

Day 1: What it Means to Know Christ

A man passed away and was resurrected and waiting in a room to be interviewed. Another man was ahead of him. The door opened, the man entered, the door closed. The interviewer began: I want you to tell me what you know about Jesus Christ.

Well, He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem; He lived thirty three years, spending the last three in His ministry, organising His church, choosing His apostles to direct it, giving the gospel to direct our lives.

The interviewer stopped him and said: Yes, yes, that's all true, but I want you to tell me what you know about Jesus Christ.

Well, he was tortured and crucified that we might have eternal life. Three days later He was resurrected that we might return to our Heavenly Father.

Yes, yes, that it true, but I want you to tell me what you know about Jesus Christ. The man, a little perplexed, again began: Well, He restored the gospel in its fullness to the earth through Joseph Smith, reorganised His church, gave us temples wherein we might do work to save our dead. He gave us family prayer and family home evening where we might unite with our families. He gave us the Priesthood to heal the sick and personal ordinances for our salvation and exaltation.

The interviewer again stopped him and said: All of what you have said to me is true. The man was then invited to leave the room. After he left the door opened and the second man entered. As he approached the interviewer he fell upon his knees and cried, "My Lord, My God."

Day 3: The Old Lamp

A lamp once hung in an ancient town
At the corner of a street,
Where the wind was keen, and the way was dark,
And the rain would often beat;
And all night long, its light would shine
To guide the traveler's feet.

The lamp was rough and plain and old,
And the storm had beaten it sore;
'Twas not a thing one would care to show,
Whate'er it been before,
But no one thought what the lantern was,
'Twas the light that, within, it bore.
The lamp is a text for young and old,
Who seek in a world of pride
To shine for their Lord and to show him forth,
And never their light to hide;
You are the lantern,
But Christ is the light inside.

Day 2: The Card Files

In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in the room. There were no features except for the one wall covered by small index card files. These files stretched from floor to ceiling and went endlessly in both directions. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read, "Boys I Have Liked" I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names on each one. I then realized where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalogue system of my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in every detail. A sense of wonder and curiosity mixed with horror stirred within me as I began opening files and looking at their contents. Some brought joy and sweet memories, others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I looked over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching.

A file named, "Friends" was next to the one marked, "Friends I Have Betrayed". The titles ranged from the mundane to the weird. "Books I Have Read", "Lies I have told", "Comfort I have given", "Jokes I have laughed At", "People I have hurt". Some were almost funny in their exactness.

"Things I Have Done in Anger", "Things I have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents". Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes, fewer than I had hoped. I was overwhelmed by the volume of life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my young life to write each of these thousands or millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth, each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature.

When I pulled out the file marked, "Songs I Have Listened To", I realized the files grew to contain the contents. The cards were packed tightly, yet after two or three yards I hadn't found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much of the quality music, but more by the amount of time I knew it represented. When I came to a file marked, "Lustful Thoughts", I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out inch by inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card.

I shuddered at the details. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. A rage broke through me. "No one must see these cards. Not one must ever see this room. I have to destroy them." In a frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn't matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. I took it out and pounded it on the floor. Not a single card would come out. I desperately pulled out a card and tried to rip it, but it was as strong as steel.

Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a sigh, then I saw it. The title, "People I Have Shared the Gospel With". The handles were brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand.

And then the tears came. I began to cry. Sobbing so deep it hurt my stomach. I fell on my knees and cried out in shame. The rows of shelves whirled around me. No one must ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key. But as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him.

No, please, not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus! I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. In the moments that I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to go to the worst boxes.

Why did He have to read every one? Finally He turned and looked at me with pity in His eyes.

But this wasn't a pity that angered me. I dropped my head and began to cry again. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me. Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, he took out a card and one by one He began to sign His name over mine.

"NO!" I shouted, rushing at Him. All I could find to say was, "NO, NO", as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on those cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name JESUS covered mine. It was written with His blood.

He gently took the cards back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign all the cards. I do not think I will ever understand how he did it so quickly. But the next instance it seemed, I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished".

I stood up and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on the door. There are still cards to be written.

Day 4: Shay Plays Baseball

At a fund-raising dinner for a school that serves learning-disabled children, the father of one of the school's students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he offered a question.

"Everything God does is done with perfection. Yet, my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children do. He cannot understand things as the children do. Where is God's plan reflected in my son?"

The audience was stilled by the query. The father continued. "I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like Shay into the world, an opportunity to realize the Divine Plan presents itself. And it comes in the way people treat that child."

Then, he told the following story:

Shay and I walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they will let me play?"

Shay's father knew that most boys would not want him on their team. But the father understood that if his son were allowed to play it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging. Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play.

The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, "We are losing by six runs, and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three.

At the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the outfield. Although no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again.

Now, with two outs and the bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base. Shay was scheduled to be the next at-bat. Would the team actually let Shay bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball. However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps closer to lob the ball in softly so Shay would at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher.

The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have ended the game.

Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, "Shay, run to first. Run to first."

Never in his life had Shay ever made it to first base. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!" By the time Shay was rounding first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman for a tag.

Instead, the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions had been, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Shay ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shay reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third!" As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams were screaming, "Shay! Run home!" Shay ran home, stepped on home plate and was cheered as the hero, for hitting a "grand slam" and winning the game for the team.

"That day," said Shay's father softly, with tears now rolling down his face, "the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of the Divine Plan into this world."

Day 5: Is Your Hat Burning?

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger.

“God, how could you do this to me!” he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. “How did you know I was here?” asked the weary man of his rescuers. “We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Remember, next time your little hut is burning to the ground---it just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

Day 6: The Pearls

The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. “Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please!” Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's up-turned face. “A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$2.00. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma.”

As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbor and asked Mrs. McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents. On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere-Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, “Do you love me?” “Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you.” “Then give me your pearls.” “Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess - the white horse from my collection. The one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite.” “That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night.” And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, “Do you love me?” “Daddy, you know I love you.” “Then give me your pearls.” “Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper.”

“That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you.”

And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, He noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. “What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?” Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, “Here, Daddy. It's for you.”

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime- store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure. So like our Heavenly Father. What is it that we are hanging onto?

Day 7: Heaven Scent (By: Diana Blessing's Mother)

A cold March wind danced around the dead of night in Dallas as the Doctor walked into the small hospital room of Diana Blessing. Still groggy from surgery, her husband David held her hand as they braced themselves for the latest news. That afternoon of March 10, 1991, complications had forced Diana, only 24-weeks pregnant, to undergo an emergency cesarean to deliver the couple's new daughter, Danae Lu Blessing. At 12 inches long and weighing only one pound and nine ounces, they already knew she was perilously premature.

Still, the doctor's soft words dropped like bombs. 'I don't think she's going to make it', he said, as kindly as he could. "There's only a 10-percent chance she will live through the night, and even then, if by some slim chance she does make it, her future could be a very cruel one".

Numb with disbelief, David and Diana listened as the doctor described the devastating problems Danae would likely face if she survived. She would never walk, she would never talk, she would probably be blind, and she would certainly be prone to other catastrophic conditions from cerebral palsy to complete mental retardation, and on and on.

"No! No!" was all Diana could say.

She and David, with their 5-year-old son Dustin, had long dreamed of the day they would have a daughter to become a family of four. Now, within a matter of hours, that dream was slipping away. Through the dark hours of morning as Danae held onto life by the thinnest thread, Diana slipped in and out of sleep, growing more and more determined that their tiny daughter would live, and live to be a healthy, happy young girl. But David, fully awake and listening to additional dire details of their daughter's chances of ever leaving the hospital alive, much less healthy, knew he must confront his wife with the inevitable. David walked, in and said that we needed to talk about making funeral arrangements.

Diana remembers 'I felt so bad for him because he was doing everything, trying to include me in what was going on, but I just wouldn't listen, couldn't listen.' I said, "No, that is not going to happen, no way! I don't care what the doctors say; Danae is not going to die! One day she will be just fine, and she will be coming home with us!"

As if willed to live by Diana's determination, Danae clung to life hour after hour, with the help of every medical machine and marvel her miniature body could endure. But as those first days passed, a new agony set in for David and Diana. Because Danae's under-developed nervous system was essentially 'raw,' the lightest kiss or caress only intensified her discomfort, so they couldn't even cradle their tiny baby girl against their chests to offer the strength of their love. All they could do, as Danae struggled alone beneath the ultraviolet light in the tangle of tubes and wires, was to pray that God would stay close to their precious little girl.

There was never a moment when Danae suddenly grew stronger. But as the weeks went by, she did slowly gain an ounce of weight here and an ounce of strength there. At last, when Danae turned two months old, her parents were able to hold her in their arms for the very first time. And two months later-though doctors continued to gently but grimly warn that her chances of surviving, much less living any kind of normal life, were next to zero.

Danae went home from the hospital, just as her mother had predicted. Today, five years later, Danae is a petite but feisty young girl with glittering gray eyes and an unquenchable zest for life. She shows no signs, what so ever, of any mental or physical impairment. Simply, she is far from the end of her story.

One blistering afternoon in the summer of 1996 near her home in Irving, Texas, Danae was sitting in her mother's lap in the bleachers of a local ballpark where her brother Dustin's baseball team was practicing. As always, Danae was chattering non-stop with her mother and several other adults sitting nearby when she suddenly fell silent. Hugging her arms across her chest, Danae asked, "Do you smell that?"

Smelling the air and detecting the approach of a thunderstorm, Diana replied, "Yes, it smells like rain."

Danae closed her eyes and again asked, "Do you smell that?"

Once again, her mother replied, "Yes, I think we're about to get wet, it smells like rain."

Still caught in the moment, Danae shook her head, patted her thin shoulders with her small hands and loudly announced, "No, it smells like Him. It smells like God when you lay your head on His chest."

Tears blurred Diana's eyes as Danae then happily hopped down to play with the other children. Before the rains came, her daughter's words confirmed what Diana and all the members of the extended Blessing family had known, at least in their hearts, all along. During those long days and nights of her first two months of her life, when her nerves were too sensitive for them to touch her, God was holding Danae on His chest and it is His loving scent that she remembers so well.

Day 8: Orson F. Whitney's Vision of the Savior

It was a dream, or a vision in a dream, as I lay upon my bed in the little town of Columbia, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I seemed to be in the Garden of Gethsemane, a witness of the Savior's agony.

I saw Him as plainly as ever I have seen anyone. Standing behind a tree in the foreground, I beheld Jesus, with Peter, James and John, as they came through a little wicket gate at my right. Leaving the three Apostles there, after telling them to kneel and pray, the Son of God passed over to the other side, where He also knelt and prayed. It was the same prayer with which all Bible readers are familiar: "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

As He prayed the tears streamed down His face, which was toward me. I was so moved at the sight that I also wept, out of pure sympathy. My whole heart went out to Him; I loved Him with all my soul, and longed to be with Him as I longed for nothing else.

Presently He arose and walked to where those Apostles were kneeling-- fast asleep! He shook them gently, awoke them, and in a tone of tender reproach, untinged by the least show of anger or impatience, asked them plaintively if they could not watch with Him one hour. There He was, with the awful weight of the world's sins upon His shoulders, with the pangs of every man, woman and child shooting through His sensitive soul-- and they could not watch with Him one poor hour!

Returning to His place, He offered up the same prayer as before; then went back and again found them sleeping. Again He awoke them, readmonished them, and once more returned and prayed. Three times this occurred, until I was perfectly familiar with His appearance-- face, form and movements. He was of noble stature and majestic mien-- not at all the weak, effeminate being that some painters have portrayed; but the very God that He was and is, as meek and humble as a little child.

All at once the circumstances seemed to change, the scene remaining just the same. Instead of before, it was after the crucifixion, and the Savior, with the three Apostles, now stood together in a group at my left. They were about to depart and ascend into Heaven. I could endure it no longer. I ran from behind the tree, fell at His feet, clasped Him around the knees, and begged Him to take me with Him.

I shall never forget the kind and gentle manner in which He stooped, raised me up, and embraced me. It was so vivid, so real. I felt the very warmth of His body, as He held me in His arms and said in the tenderest tones: "No, my son, these have finished their work; they can go with me; but you must stay and finish yours." Still I clung to Him. Gazing up into His face-- for He was taller than I-- I besought Him fervently: "Well, promise me that I may come to you at the last." Smiling sweetly, He said, "That will depend entirely upon yourself."

I awoke with a sob in my throat, and it was morning.

Today is Easter Sunday. We hope that as you have reflected on the life of the savior during this 8 day walk with Christ, that your testimony has grown and that you have drawn closer to him. The Lord is always near. He knows your name and his arms are always extended towards you. Remember Him always and you will feel of his great love for you.
Never forget who you are.

We love you. Happy Easter.