

The CHOSEN

BOOK THREE

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THE CHOSEN Book Three: 40 Days with Jesus
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P U B L I S H I N G

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FOREWORD

When our five-year-old daughter, Lenya, unexpectedly went to heaven five days before Christmas, there were some things we never wondered about. We never wondered where she was. We knew she went to Paradise. We never wondered if God was still good or if He still had a plan for us. Faith thrives in scary places. We never wondered if we had been forgotten, or abandoned, or betrayed. God was with us and gave us peace. And we never worried about whether we would see her again. But one of the things I did often wonder, one of the things that woke me up with cold sweats at 3am, was who exactly was taking care of her in heaven? I mean it's a big place. *Is it Ruth? Is it Esther?* I know she's safe but who is actually watching her? She is only five after all.

When I first watched *The Chosen*, at my wife's insistence I might add, the thing that blew me away was the way Dallas creatively and beautifully presented Jesus. His kind eyes. His sense of humor. His humanity. It's easy to miss that side of Jesus. The backpack-wearing, dancing at the wedding, subtly sarcastic, kind-eyed Jesus. Holy but not pious. Approachable. Funny. Wild. A Savior kids wanted to be around. Until *The Chosen*, I had seen depictions of the Messiah that made me

want to go to worship but never made me want to go to dinner with or book as a babysitter. *The Chosen* showed a Jesus I would climb a tree to listen to and be excited to eat fajitas with him afterward.

Watching Jesus interact with children in particular brought tears to my eyes and comfort to my heart. The thought that the kind of Jesus I saw on my TV was taking care of my little girl applied healing to my soul and made my heart sing. *The Chosen* presented the Jesus that is in the Scriptures in a shocking, wonderfully warm, new way. It made me want to follow Jesus for the first time all over again. It also made me want to read the Scriptures with renewed imagination and wonder.

This is when I discovered Dallas and his wife Amanda's dirty little secret. They never set out to make a show but to make disciples. They got me.

It's easy to become blind to things you have seen many times. The Bible can be that way. The Pharisees searched the Scriptures looking for life but missed the fact that from Genesis to Revelation the whole story was about Jesus. It takes work to get out of the rut and let Jesus come to life in front of you on every page each time you approach it. You have to be intentional about reading it like you have never read it before.

My prayer for you is that if like me (and millions of others) *The Chosen* has ignited something inside of you, it would propel you to shake off your preconceived notions and memorized prayers and pursue a fresh encounter with Jesus as you engage on the adventure that is this devotional. Pour a coffee, make some fajitas, get in your favorite chair, or climb a

tree. Ask God to open the eyes of your heart and help you see the glorious truths in His Word. This 40-day journey could change everything because it is a space for you to encounter the one your heart has longed for all your life.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucy and Susan spent time frolicking with Aslan the Lion who represents Christ, and afterward they never could decide if being with him was more like playing with a kitten or wrestling a thunderstorm. That mix, that tension, that beauty is what awaits you in these pages.

Ready or not here you go.

Levi Lusko

Author, *The Last Supper on the Moon: NASA's 1969 Lunar Voyage*, *Jesus Christ's Bloody Death*, and *the Fantastic Quest to Conquer Inner Space*

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a little different from the ones that came before it.

Our first Chosen devotional was an introduction to Jesus, His followers, and the idea that (like them) we're chosen by God in the "before"—that part of the story when we're broken versions of the people God created us to be. But then Jesus enters in and rescues us from sin and changes us, making us more like Him and less like the before we once were.

Our second devotional picked up where the first left off and sought to answer the question, *What does it really mean to follow Jesus?* To place our identity in Him. To be surrendered to His will and His way. To go where He goes and do the things He does.

But this third book takes following to a whole new level, and we suppose that's a good thing since the world is becoming less and less friendly to those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Which means that as things get more contentious, His followers are gonna need greater clarity of conviction, stronger resolve, and sturdier backbones. And not just because of the hostility around us, but also because God requires it.

*You are not hot or cold.
I wish that you were hot or cold!
But you are only warm—not hot, not cold.
So I am ready to spit you out of my mouth.*

REVELATION 3:15-16

Jesus loves us and made a way for us to be rescued. Indeed, He offers radical, unmerited, and unending grace from the first moment we accept Him to our final dying breath (John 1:16)—that's all true. But in spite of how culturally unpopular, it's also true that every other road leads to destruction (John 3:36) and that *Jesus Christ Himself* will judge unbelievers at the end of the age (Revelation 20:11-15).

Which brings us to this book and the worst worldly sales pitch we have to offer, but perhaps also the most loving exhortation we can muster: Jesus doesn't want passive followers. On the contrary, He wants us to pursue Him, to seek understanding, to pray for more faith, to know and hold fast to what is true and to reject what isn't, to obey God's Word, and to persevere through hard things, of which there will be many.

Jesus wants followers who will passionately pursue Him to the ends of the earth.

So we, dear reader, are raising the temperature.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-4

Amanda, Kristen, and Dallas

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DAY 1

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

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And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

MATTHEW 5:2-3

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wasn't talking about money, though being financially poor sometimes makes it easier to be “poor in spirit.” *Lack* of any kind has a way of tenderizing our hearts and exposing our real need. Conversely, wealth sometimes makes it harder to be poor in spirit since it fosters self-sufficiency and even pride, which are enemies of the lowly posture required to be poor in spirit.

No, the poor Jesus referred to are those who are ready and willing to look to God for help. Because when we

recognize our own spiritual bankruptcy (our desperate need to be saved from sin and all its consequences), we get real low real fast. And if we're smart, we stay there. To be poor in spirit means to take a knee now and forevermore. It means to live in surrender to our Savior, relying on Him for the help we can't possibly provide ourselves.

Safe to say, Jesus was teaching His disciples about a new and uncommon way to live, not only in attitude but also in awareness because Jesus spoke of a kingdom that is not of this world. He wasn't merely teaching His followers about making good choices, though we should obey God's Word and try to be more like Jesus. While our choices are important, they weren't the focus of His sermon. Rather, Jesus wanted His followers to see and understand their new reality and that life here isn't all there is.

Jesus came offering Himself and everything that belongs to Him, which includes kingdom membership. When we embrace Him, we're in, in spite of the fact that we still live here. And the knowledge of that should change everything! We're here, but only for now. Our circumstances are difficult, but only for now. Our pain and suffering are real, but only for now. Sin and sickness and strife are part of our lives, but only for now.

Also part of our lives right now?

1. Access to the King. We can actually approach the God of the universe.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

HEBREWS 10:19-22

2. Access to the King's power. We are not left powerless in the world today.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

Property of BroadStreet Publishing. Do not duplicate. 2 PETER 1:3

3. The attention of the King. Our needs are brought before the Father by Jesus Himself.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:34-35, 37-39

4. The presence of the King. God is with us all the time. In all the things.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

JOHN 14:16-17

Since the kingdom of heaven is already here, those who get low and surrender to Jesus have a whole new way of seeing, understanding, and navigating the broken world we live in. Because no matter our lack, we're under the protection, power, and loving care of the King—we are part of His Kingdom.

And that does indeed change everything.

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that God would help you hold tightly to these verses as you journey through this book and as you grapple with hard things. Pray that He'd cultivate a deep humility and poverty of spirit found only in those who belong to His Son. Pray that your heart and your hope would be transformed by His Spirit and praise Him because He always answers all of the above in the affirmative.

MOVING FORWARD

- o Why does *lack* of anything make it easier to respond positively to Jesus?
- o In what ways do you see the kingdom of heaven at work around you?
- o Through Jesus, you have access to the King. How does knowing that change the way you feel about the difficult circumstances you're currently experiencing?

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DAY 2

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

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Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

MATTHEW 5:10-12

Nearly three decades after Simon was renamed Peter and identified as the rock upon which Jesus would build His church (Matthew 16:18), he identified his fellow church members by saying, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God’s] own possession, that you

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Peter was writing his letter to a bunch of scattered exiles who had fled Jerusalem after suffering brutal persecution from the Romans. It was a scary time. For a while, things were fine between the Christians and the government. But as the church grew and the gospel message spread, so did its perceived threat.

Not surprisingly, some of the believers weren't super eager to agree with Peter's description. Like their wilderness-wandering ancestors, their identity and the circumstances under which they found themselves didn't seem to match. They weren't looking or feeling very royal, and they wondered if being chosen was worth the hardship. Since Peter could empathize with the pressure, he reminded the persecuted church that blessing is rarely synonymous with comfort or popularity.

Peter encouraged the rocky church in a way similar to how Moses encouraged the sandy Israelites. Approximately 1500 years before Peter's hardship, Moses spoke these words during his: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

A whole bunch of things happened between the Israelites' exodus and the formation of the early church, but here's what stayed the same: being chosen never made the people impervious to discrimination, insults, or persecution. On the contrary, it qualified them for it.

THE CHOSEN

That promise actually transcends time, which might be the reason Old Testament Moses and New Testament Peter got to hang out for a minute on the Mount of Transfiguration. Together they stood with the glorified Jesus while hearing the Father say, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5)

They did listen. And Peter went on to communicate to his generation the praises of He who calls us out of darkness and into His wonderful light. Despite the insults, persecution, and false accusations, Peter rejoiced and was glad. He knew that great was his reward in heaven; he’d caught a glimpse of it with his own eyes when he stood next to the persecuted prophets who’d gone before him. They shared a kinship, a bond. Peter and Moses were persecuted because of righteousness.

We, too, are living in a scary time. The circumstances we find ourselves in don’t seem to match our glorious identity. It’s hard to feel royal with all the insults and false accusations being hurled at God’s chosen people. But blessing is not synonymous with comfort or popularity; it’s a result of listening to God and obeying the Son with whom He is well pleased. And the hardship is more than worth it, and great is our reward. Like Peter, Moses, and the rest of the prophets who came before us, someday we too will stand face-to-face with the glorified Jesus.

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for the proper perspective when being insulted, persecuted, or falsely accused because of your faith in Jesus. Ask God to help you rejoice and be glad instead of being offended or angry. Praise Him for the privilege of suffering for His name (Acts 5:41) and ask Him to help you fix your eyes on the glory that awaits.

MOVING FORWARD

- o In what ways have you suffered for your faith?
- o When circumstances don't seem to match, do you find it difficult to agree with the description, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own possession"? Why or why not?
- o Is it hard for you to rejoice and be glad in spite of everything going on in the world? What practical steps can you take to fix your eyes on Jesus and your reward in heaven?

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