**Bread ‘n Wine**

**99** *Reflections from a Dogeared Pilgrim*

John Cox

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### Introduction

These Reflections are a compilation of writings over the past twelve years. They first emerged in the form of a weekly note to members of the church I served as a pastor as a means of encouragement and community building. Some are from my blog (johncoxauthor.ca).

The Reflections are arranged randomly and can be read in any order. Sometimes you may stumble upon one written in the Christmas season and it is June. I believe God can speak to us in a wide variety of ways and can apply a Christmas theme to any day of the year. Each Reflection ends with a few thoughts to help us consider and apply what we have read, and a passage from the Bible.

Approach the exercise of reading these Reflections with expectation and take time to ponder and reflect, there is no rush to finish. You could spend a few days on one reflection, reading the chapter around the Scripture quoted. You could randomly open the book and read whatever comes up. Don’t be afraid to be playful with God, he is serious about us coming to him as children. He desires to speak and encourage us more than we know.

Someone asked the question, “Do you ever worry, or have anxiety about something?” The answer is usually ‘yes’. “Well then, you know how to meditate.”

These Reflections cover a wide range of topics and are intended to provoke thinking and encourage venturing beyond small boxes of interpretation. If you don’t agree with something, that’s fine. Move on to the next Reflection, or better still, chat to a friend about what bothers you. You could even contact me, and I will do my best to respond.

May God take these very humble and imperfect words and use them to inspire you, to bless you, and to encourage you in your journey with Jesus, in your daily life, and as a vital member of his rather messy church.

### 14 Encouragement

*He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Acts 11:24*

I would love Luke’s words describing Barnabas to be my epitaph, how about you? Barnabas is one of those characters so easily overlooked in the pages of the Bible. It is the qualities of people like him that are foundational to the strength and integrity of the wider Christian community.

Great beams of wood supporting huge roofs are built by gluing (laminating) small strips together. The glue is hidden. The individual pieces of wood can never accomplish what the greater whole can support when firmly bound together. Barnabas (filled with the Holy Spirit) is the glue. He is remembered for his great encouragement and generosity.

In the days of the early Church everyone was learning that faith in God involved the visible expression of care and generosity to those around us. We read that the first Christians were extremely aware of one another and ensured that no-one went without. They shared all things. One of the first to model a light touch with money and a generous heart was Barnabas. He sold land he owned and brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles in Jerusalem to support their ministry (Acts 4:37).

Barnabas was not only generous, but he was also courageous and discerning. It was Barnabas who introduced the newly converted Saul to the suspicious and scared disciples in Jerusalem and vouched for the integrity of his conversion. Later he would travel to Tarsus and encourage Paul to share a ministry journey with him, resulting in the writing of letters that would form a substantial portion of our New Testament. Paul received the acclaim while Barnabas remained in the background. Barnabas was probably applauding and smiling from ear to ear and sending more cheques whenever he could - no doubt.

It is tempting to look for quick fixes or short cuts in the Christian life - I know because I have tried. The reality is there is no substitute for relationships forming the context of growth. Love is the key to releasing all the meaning and power contained in every word of Scripture.

When everything is stripped away, we are far more similar than we are different, aren’t we? Encouragement builds us up. Criticism and complaining pulls us down and tears us apart.

**Consider:** Let us not underestimate the power of encouragement and affirmation. When we appreciate something, or have been blessed by someone, make a call, send an email, tell them face to face. Do not assume that person does not need the kind word. Try not to delay your affirmation or allow shyness to have the victory.

May you and I live like Barnabas today, rather than wait to express appreciation in epitaphs carved on cold stones. As best we can, let us be encouragers of others, placing them and their success above ours.

Point others toward the ‘more than we can ask or imagine’ God doing – in you and through you.

**Acts 11:25-26**

*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

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Don't ask God to guide your footsteps

if you are not willing to move your feet.

Portuguese Proverb

### 20 Jesus Makes a Difference

Wherever Jesus went he touched people, leaving many in his slipstream who had ‘come alive’. They were talkative about his impact on their lives, how they had experienced an unexpected awakening of hope and joy. It was a profound revelation to discover that God and joy were always intended to be the foundation of human life on earth. That the Father’s heart is passionate and jealous for relationship.

I have taken way too long to take hold of this truth, run after it, and claim it as my own. I mistakenly interpreted my circumstances as indicators of my favor with God (or lack thereof). Consequently, I spent too much time struggling to survive - to be honest, often feeling passed by. I subsequently have learned what a lie I was subjecting myself to. How it eroded my relationship with God. It robbed me of joy. It often left me isolated and alone inside, while the outer mask portraying ‘everything’s fine’ kept slipping - despite my best efforts.

To encounter Jesus is to discover the wellspring of love and joy. I remember when I was in Israel we hiked down a deep river-bed called the Wadi Quilt. It winds through barren and rocky wilderness from the foothills of Jerusalem to Jericho. Along one side runs an aqueduct built by Herod to carry water down to his palace on the outskirts of Jericho. The temperature was about 120 degrees and all the way we followed the aqueduct that flows with clear refreshing water. We began our hike at the wellspring where the water bubbled up from underground as it has been doing for more that two thousand years.

The love and joy of God is like that.... it never runs dry. But to access its refreshing qualities we must locate the source and then step into its flow. There is a lot of talk these days about being ‘hydrated’ - almost to the point that we do not leave home without our bottle! Imagine if Christians were hydrated with overflowing joy and hope irrespective of their circumstances. Not offensively trite and nauseating but confident and peaceful, secure in the Father’s love and his faithfulness.

Jesus prayed for his disciples asking the Father that their joy would be full, not eked out in small measures to keep them alive on the way to heaven. Remember how he promised a never-ending supply of water to the woman who met him at the well and he told her ‘Everything I’d ever done,’? If you don’t know the story, take time to read it in the first half of John (Chapter Four).

I am praying for that kind of drenching and reality in my life. I am totally unmotivated by theory. I am extremely inspired with the promises of Jesus pointing to an attainable experience on earth as it is in heaven - today. I am praying for churches to become wide and rich floodplains where many find nurture, hope, joy, and profound healing.... in Jesus. The signs and wonders will be Christian men, women, and children dripping wet in a dry wilderness, unashamed to speak of what they have seen and heard; more than willing to lead thirsty people to Jesus.

**Consider:** If you were drenched and filled by God’s love and Spirit what do you think you would look like? What do you desire more of? Perhaps he wants to release those things in you and through you and has already? How about living from his acceptance, power, and affirmation?

**2 Corinthians 1:20-21**

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.**Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us.*

The usefulness of a cup is in its emptiness. Chinese Proverb

### 55 Declarations amid Despair

I fumbled through pages of books - grasping for straws lodged between scattered phrases desperate to find a glimmer of light at the end of my claustrophobically dark tunnel. Despair and depression gripped me in a vice like a crocodile snatches its victim and twisting and turning drags it into the depths. I felt helpless, and could see no way of escape, or end in sight.

I was reading the writings of those who had endured depression; how were they still alive? I was so devoid of hope that even knowing the authors survived made a difference.

Years later I reflect on that dark time, astounded at what transpired. It was only God, in his mercy and grace who rescued me from what felt quite literally like the jaws of death. Once one has trudged through the valley of the shadow of death when hope rises, like a dawning sun, above a horizon you thought was lost, you never want to lose sight of it again.

I realize now that much of my life, my joy, my hope, and even my faith had been stolen by a cunning thief who aims to kill and destroy. Call him satan. Call him the devil, call him evil or whatever you want. You may not believe in him, but he believes in you as a host for the parasite he is. I had allowed him to gain access by my poor choices rooted in my circumstances. Believing lies I had been reduced to a weak and pathetic victim. But because I am writing this you know it was not the end; God does redeem and help us overcome.

I listened to a talk the other day where I was reminded that the only living ‘being’ to whom God has given legitimate authority is human; you and me - made in his image. That authority is to be exercised over the earth and all living creatures; not over one another. Evil has no authority at all other than that which we relinquish to it.

Like a vampire it feeds off those who lose their identity as sons and daughters of the living God. It diminishes them to ineffective skeletons far removed from the vibrant people the Father intends them to be. As an emaciated body reveals disease or starvation, so too a person lacking identity or God’s Spirit within them is lifeless, without hope. But….

God releases hope and joy among his people that grows from the depths of who he is for us - `and in us. It is neither superficial nor naive, it is the fruit of a confidence we have in his faithfulness, his goodness, and his promise to never leave us nor forsake us. Hope in the heart, where the blood flows, is not nourished by intellectual concepts. It is born from the love of the Father revealed through his Son, Jesus, and brought to life in us by his Spirit.

The mandate for any Christian community is to be a place where heaven touches earth releasing hope and joy into the world - even where circumstances and situations are tough. Declarations of God’s goodness are powerful. Yes, when one is overwhelmed in dark despair they can sound pathetic and irritating. But speaking truth to darkness weakens its grip. For instance: I am deeply loved. God is with me now. He is not angry, and he cares about my situation. He holds me close right now, even when I feel nothing. I believe he will help me through this, step by step, day by day.

I know what unbelief and anger feels like first-hand. Affirming revelations and declarations saved my life and helped me find hope for a future I never believed possible. Unfortunately, most of us know the real power in darkness and negativity; often more than we experience the much, much more that is offered and unleashed through hope in Jesus.

Christianity is meant to be powerful and life-changing! My joyful testimony now is that I find it hard to comprehend the years when I felt so trapped and hopeless. God has no favorites, and these declarations need to be spoken out as we choose to rise and take hold of our life and destiny. Attitudes and habits such as criticism, negativity, pessimism, and depression can be as familiar as old friends sticking like barnacles to our spirits. Begin to marinate them in declarations and they will, much to your surprise, drop off as hope reclaims the ground that has been stolen from you.

**Consider:** What phrases run through your head about yourself that are negative and lies? Write them down, cross them out, and then write down what Jesus would say instead. If you cannot talk to yourself, pretend you are speaking to a friend.

**John 8:10-11**

*Then Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?”* [*“No one,*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3762.htm)[*Lord,”*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm)[*she answered.*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2036.htm)[*“Then neither*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3761.htm)[*do I*](https://biblehub.com/greek/1473.htm)[*condemn*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2632.htm)[*you,”*](https://biblehub.com/greek/4771.htm)[*Jesus*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2424.htm)[*declared.*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2036.htm)[*“Now*](https://biblehub.com/greek/575.htm)[*go*](https://biblehub.com/greek/4198.htm)[*and*](https://biblehub.com/greek/2532.htm)[*sin*](https://biblehub.com/greek/264.htm)[*no more.”*](https://biblehub.com/greek/3371.htm)

### 66 Peace, Despite…

I suppose all of us secretly dream of life as perpetual paradise. No worries or stress, zero responsibilities; the chance to relax in never-ending sunshine on some beach where the turquoise ocean rolls lazily across pristine white sand.

I remember taking a team to support a building project in Honduras. After our work we visited Roatan, one of the Bay Islands. The beaches were the fantasies of postcards stretching for miles lined with coconut palms; long green fronds bending and spiked against a clear blue sky. “Why are these beautiful beaches so empty?” I inquired. “Well, if you lie near the coconut trees you never know when a coconut may drop on your head, and the beach is full of sand fleas,” was the answer given.

It seems so typical of our lives on earth, where every Eden mirage has a hidden liability or hazard - invisible from a distance. May as well learn how to embrace our present (the double-edged sword that is life) and find peace and joy where we live right now - amidst falling coconuts and other bugs - because they are everywhere.

I am inspired by how Jesus lived on earth. His context was riddled with donkey loads of inconvenience, unfairness, exploitation, and uncertainty. Human life was cheap; often at the mercy of the Roman occupying army and the whims of those who ruled. Human rights were a joke, religion was peddled on every street corner, and newborn babies could be killed if the regional autocrat were paranoid about rumors of a newborn king.

This was the guy who said, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, what you will eat, drink, or wear.” “Peace I give to you, not as the world gives.” Jesus did not merely give advice to others - he lived what he advocated. He walked the talk without a victim mentality or a grandiose sense of martyrdom. Nowhere is that more evident than in the events leading up to his crucifixion. It was the easiest outcome in the world for him to avoid by merely compromising or offering the religious leaders some token of respectful subservience for public consumption.

I imagine if I was in Jesus’ situation, I might hear God calling me to another land as a missionary. Perhaps I could delay what seemed inevitable by advocating for the disciples to have more equipping and training. They were so raw and often teetering on the edge of packing up and returning home. My rational mind could find more reasons than the tassels on my prayer shawl to avoid sipping the cup in Gethsemane, escaping the ripping lashings, and keeping my hands out of sight rather than nailed to a cross.

Unlike me and Peter, when the rooster crowed, Jesus never flinched, doubted, or turned to run. As a faith-filled man he wrestled through sweat and blood in the Garden of Gethsemane before his capture and crucifixion. Even knowing God as Father and empowered with his Spirit did not mean he did not feel fear or anxiety. The crucial point for us to learn from is this. Long before the pressure climaxed, Jesus had settled the matter of whom he trusted when darkness loomed, and all strength drained in blood on the ground beneath his nailed paralyzed feet. There was peace to be experienced amidst circumstances that sent every friend scurrying for cover. A more magnificent picture was being painted than anyone on earth could ever understand.

God Almighty underscored the fact that he was on a mission of love and forgiveness that would shake the foundations of the world with the resurrection of his Son. The journey between womb and tomb was perilous, hostile at times, riddled with injustice and easy escape routes. I am so proud of Jesus - grateful, and indebted.

Peace is an inside job, flowing from the heart outward… because of God’s love revealed through Jesus. If we wait until humans have cobbled together an agreement and conditions for peace, before too long we are picking up pieces. And around and around we go again.

**Consider:** Where are you delaying your abiding in peace? Until a circumstance changes? Are you waiting for a goal to be achieved, or a relationship to be mended? Why not consider leaving those elements in God’s hand and receiving his peace now? That does not mean those things are unimportant. They are merely inadequate as sources of lasting peace.

**John 14:27**

*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.*

### 71 God is Faithful

Someone reading this needs encouragement to know that God is faithful; that he can be trusted if you remain close and refuse to allow your circumstances to have the last word. “Then why doesn’t he do something for me?” some of us retort with weariness and tired unbelief. That is certainly what I would have said some years back when I was neck-deep in despair and angrily trying to work out life ‘doing it my way’. Trying to push my will onto the world around me and unwilling to consider that I needed help.

It was an exhausted ‘me’ who finally began to yield and admit once again that I cannot do ‘life’ on my own with any sense of fulfilment or satisfaction. My best efforts left me empty inside and my worst moments filled me with anger and blame. That is when I heard the whisper reminding me of my identity, “You’ve forgotten who you are. You’re my beloved son, with identity and value, there’s a future waiting for you if you’ll step into it... all I have is yours.” I felt power rising on the inside of me and in my mind’s eye my circumstances receded as I grew in assurance and stature and in Nelson Mandela’s words, began the long walk into freedom.

Nothing magically fell into place the next day. It was more like beginning a long hike through valleys and over mountains. The unknown journey was one step at a time across a wide variety of terrain. Sometimes it was beating through the thick underbrush of a dark valley and on other days there were inspiring views from the tops of mountains. As I walked, I noticed my faith muscles growing again. I was becoming more easily able to endure the uphill climbs and even enjoy challenges that would previously have led me back into despair. The secret was that I knew I was not walking alone; my trust in God my Father’s presence and provision blossomed and was constantly reaffirmed. In my spirit there was a new sense of hope and confidence, opportunities and conversations moving forward emerged. I had a renewed sense of self and an expectation for a better future that had been a long time coming.

There were moments of terror and doubt, but joy invariably came in the morning; often music and songs were on my lips. The music had been silent for a long time. I was learning to live and walk from a place of victory, provision, and assurance. Above all a renewed identity rooted in God’s love and favor rested upon me all the time no matter what my circumstances were. Today I feel like a veteran, a seasoned fighter, one who is supremely confident in the faithfulness, integrity, and purposes of Jesus. I want to serve him and through him enable others experience his reality and know the same affirmation he has poured over me despite my rebellion at times.

**Consider:** Do you have challenges that are stifling your faith? Disillusionment or discouragement eating away. These are moments we will benefit from sharing our thoughts with someone we can trust. Sometimes merely bringing things into the light helps to turn them around and stop the rot.

Here is a reflection from my friend Kyle who helped edit these writings:

*Today, I ask you to imagine God, the creator of all things, the one who never makes mistakes entering his creative studio. The door swings open, and light fills the space. God with purpose in his eyes, quickly grabs an ancient old leather apron, tosses it on and starts pacing back and forth, inspiration has taken hold of him. Soon he begins to inspect thousands of clay mounds on a shelf near the back of his studio, he is looking for something particular, something well suited to his intentions. Suddenly he finds the proper bit of clay and smiles a smile that only mothers have for their newborn baby and lets out a resounding “yes”. You watch as he sits down, gently, and skillfully he moves the clay from one place to another until the rough shape of a human being is now formed. Then you hear him begin to hum to himself as his fingers and tools, bring forth the fine details: you begin to recognize this clay, to your surprise and unbelief it looks like … like… you. He begins to admire his work, it is beautiful in his eyes, tears of joy fall upon his face, he cannot wait to share you with the world and so he takes one enormous inhale until his chest hurts and breathes his spirit into you….and says live my child, live!*

**Hebrews 11:8**

*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.*

Pride is concerned with who is right... Humility is concerned with what is right.

Pakistani Proverb

### 90 Discovering Treasure

The interesting factor about treasure hunts is they are never passive. They always encourage a sense of excitement, promise, motivation, and action. Which is exactly what Jesus invites us into when we begin to follow Him. In fact, when we are first ‘found’ by Jesus we get to experience what it is like to be ‘rejoiced over’ and treasured ourselves. For me it came as a wave of relief and joy as acceptance and belonging washed over me. There was hope and expectancy as I anticipated a future that was not merely hanging on my grit and ability. God promised to be with me and even go ahead. Best of all, his promise was to never leave me or forsake me. How does that sound to your ears as you read this?

How do you think of yourself before God the Father? The truth revealed by Jesus was that when he takes our hand and looks at us, he sees a treasure of infinite value and worth. Remember how the father ran out and embraced the prodigal son as he returned from life on the pig farm (see Luke 15). This was after he had squandered his inheritance on wine, women, and who knows what else? He returned to his father feeling anything but ‘treasure-like’. He felt shame and awkwardness, embarrassed and guilty. The treasure had been ripped out of him because of his rebellion, actions, and attitudes. We are often most ruthless to ourselves when we contemplate our failures and regrets. Shame is a terrible friend. Shame accuses and destroys the soul. God never shames. He convicts us of wrong, calls us to repentance (change direction) and reminds us of our identity as beloved sons and daughters.

The good news is that God the Father and his Son are brilliant at restoring what looks like junk into the treasure that it was first created to be. They can do it with astounding speed - up close and personal - only when they are embracing the one who has lost hope, identity, and vision. All this talk of treasure highlights a truth that most of us need to keep rediscovering and allowing God to ‘make alive again’ within us. That is the passion and excitement to expect new things and astounding revelations as we keep company with Jesus. We have to build on the foundational cornerstone that we are loved.

In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, Jesus speaks about restoring the Church in Ephesus to its ‘first love’. To restore our first love and excitement that is only evidenced when we are close to him and aware of his love and of ourselves being ‘treasured’. Jesus said that we are to treasure/love others as we ourselves have been treasured/loved.

If we are to walk into the promises and dreams the Lord has for us it is critically important that we walk into those dreams out of places of confidence, love, and security in our identities as followers of Jesus and children of a loving Father. This is not sentimentality; it is the key to authority and sharing mercy and grace, hearing the voice of God; knowing his presence and worshiping him with an enthusiasm that is life giving and power releasing.

**Consider:** Let us ask God to release in us a sense of anticipation and expectancy - as if we were on a treasure hunt. Let us expect him to have placed a treasure amid our present triumphs or failures for us to discover and enjoy. These nuggets may come in the form of a dream, a picture, a song, a healing - or whatever. Expectantly give him permission to use us - it is even possible that his treasure for someone else present will be wrapped up in ‘us’! Be a participant in discovering the answers we seek. Happy treasure hunting!

**Matthew 6:19-21**

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**98** I Now Realize

“I now realize….”

Cornelius was a Roman Centurion, a Gentile, not a Jew. He ate pork and never entered a synagogue. He was not ‘one of us’ (God’s chosen people).

Despite that fact, there came a day when Cornelius received a word from God (whom the Jews thought was ‘theirs’) instructing him to invite Simon Peter to his home. The next day just before men arrived at Peter’s door, Peter had a vision in broad daylight. It was a large sheet full of animals that he was commanded to kill for food. Peter protested and identified the animals as unclean according to Jewish law and tradition. “Do not call anything I have made unclean” came the retort.

Then Peter, like Cornelius, received a word from God about an impending request from a Gentile for a visit; and he was instructed to accompany them. A day later, after a long journey by foot Peter stood among Gentiles in the Centurion’s home. A radical action casting all tradition and prejudice aside in obedience to God. They proceeded to share their experiences of the same God. It was a revelation to Peter that cut through tradition, culture, mindsets, and deep prejudice.

In great humility Peter’s opening sentence was, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism…”

One of the most encouraging and attractive things about Peter is that we can relate so easily to him, precisely because his struggles are ours. Despite his many misunderstandings Jesus never abandoned him or humiliated him in his struggle to make sense of the impossible. There were quite a few moments when Simon Peter muttered, “I now realize….” Perhaps it was these ‘eureka moments’ that formed Peter’s deep understanding of God’s nature and love. It eventually led him to being able to hear and obey God’s heart for the Gentiles. He could not have been used there if he had not worked through all the other ‘moments’; such as:

* I now realize…. this man called Jesus is not ordinary (after the miraculous catch of fish when they first met and Jesus called Simon to follow him)
* I now realize…. that Jesus does miraculous healing (after witnessing Jesus heal his sick mother-in-law)
* I now realize ….. that Jesus is unpredictable, compassionate, and practical (after witnessing the feeding of the 5,000)
* I now realize…. that Jesus honors me when I take risks and will be there when I sink (after stepping out of the boat and walking on water with Him)
* I now realize….. that Jesus lives in absolute peace and trust in His Father’s faithfulness (when the disciples were terrified of a storm and Jesus slept in the boat before calming the wild sea)
* I now realize…. that Jesus prophetic word that |I will be a ‘rock’ is beyond what I believe about myself (after Jesus declared that Simon’s name would be Peter)
* I now realize…. that I haven’t seen or understood anything yet (after standing on the Mount of Transfiguration with James, John, Moses and Elijah and Jesus in all His glory)
* I now realize…. that my solutions, despite my passion, are not always how Jesus acts (after cutting off a Roman soldier’s ear with a sword in Gethsemane)
* I now realize…. that I’m not as spiritual as I imagined (after falling asleep when Jesus asked for prayer in Gethsemane)
* I now realize…. that I totally overestimate my strength and ability to follow Jesus (after Peter denied Jesus three times as he approached crucifixion)
* I now realize…. that no matter how I fail Jesus will forgive and never abandon me (after Jesus met him on shore of Galilee and said, “Do you love me?”)
* I now realize…. that I am totally dependent upon Jesus and His Spirit alive in me (after waiting in Jerusalem and being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost)
* I now realize….. that God can use me just like I witnessed Him using Jesus (after he and John healed the crippled man at the temple gate)
* I now realize…. that God’s Spirit can flow through me with power, give me courage, and set me free to be ‘the rock’ I never imagined three years ago (after Peter spoke and 3000 were baptized)

There were probably many times Peter was tempted to ‘unfollow Jesus’, and no doubt every one of the disciples. Ironically, those were the very moments when God wanted to break though and enable Peter to ‘now realize’ something about Jesus, or himself, that would help him grow into a better version of himself.

Conflict is not when we have differing points of view; it is when we allow the expression of differences to sabotage relationships and to release judgement, blaming, and name calling.

**Consider:** Let us embrace the moments of confusion, misunderstanding, even frustration and be open to what God has for us just beyond. Most often real transformation and growth takes place during life, not merely in our heads or by clicking a ‘like’ on Facebook. “I now realize..” has to be on the lips of every disciple of Jesus. Following Jesus includes many moments of not understanding. Be encouraged, your next ‘I now realize’ moment may be just around the corner.

**Luke 18:34**

*The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.*