



MORNINGS *with* JESUS 2015

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT *for your* SOUL

365

DEVOTIONS

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Excerpts from
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taken from
Mornings with Jesus 2015

SUNDAY, APRIL 5

“They will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Matthew 1:23 (NIV)

THE FIRST EASTER. IT HAD been thirty-three years since Jesus was born, of a virgin, just like the angel said. It had been hundreds of years since Isaiah first spoke this prophecy that Matthew quoted (Isaiah 7:14). All of that was two thousand-plus years ago.

And Jesus, Immanuel, is still with us.

The promise of His birth was only the beginning of the blessing Isaiah foretold; it would have been incomplete had Jesus not followed through with Good Friday and Easter. The promise of Immanuel, first revealing itself in a manger in Bethlehem, was fulfilled one joyful day outside Jerusalem when Jesus rose. One empty tomb, many confused people, and one Immanuel who returned to be with us.

The celebration of Immanuel is typically associated with Christmas. But lately I’ve been thinking how much more Immanuel means because of Easter.

Immanuel’s birth ushered in thirty-some years of Him walking the earth alongside people, but then Easter ushered in eternity with Him. During those three decades after His birth, He healed lives, raised the dead, upended whole patterns of thinking, and said He wasn’t finished. It was wonderful, of course. Yet Easter’s gift brought unending perfection, the finishing touch. He came to be with us for a lifetime so that we could go to be with Him forever. In the meantime, we need him here and now. And so he is through his Spirit, who not only lives with those who call him Savior, but in us as well.

I’m awed to think of God coming to earth as a man. I’m thunderstruck to consider that He died and rose for me. But is my daily life transformed to the degree that Immanuel abiding within me warrants?

—ERIN KEELEY MARSHALL

FAITH STEP: *Does the reality of Immanuel awe you? Ask Him to make the promise of His presence transforming to you right now and always.*

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. 1 Corinthians 13:11 (NLT)

LAST WEEKEND WE BROKE OUT the family movies. We didn't subject relatives or friends to hours of our memories, but as for Steve, Paxton, Calianne, and me, reminiscing did our hearts good.

The kids got a kick out of seeing themselves as infants and toddlers. They giggled over their baby pudge and attempts at walking and talking, and they howled with laughter when their diaper-clad selves sang and danced to the "potty song." Steve and I oohed and aahed, and I think Steve's eyes welled up a time or two. I know mine did.

I was awestruck by how much Pax and Cali are still who God created them to be, albeit with several more years' growth and maturity behind them. Paxton's eyes still hold the same depth that looked at us through the lens. Calianne's face has the same chubby-cheeky-baby sparkle with a few more years on it. And their personalities are still recognizable as *them*.

I wonder how I look to Jesus as He watches me grow. I still have the same innate characteristics as when I was a new believer. I still struggle with patience and faith and resting instead of fretting. I still let my type A frailties overtake His Spirit's work in me.

But does he see growth in me? Although my kids' chubbiness was adorable, "spiritual baby fat" of judgmentalism, hypocrisy, ungraciousness, anger, self-righteousness, and pride—to name a few—are areas to grow and tone as we mature in Christ.

Someday when I get to heaven and get the replay of my spiritual development, I pray that these years on earth will yield healthy growth and the images will be ones to smile at with my Savior. —ERIN KEELEY MARSHALL

FAITH STEP: *Consider how you've grown the past year. Ask Jesus to show you areas of "spiritual pudge" that He wants to mature.*

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world. Psalm 19:1–4 (NLT)

EVER SINCE I WAS A child I have loved to gaze at clouds. When they're billowy like cotton, I pick a place in them where I'd love to sit for a while. When my daughter told me a couple of years ago that she wanted to sit on a cloud, I knew she was mine!

Something about letting my dreams linger in their depths moves me to envision the bigness of the Lord. When I look at the vastness above me, I love imagining my Savior bigger than the sky; I believe that's exactly how He wants us to see Him. That is, after all, how He sees Himself.

Jesus shares His glory with us through His creation, and that creation can inspire us to praise Him more. The sky is huge; how much greater still is the One Who formed it, redeems it, and holds it in His hand?

When we struggle to see hope in our circumstances, or when the days feel loaded with too much stress, too much that drains us, we can bask in Jesus's glory all around us. In fact, we can be inspired to ask for more of His glory. Because He loves to shine upon us, we can ask Him to send down His glory over everything that troubles us (Romans 8:18).

If we aren't asking Him for more of Himself, for more of His glory, why not? That's one prayer He will answer yes to, and the more we look for more of Him, the more we will experience all that He is.

—ERIN KEELEY MARSHALL

FAITH STEP: *What qualities about creation speak to your heart? Let their beauty move you to worship the Savior.*

FRIDAY, APRIL 24

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. James 1:17 (NIV)

MY FRIEND MARIAN LOVES A great deal. If there's a yard sale in the area, she arranges her Saturday morning to fit it in. Today she stopped by and treated me to a Jesus-moment when I was convinced, once again, that our Savior loves to love us uniquely.

“Have I told you about my bushes?” she asked.

I responded no, so she told me about two small bushes in her yard that had died. She looked for replacements but couldn't find the same variety anywhere, and she didn't know its name.

She figured she'd just remove the dead ones and plant something else or leave two empty spots among the other identical bushes.

Well, one day while running errands, she drove by her bushes lying at the roadside. Not *her* bushes exactly, but two of the same kind, roots and all. Yep. Just sitting there looking abandoned and forlorn (drama and all).

She pulled up to the house and rang the doorbell. The owners said, “Sure, go ahead and take them. We're redoing our landscape and getting rid of those.”

Marian has big faith that trusts when Jesus shows up. If there ever was doubt whether Jesus cares about the smallest—even fairly insignificant—desires of our hearts, this story ought to ring with promise. Two rare bushes just like the two my friend needed. The added gift was that they were free, a sweet bonus that spoke personally to my frugal friend's heart.

Jesus knows what matters to you. Thank Him today for the gifts of love He may send when you're least expecting them. —ERIN KEELEY MARSHALL

FAITH STEP: *Why not begin a remembrance garden in a corner of your yard? Start with one rock and ask Jesus to grow your garden of faith. Add a rock to it each time He shows you He sees you and knows your heart.*