it; don’t even touch it or you’ll die.’”

<sup>4-5</sup> The serpent told the Woman, “You won’t die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you’ll see what’s really going on. You’ll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil.”

<sup>6</sup> When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she’d know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

<sup>7</sup> Immediately the two of them did “see what’s really going on”—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

Genesis 3.1-7 |MSG

### Receive

Welcome to the headwaters of the ultimate upstream issue.

There were four rivers that flowed out of that original paradise: Eden, now lost, except in our souls. They were Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. Ah, but there was a fifth river in that Garden and it issued from the serpent’s mouth, a gushing, polluting flow intended to sweep away the woman and drown the rest of a creation pronounced “very good.”

It was a river instilling doubt, calling goodness into question. It was a river emboldening ego and choosing pride and self-pleasure, knowledge and technology, personal fulfillment and insight over walking with the Divine in the cool of the day. Civilization has been buried in its sediment ever since, making fossils of us all.

The story of the great flood during Noah’s time pales in comparison to the impact of this pestilent flow. Yet, we still think we can surf it, dam it, use it, and irrigate this Dead Sea world with its virulent waters.

Traditionally we’ve coined the term “original sin” from this story. This is a term or doctrine which tends to cast damnation over everything and everyone. And while not taking issue with such a beloved doctrine, steeped in our tradition, let’s shift our gaze ever so slightly to the story that, in reality, towers over the serpentine flow of Genesis 3. For in the first two chapters of Genesis we have two creation stories intended to ground us in a much more fundamental doctrine: the doctrine of *original blessing*.

The serpentine flow always tries to pollute, override and usurp God’s flow but God’s flow, like Christ’s blood, is unstoppable, irrevocable and will always bring Life. It is the flow issuing from the Savior’s pierced side, the flow issuing in a fresh, deepening river of life lined with a progressively flourishing row of trees whose “leaves are for the healing of the nations.” Its waters are remaking, realigning, and reinvigorating this depressed, Dead Sea world.

This is the headwaters of all of life, ultimately absorbing and purifying the serpentine flow, as death is swallowed up by Life. God's original truth was that He wasn't trying to keep something good from Adam and Eve or trap them in dark waters; he was trying to give them opportunity and choice to freely respond in love, trusting his goodness with each step past the tree in the middle of the Garden. And even when they broke that trust, there is an immediate promise for the original blessing to return to them... a plan of redemption through Christ as stated in Genesis 3:15. This was always his plan: to envelop us in his river of overwhelming grace and goodness, despite what we have done.

### **Relate**

Which river do you see most evidence of in this world? Is it the one issuing from the serpent's mouth or the one from the Savior's side? Where have you personally been blinded by the serpent's lie, drawing you into his river of spiritual confusion? In what areas of your life do you need the Savior's redeeming headwaters of truth and healing?

Is there someone drowning nearby, in your close circle of relationships or in your own neighborhood? How is God asking you to respond to their cry for help?

### **Respond**

*Father, take me to the river of life. Invigorate me with its living flow that the world might be refreshed and renewed through your redeeming hope in me.*

Reach out to someone drowning and in need of help today. Give them a cup of cool water, and offer them spiritual and practical hope for this moment.

W E D N E S D A Y

## Seeing clearly

### Reflect

<sup>16-19</sup> Meanwhile, the disciples were finding fault with each other because they had forgotten to bring bread. Jesus overheard and said, “Why are you fussing because you forgot bread? Don’t you see the point of all this? Don’t you get it at all? Remember the five loaves I broke for the five thousand? How many baskets of leftovers did you pick up?”

They said, “Twelve.”

<sup>20</sup> “And the seven loaves for the four thousand—how many bags full of leftovers did you get?”  
“Seven.”

<sup>21</sup> He said, “Do you still not get it?”

<sup>22-23</sup> They arrived at Bethsaida. Some people brought a sightless man and begged Jesus to give him a healing touch. Taking him by the hand, he led him out of the village. He put spit in the man’s eyes, laid hands on him, and asked, “Do you see anything?”

<sup>24-26</sup> He looked up. “I see men. They look like walking trees.” So Jesus laid hands on his eyes again.

The man looked hard and realized that he had recovered perfect sight, saw everything in bright, twenty-twenty focus.

Mark 8.16-26 |MSG

### Receive

Classic.

Fresh from the sight of another miraculous feeding that should have left them in a lingering, deep sense of awe, they turn to fussing, fighting, and fault-finding over who’s to blame for forgetting to bring something that Jesus wasn’t even concerned about.

Yes. This is us. This is our story. We shouldn’t have to look very hard to see it. The question sticking out, like that proverbial sore thumb, right in the middle of the text – “Do you still not get it?” – has each of us tagged. We don’t have to look out into the world to see confusion. We have plenty of our own.

What they failed to see was who Jesus was. He was the “I AM.” He was the prophesied Messiah standing in front of them. He was the new divine Moses, feeding miraculous manna in abundance, overflowing the twelve baskets, carried by the twelve disciples, feeding the lost and hungry people in a spiritual wilderness. Do you not see who I am? Do you not see what I am here to do? I came to feed the hungry, to bring sight to the blind, to rescue the lost from spiritual darkness. And I care enough to reach out to you just where you’re at, and heal you through my touch. And I empower you, to use what you have in faith, to bring sight and nourishment to the lost.

## **Relate**

With whom do you most identify in this text: the clueless disciples who still don't get it, or the blind man experiencing the repeated touch of Christ?

Who is Jesus calling you to minister to? What loaves and fishes can you bring to him to multiply?

## **Respond**

*Healing Christ, touch my dim eyes. Spit on this dry life – and let me patiently wait for your repeated touch. Give me your eyes, your vision, your heart to see the wide world clearly, with your undistorted view that my body, your temple, might be full of light.*

Wait in silence and ask God to open your eyes to His spiritual truth for your life. Then write a reminder of these words, which He has spoken to you and post it up on your mirror so, that you can “see clearly” what He wants you to see.

## THURSDAY

# Counterfeit vs. Truth

### **Reflect**

<sup>11-14</sup>. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-14 | ESV

<sup>16-18</sup> Gather up the testimony,  
preserve the teaching for my followers,  
While I wait for God as long as he remains in hiding,  
while I wait and hope for him.  
I stand my ground and hope,  
I and the children God gave me as signs to Israel,  
Warning signs and hope signs from God-of-the-Angel-Armies,  
who makes his home in Mount Zion.

<sup>19-22</sup> When people tell you, “Try out the fortunetellers.  
Consult the spiritualists.  
Why not tap into the spirit-world,  
get in touch with the dead?”  
Tell them, “No, we’re going to study the Scriptures.”  
People who try the other ways get nowhere—a dead end!  
Frustrated and famished,  
they try one thing after another.  
When nothing works out they get angry,  
cursing first this god and then that one,  
Looking this way and that,  
up, down, and sideways—and seeing nothing,  
A blank wall, an empty hole.  
They end up in the dark with nothing.

Isaiah 8.16-22 | MSG

### **Receive**

Bank tellers are trained to spot counterfeit bills in a particular way. Because there could be so much variety entailed with counterfeit bills, they are actually trained by studying the real ones. As they look closely at the true bills, studying the details and distinct characteristics, it becomes easy to notice the parts missing or the additions that are false in a counterfeit.

In a similar way, we as believers are called to train our eyes to see the truth of the Gospel so that we can notice false doctrine as counterfeit. There will be false teachers and false religions around us, which are deceitful and motivated by selfish ambition. The enemy aims to maintain and feed spiritual confusion by perpetuating these false teachers and beliefs throughout the world.

What’s our best defense? Knowing the truth. Paul starts each of his letters by proclaiming the truth so that his readers will know how to live it out. What is the truth? This passage in Titus provides the Gospel in a nutshell:

- Salvation is for all!
- Salvation comes through Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us and redeemed us from sin (Justification)
- Salvation leads us to live godly and self-controlled lives (Sanctification)
- Jesus saved us so that we can be a purified people eager for good works
- Our hope is in the return of Christ and eternal life with him

When we add our good works to produce “salvation,” it is counterfeit. Jesus did it all. When we look to other gods, it is counterfeit. When we believe we should keep sinning and our works don’t matter, it is counterfeit because our lives are meant to reflect our salvation through action and godliness. His salvation and only his salvation is the real deal.

In contrast, when people are looking to other gods, fortune-tellers, the next and brightest new sign of the times, they are turning towards the false teachers and the idols of the culture, both inside and outside Christianity. Isaiah wasn’t the only one to behold crowds frustrated and famished, trying one thing after another, looking this way and that, up, down, and sideways, but seeing nothing and ending up in an empty hole with a blank wall.

“The religious hunt for signs, the irreligious clamor for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified,” Paul says, completing the thought. There it is again. The new axis of the cross on which a renewed, re-formed, reshaped world moves.

What is so ironic with religious blindness – especially that which causes the religiously blind to chase shadows of the sensational and spectacular? Simply this: we *are* the signs. So says Isaiah; so says Christ. Warning signs and hope signs. That’s who and what *we* are in the wide world. Signs of the Immanuel God who comes to make his home and his heaven *with us*. As signs, we point to Him, the only way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him, who is Christ! (John 14:6)

### **Relate**

What have you heard or seen that was the “counterfeit” Gospel? Have you been living out the true Gospel in your life, being a sign pointing towards Him? Or have you been chasing signs of the times or false gods of our culture thinking they would bring you internal peace and guidance? What does it mean, practically speaking, for you to be “a warning and a hope sign” in this world?

### **Respond**

*Jesus my Savior, thank you for taking all my sins as your burden on the cross, and for giving me forgiveness instead! Holy Spirit, please continue to work your redeeming power throughout every crack and hole in my life, forming me more into your reflection of righteousness. Give me courage to withstand temptations of chasing after anything else but YOU to satisfy my soul. And when I speak or show your Gospel in my actions, help me not to add anything to it. But let me only be a sign that points to you.*

Decide today how you might be intentional about studying and meditating on God’s word each day. It is by His word of life that we know the truth to be able to withstand the lie when it comes. Even five minutes a day can help ground and center you in His truth.

## FRIDAY

# Come to me

### **Reflect**

<sup>25-26</sup> Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You’ve concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

<sup>28-30</sup> “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Matthew 11.25-30 |MSG

### **Receive**

Jesus calls people to walk with him. Not figuratively but literally. He has herds of people following him... listening to his teaching; yes, but also watching how he interacts with the most surprising of people: the women, the lepers, the religious leaders, the tax collectors, and the children. His disciples really followed him as their Rabbi, seeking to do what he did and walk in his sandals so to speak.

He wasn’t calling people to subscribe to his doctrine or begin synagogue services, but he called people to simply walk and be in relationship with him. So the Jews were not only called to revere the holy Torah and the scriptures they held so dear, but they were called to see God-made-flesh in the person of Jesus. This is when all the confusion fades away. Through his interactions and kindness, his miracles and grace, he made the scriptures and law come alive with new breath and new purpose! They could see what was really important for their faith by watching how Jesus lived.

It wasn’t about being right. It wasn’t about being powerful or respected. It was about loving his heavenly Father and loving the least of these as well, even preferring them over his own needs. It was about caring for the sick and the lost, and redeeming what innocence had been stolen. This is the difference between religion and relationship; relationship with our Creator who would send his own son to earth to meet us where we are. And when we get tired, all we have to do is wait on him to bring us peace, love, joy, and grace. A little child doesn’t need to get all the right answers to pass this religious test. He just has to receive God’s love and follow Him.

Let us follow and live out the love of the Father, the Gospel of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit in unforced rhythms of grace.

### **Relate**

Is life for you “unforced rhythms of grace” or are you still tired, burned out, worn out from all of

the constant dog-paddling you have to do to get through it? How can I make this invitation of Christ real in my daily life?

**Respond**

*Rest-bringing Jesus, show me how to take a real rest. Slow me down even as you draw me out of the tiresome river of striving through this world. Dry me off and send me forward with the playful energy of a child awakened to be about his daddy's business in his Daddy's world.*

Spend a few minutes looking at childhood pictures or playing with a child, and remember the innocent wonder and joy brought through seeing the world through their eyes. As a child, life is simply about being loved, taken care of, and wide-eyed exploring! Write down what childlike aspects you want God to redeem in your life and your relationship with Him.