

## **QUESTIONS TO LIVE BY**

**Luke 2:8–35**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Our focus is on the theme “Questions to Live By.” Rather than reading this Scripture in its entirety, recognize, as we start out, that there are four major segments of this passage. The first is the appearance of the angel to the shepherds and their subsequent visit to the manger at Bethlehem. The second segment of the passage is where Jesus’ parents bring Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord thirty-two days after His circumcision. The third part of this passage is when the elderly, godly man in the temple, Simeon, takes Jesus up in his arms and blesses God and gives a prophecy concerning Jesus. The fourth part of this passage is where Simeon says some deeply disturbing words to Mary about a sword piercing her own heart. Whenever we read a Scripture like this, its familiarity may in itself be dulling to our sensitivity. That is, we read a Christmas passage, the birth nativity passage, and we think to ourselves as we read it, “I already know that and how does that possibly relate to the kind of tension and concerns and problems that I’ve addressed and lived within my personal life this last week?” I find it such an incredible challenge to minister to a group that is as diverse as this group, where we have such a wide variety of age spans and interests in life. To think that, somehow, the one Scripture can speak to us all in every one of our special life situations, and it can speak with equal power and authority. That to me would not be possible, were it not for the translating work of the Spirit, to lift the Scripture off the page and put an application into our heart. So that’s what I really seek to do today, with the Spirit’s help, to see the Scripture lifted off its page and put into our heart in a very special and practical way.

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I want to do this by asking four questions that are related to the four segments of Scripture that we are going over today.

#### **I. The first question that comes is this: What are the realities in your world?**

That question arises quite naturally from the consideration of the shepherd's story in verses 8–20 of chapter 2. When I see the shepherds, I strip away the romantic idea of them being in the field on Christmas night, and I see instead men who are involved in an occupation that was perhaps a lot like you may be involved in, a lifestyle that has become a daily grind. There are not any intellectual challenges to being a shepherd. There are no motivational seminars that I know of—then or now—to tell people how to be a better shepherd or how to get another step up the corporate ladder or how to increase your retirement plan through a wise investment of income flowing to you as a shepherd.

Being a shepherd is a daily grind. Words like “routine” and “boredom” come easily to my mind when I think of what they were doing. It's everyday... get up and do the same thing. These people are in a job that's going nowhere. IBM is not going to come along and hire them. What is IBM going to do with a non-computer shepherd, so to speak, to transpose the cultures?

They are involved, also, not only in a kind of tedious job and tedious lifestyle, but they're involved at the low end of the economic ladder. They're at minimum wage, or if they've got a shrewd aggressive employer, he's got them working for less than minimum wage. And to make matters worse, they're working the graveyard shift. They're on duty at night, plodding away, trying to keep awake, trying to also keep in some touch with their families on a periodic basis. They're at work for days on end without a break. And not only that, we can do other things from knowing a little bit about shepherds of that time culturally.

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They were basically a despised class of people. We have the romantic idea of a shepherd from Psalm 23 or from David's being the shepherd king of Israel. But in actual fact, in New Testament days, shepherds were regarded by religious people as low class. Their job made it impossible for them to keep the ceremonial regulations such as the washing of hands and the like, which would even allow them to come and participate in the temple life. They were, therefore, segregated from practicing the religious life which was then prevalent.

They were looked upon as thieves. Shepherds were frequently seen as being confused over what is mine versus what is thine. You may know somebody like that, who doesn't have a good grasp of what is mine and what is thine.

Shepherds were even so looked down upon that their testimony was not accepted in a court of law.

So here they were plugging away and forgotten—written off; archetypal representatives of the peasant classes of the entire world. If you would allow me this, I would even suggest that they were nontranscendental people. That is to say they were not concerned with the great issues of “Where did I come from, where am I going.” They were not enrolling in a university class on metaphysics or anything like this. They were just sort of “put-the-right-fender-on/put-the-left-fender-on.” If they're working on the assembly line, they always paint this swatch of metal red... it's punch in-punch out. Do the same thing all day long. Everything's normal. Everything's tedium. It's just, “get through life,” and you sort of feel inoculated and numbed about life. That's how I see the shepherd's world when it is dramatically intersected on that Christmas Eve.

The realities of their world were the common, ordinary, routine. And suddenly, they have a different reality; because the coming of Jesus into earth introduces new realities in a life. The shepherds become aware of the unseen world. Always before, it had just been what you could

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see and what you could get your hands on. That was reality: touch it, feel it, see it. But suddenly, the unseen world became visible and the God who was silent spoke to them through the words of mighty angels. And they, who didn't have a grasp on the transcendental questions, suddenly became people who know God's plan for the human race. The angel, right off the bat, tells them that that baby who has been born, just a short distance away in Bethlehem, is a Savior, He is the Christ, and He is Lord. In those three words, the angel intersects the reality of the shepherd's world.

The term "Savior" assumes that one is lost and needs to be rescued. I don't need a Savior if I'm not lost. I remember when I was ten years of age, I nearly drowned in a community swimming pool. The lifeguards thought I was joking by thrashing around in the water. They thought I just wanted to get them to do something, so they sat there and watched me go under. Finally a gal who was older (eighteen years of age—very old to me as a ten-year-old) sees my struggle, comes over and pulls me out and rescues me. If I'm swimming along real well, I have no need for a Savior. It's only when I am lost that I need a Savior. And God sending Jesus is His way of saying, "Whether you feel this way or not, the whole human race need to be saved."

Into that world, comes a Savior. Into that world comes the Christ, which in the Greek or the Hebrew simply means "the anointed one," the one smeared with oil. There were only three kinds of people in the Old Testament that were smeared with oil. It was sort of like an installation as they came into an office. The prophet was anointed with oil, which meant that he was recognized as one who knew God and spoke for God. A king was anointed, which meant he now had the right to reign. And a priest was anointed when he began his ministry, showing that he had the right to act as an intercessor between man and God. The anointed one, the Messiah, would be One who would pick up simultaneously all three offices—the prophet of all prophets who would

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truly speak God to us, the king who would rule over us, and the priest who would alone intercede between us and God. Suddenly, that reality gets jammed into the shepherd's world.

That He was Lord. The sacred Hebrew name for God is used of this child born in Bethlehem.

Those realities need to be intersecting our life. To us, Jesus has come, the One who speaks for God to us; authoritatively, completely, finally. No other voice will we listen to that is in disagreement with His voice. He is God speaking to us. He is Christ, the one who God has appointed and whom we need, therefore, to designate as well as the one who speaks for God, who rules over us as king and who intercedes for us. He is God almighty. What a difference His coming makes in our life.

One of the messages that I sometimes give at a wedding: A young Christian couple is standing before me, and I'll be talking about the special treasure that is theirs as Christians. A couple of phrases that I will say to them will be something like this, "What a loss, not to have fellowship and friendship with God, to begin the day without knowing Him, to eat meals without blessing Him, to have needs and not tell Him, to bear children and raise them without Him, to be absent from His people, to never serve in His name, to be absent of the love He brings, the peace He provides, the joy He inspires. You know Him. There was a moment in your life when you gave it to Him. You know, when you lie down and when you rise up, there is a God in heaven and His name is Jesus.

That is the reality that intersected the shepherd's reality. You know, from now on, when you lie down and when you rise, that there is a God in heaven and His name is Jesus. That reality needs to govern and dominate our lives.

The angel brings the announcement that this birth of Jesus would be joy to the world, and it would bring peace among men who knew God's grace and experienced God's grace. I would

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submit to you that there is no joy in life that is absolute and complete until we know the joy of what God has done for us in Christ. And neither can there be any peace.

God takes the shepherds out of their world into His world and brings them a new reality. What are the realities governing your life?

### **II. The second question arising out of this passage: What obedience is God seeking of you?**

This question arises out of verses 21–24, the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, the step-father of Jesus. There are four marks of obedience that they go through.

**A.** They're being guided and governed by the Old Testament law, and therefore they come. They have their child, their Son—or Mary's Son—circumcised on the eighth day. Leviticus 12:3 provided that as a requirement. They obeyed that. The sign of the covenant God had made with Abraham.

**B.** The naming of the child is the second mark of their obedience. The angel had said, "Call him Jesus," when he had first appeared to Mary. So they called him Jesus. That common Hebrew name, Joshua, just as a common Hispanic name, Jesús. In the Bible times, back in Numbers 13:16, there was a man by the name of Hoshea. Hoshea's name meant "salvation." One day, Moses said to Hoshea, "Your name is no longer going to be called 'Hoshea.' I'm going to call you 'Joshua.' He called him Joshua because he took the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, and the name "Hoshea," and put the two names together, and it came out as "God's salvation." It was no longer just "salvation"; if salvation is to come, it must come from God. That ancient name that God had given to the biblical Joshua who led his people into the Promised Land is being given now to Jesus, who is going to lead God's people of all times and all places, not to the Promised Land, but to something eternal and not temporal, something spiritual and not physical.

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**C.** They obeyed in themselves, being available for the purification of Mary on the fortieth day, as Leviticus 12:1–8 proscribed.

**D.** They obeyed in consecrating their Son through an offering. That detail is laid out in Exodus 13:2–12. In fact, the parents of Jesus are relatively poor as can be seen by the fact that they present pigeons for the sacrifice for the presentation of Jesus rather than a lamb, which would be more the offering of the wealthy. They offered obedience.

Sometimes, you may be tempted to ask why it was that these two people wound up as the earthly parents of Jesus. I think there are a lot of clues in Scripture. One is the fact that they were willing to totally obey God from day one. Jesus needed, on the human side, parents who would model simplistic obedience to God. I don't know all the dynamics there is in His maturation, between the divine side and the human side; but certainly on the human side, Jesus needed to mature, to be educated, to be taught, to learn. If He is fully flesh, He needs those things. And He needs parents who'll model what it is to be wholesome, to be godly. And by the way, I think those words are synonyms. I think to be wholesome is to be godly and to be godly is to be wholesome. They're wholesome. They modeled that obedience.

For those of you who are in this service who are parents, there is no more important gift that you can give to your children than to model—right from the first days they come into your life—to model in your own life a simple obedience to God. That will be a base upon which you can build a proper role model for them in the days that are ahead.

I think all of us, in looking at Mary and Joseph, need to search our own hearts about obedience to God in terms of doing what we know we need to do and offering ourselves to God in surrender. I think of such a simple area as water baptism. If you have come to faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord lays it upon you as a command, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). It's not an optional kind

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of a thing. It's a direct order from Him. You will find that your Christian life will grow and deepen as you take steps to obey the Lord in every area He's told you to walk in. And if He's said to you—at the beginning of your Christian life—that you should be baptized in water, even if you may not understand all the reasons for doing that, know this reason: It is a mark of obedience. God insists that you take it. If you're going to grow in your Christian life, you'll need to be obedient in that area.

Another area where maybe the Lord is searching our hearts about obedience: sexual morality. In any audience this size, there are people that are going to be wrestling with those kinds of questions: “Am I going to keep my body pure? Am I going to refuse an immoral relationship? Am I going to refuse an affair?” Jesus said in John 8 to the woman who was taken in adultery, “Go and sin no more.” He asked for her obedience in the area of morality.

He asks for our obedience in the area of business. To Zacchaeus, who had defrauded people and cheated them, he requires that he make up what he has done wrong and that, as a follower of Jesus, he can be counted upon to be an honest person. And Zacchaeus volunteers it. The Lord asks for our honesty in all business and financial transactions.

He asks for us to obey him in loving the difficult person in our life. Often, the difficult person is someone we are living with, like a husband or a wife or a child or a parent. I remember the guy who went to the pastor for marriage counseling and was complaining about the kind of wife his wife was turning out to be. The pastor said, “I want to remind you that you took her for better or for worse.” And the young man replied, “Yes, but she's worse than I took her for.” Obedience is loving the difficult person, and returning good for evil and blessing, or saying something good about them rather than cursing. Obedience in forgiveness, obedience in refraining from

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vengeance, obedience in fulfilling the great commission...God is asking for a people of obedience.

Perhaps some of you remember Dr. J. Edwin Orr who has been with us a number of times. He is the historian of spiritual revivals, both ancient and modern, a great man of God. He was sort of a patron spiritual father of Billy Graham. When Billy Graham came to Los Angeles in 1949, Edwin Orr was very influential in Billy Graham's ministry at that particular time, and was very involved in the Los Angeles crusades. I've heard J. Edwin Orr talk about this. During that time, a number of people who were very influential in the Hollywood world began to come to Jesus Christ. One of the leading gangsters, in fact, the leading gangster in Los Angeles, Micky Cohen, made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Also, two of the people who worked for him, Bill Jones and Jim Voss. Jim Voss worked the wiretaps to help Mickey Cohen do his gangster work. They both came to Christ. The difference between Bill Jones and Jim Voss from Mickey Cohen was that Jones and Voss made a dramatic change in their life and began to obey Christ. But Mickey Cohen was relatively undisturbed by his profession of faith. He just kept on doing things as normal. Months went by, and Bill Jones and Jim Voss became very concerned over the fact that Mickey Cohen wasn't changing at all. So Bill Jones went to talk to him. Mickey Cohen said something like this, "Jones, you never told me that I had to give up my career to be a Christian. There are Christian movie stars, Christian athletes, Christian businessmen, so what's the matter with being a Christian gangster?"

It's the same problem that Larry Flynt has had in recent times. Eldridge Cleaver has had, in recent times, confessions of faith that have not been backed up by solid obedience. What obedience is God asking of you, requiring of you?

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### III. A third question that arises out of this passage: What personal and spiritual qualities do you seek?

Verses 21–32 tell us six marvelous qualities in this man Simeon; he is kind of a model of what it means to be a wholesome man or woman of God.

**A.** He was righteous. This was the perspective that other people had of him: a person of integrity.

**B.** He was devout. His personal relationship with God was apparent.

**C.** He was expectant. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was waiting for the fulfillment of Scripture of Isaiah 41. The consolation of Israel is found in that text, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, says the Lord.” The persons who have sinned and fallen are going to be restored. He was looking for the consolation of Israel. He was not looking for life to fold in because he was getting old. He was not just wrapped up in getting by and making sure that his pension needs were met. He was still going outward in his life, looking for God to redeem a nation. A marvelous example of life.

**D.** He was a spirit-dominated person. Three times “the Spirit” is used in regard to Simeon. “The Spirit was upon him. The Spirit was revealed to him. The Spirit led him.”

**E.** He was a God-submitted person. You pick that up in his prayer. He starts his prayer with the phrase, “Sovereign Lord.” In the Greek language in which Luke writes the word “sovereign Lord” is only one word, which is the English word “despot.” When used in the English, it’s always used in the negative sense. Somebody’s an evil ruler, totally corrupt, totally autocratic or a powerful ruler. He’s not elected. He just has power. And whatever he says, goes. The Greek word, when used of God, addresses God as if one was saying, “God, You’re totally in charge. There’s not an election of Your office on November 6th.” Nobody’s going to vote on God on November 6th, to decide whether He’s going to continue as God. He’s going to continue as God.

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If everybody votes against Him, He's going to continue as God and Sovereign Lord. Simeon had this understanding of God. He was God-submitted and he knew that God had given him an assurance that, before his time came to go, he would see the Messiah.

**F.** Sixth, he was Christ-centered. When he sees this child, he takes him up in his arms and blesses God. He recognizes immediately that this child is not only going to bless Israel, but is going to be a light for all the nations. Simeon is the first one in the New Testament to have a sense of mission that Christ is for the whole world. He's Christ-centered. Remarkable, because this child had nothing to commend him; he was brought by ordinary peasant parents. He was not attended by buglers that were giving a fanfare, saying, "The Messiah is now coming into the temple to undergo the purification rite." He was not surrounded by any trappings, but Simeon had the insight from the Spirit to say who Jesus really was. Marvelous qualities.

Are there qualities in your life or my life, qualities which bring a stress upon righteousness and integrity, upon being devout, being a person of expectancy and hope, being Spirit-dominated and God-submitted and Christ-centered" Those are the qualities Simeon had.

#### **IV. The fourth question out of this passage of Scripture today: Are you aware of the unpleasant consequences of your faithfulness to Jesus? (Luke 2:33–35).**

Almost all of us who are parents have no idea of how our babies are going to turn out. I had no idea when Evangeline and George Paul were born what they would grow up to be. I really still don't. I know they're turning out great, no matter what they do. But we parents don't have the slightest clue of what our kids are going to turn out to be or what they're going to do. What makes Mary and Joseph so unique is that, right from the beginning, they knew what their child—Mary's child, He wasn't Joseph's child—was going to do, what He was going to become. It was a great privilege to be the parents of the Christ. With the privilege, comes an awesome cost.

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Simeon tells this to Mary. He says, “Mary, a sword is going to go through your heart also.”

Already, the Holy Spirit is laying the groundwork for thirty-three years down the road, when Mary will stand at the foot of the cross and know the sorrow that comes from having been the one to bear the Christ into the world. Because she was so close to Him—as His mother—she would know, beyond all others, the infinite depths of sorrow that the cross would bring. There was an unpleasant consequence for being faithful to Jesus.

We too are going to witness, like Mary, times when evil seems to triumph, when the devil wins, when the bad comes out on top, when the lie prevails, when the innocent suffer, when the guilty go free. I think all of us who have a heart for family have been praying for and distressed over the news this week of two Christian families who are going through terrible times. The loss of the three-year-old little girl; and the family at Fullerton, members of the Crystal Cathedral, the mother and three sons, in one moment’s time, were killed by a drunken driver this week. You know what those situations are when evil seems to just totally triumph. We look around and say, “Where is the good?”

Mary knew what it was like to have a sorrow that breaks out. Her sorrow was one that was caused because of her linkage to Jesus. There are really two kinds of suffering in this world:

**A.** There is sorrow that comes because of our linkage to Adam; human sorrow—accidents, traffic accidents, drunk drivers that kill innocent people. That’s just part of being human. It doesn’t come because of being Christian or non-Christian, it just comes.

**B.** Then there’s the kind of sorrow that comes because you’re linked to Christ, a kind of suffering. It may not seem like a suffering, but it is. Some of you younger people in here are going to secular schools, where, because of your outspoken faith in Jesus Christ, you are at times the subject of ridicule and peer pressure. If you didn’t have an allegiance to Christ, you would

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not be bearing that kind of cost in your life. Linkage to Jesus may have, for a moment, difficult and unpleasant consequences.

I've been reading Chuck Colson's new book *Loving God*. I highly recommend it. It's an incredible book, a deeply searching and probing book. In this book, he has a chapter where he talks about a Russian named Boris Kornfield. He was a Russian Jew. When the revolution was getting underway in Russia in the early 20s and 30s, he was very much for it. He was a non-religious Jew, a secular Jew. He held the economic theories of Marx. However, things began to change, and, for one reason or another, Dr. Kornfield fell out of favor during the Stalin years and wound up imprisoned, somewhere out in the far stretches of Siberia. While working away as a prison camp doctor, of whom there were few and the needs were so many, he was witnessed to by an unnamed Christian. Ultimately, this Jewish agnostic doctor, Dr. Boris Kornfield, through the powerful witness of a suffering Christian whose name we do not know, came to faith in Jesus Christ.

When he came to faith in Jesus Christ, there were some consequences that began to occur in his life that would not have occurred had he not been a Christian. Let me cite some of them. He was operating on a soldier, a guard in camp. As he was operating on him, he realized that all he needed to do was reach in and, in a suture in the intestines, sew it in a certain kind of way and, within a few hours, it would rupture and the man would bleed to death before anybody knew what happened; and they would never really be able to trace what went wrong. He knew he had the power to do that. Now he's a new Christian and he's facing this issue of "Do I get even with this guy that's caused so much misery to me and to others?" He said, "I made it through the operation by reciting what I knew of the Lord's Prayer continually under my breath. 'Forgive me

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as I forgive our debtors.’” He kept praying the Lord’s prayer. He made it through, and he sewed the man up right, and he lived.

The next thing that he faced was that, as a medical doctor, he regularly signed consent forms for prisoners who were being placed in solitary, damp, cold, dark cells and were being put there to die. He, as a doctor, would simply sign those orders because the men were going to die anyway and, after all, it was just one of those things. They were going to die and that was their final punishment. The consent forms would be signed by a physician that said the person was in sufficient health to undergo this solitary confinement. He began to refuse to sign the consent forms, and, because his work as a doctor was needed in the camp, the authorities simply overlooked that for a while and got other doctors to continue signing it. There came a moment when he was trying to give a victim of pellagra (which is a disease caused by lack of proper nutrition) the proper nutrients to help him recover. He’d been giving him white bread, but this man seemed to be getting weaker and weaker. Then, one day, he came to this man and saw that, instead of the white bread being on his plate, it was instead being eaten by another prisoner who was acting himself as a guard underneath the guards. It was being eaten by a trustee who was fine and strong and healthy. He had his cheeks full of white bread.

Dr. Kornfield could have simply ignored this, as it happens all the time. The trustees were always stealing from the prisoners. The prisoner would probably die anyway, he had so many things wrong with him. But as a Christian, he found that he had a new freedom; he could act according to his moral convictions. So he turned the trustee in. Even though such an act was unheard of—nobody ever did it—and to do so would simply invite retaliation upon himself, because if the trustee were punished, it was only a matter of time for him to find a way to get Kornfield. When the Commandant got the thing turning in this trustee, he gleefully signed the

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order sentencing the trustee to three days confinement, knowing that when the trustee got out, he would solve the problem of Kornfield.

Kornfield realized that things were now turning very dangerous; there were consequences in his life for being a Christian, acting in a Christlike way. So he pulled out of sleeping in his regular place and began sleeping in the hospital area. He worked endlessly without sleep. He tried to be aware, even when he was not sleeping, of what was going on. Then one day, into his life comes a young man that he said had kind of a melon-shaped face—eyes sunk and, although a young man, he had a face that reflected years of physical and psychological torment and torture—the young man was recovering from an operation for cancer of the intestines. Dr. Kornfield, when this man came into his care that afternoon, following surgery, began to witness to this young man. He felt a compulsion to witness to him. While this young man was drifting in and out of anesthesia, all through the afternoon and into the evening, and into the late evening hours, Kornfield kept telling this man about what Jesus Christ had done for him and how He had entered his life and given him a freedom that he had never had, given him a freedom to act by his moral convictions. He poured his faith and his love for Christ into this man, who was himself an agnostic and had written-off any hope in life.

When this young man, who had had the excision of the cancerous intestines, woke in the morning, he became immediately aware of the guards and others rushing to a spot not far from his bed where they found Dr. Kornfield dead, having been struck with eight blows on the head by a plasterer's mallet some time during the night. The patient began to ponder the doctor's last impassioned words of Christian witness to him. Those hours, when drifting in and out of anesthesia, he had heard this Dr. Kornfield tell him about Jesus and about the fact that all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. This young man lying on that bed gave his life

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to Jesus Christ. He survived and he went on to tell the world what happened there. His name is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He became a Christian through a Jewish Christian doctor's witness to him, a man who suffered the consequences of being faithful to Jesus.

There may be unpleasant consequences for being faithful to Jesus. You may not be allowed to walk out on a situation you may want to walk out on, and the thing that holds you is not your friends, who are all telling you to split. But the thing that holds you is the order that Jesus puts upon your life, which says, "Be true and be faithful", and scrambles your world and gives you a whole different set of priorities than a disposable mentality of this world that says "People are like Kleenexes, use them and throw them away." You may suffer some consequences for that. But God is calling you to obedience and a faith in Him.

At our men's retreat this weekend, we saw Dr. Tony Campolo's great little movie "It's Friday But Sunday's a Comin'." I've never seen it. Dr. Campolo is a sociology professor in Eastern College, Pennsylvania. He is of Italian heritage. He's a member of an all-black church in west Philadelphia. He was describing a time in that church when he had given the Sunday morning. He had preached for an hour and a half, and had really rung the bell at this point in his audience, and really felt so good when he sat down that he'd gotten everybody with him that day. He slapped the pastor on the knee and said, "Now let's see if you can beat that." The pastor said, "Just sit back and wait to see what happens." The pastor stood up and said in that fashion of black preaching, "It's Friday. Jesus is on the cross. Mary is at the foot of the cross. The sky's dark. The future looks bleak. The Son of God is dead. It's Friday. But Sunday's coming!" Then he went on for an hour and a half, taking that one phrase and relating it to every life situation. In your life now, it may be Friday, the future's bleak. It looks hopeless. And it just seems all over. It's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

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I thought of that when I considered this story of Mary, how she bore consequences of being faithful to Christ. Oh yes, we will bear the consequences. But for Christians, it's always only Friday, and Friday's never the last day. It's never God's finish line. It's always Friday, but Sunday's coming.

May God use these words to build faith and courage in our hearts.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, there are indeed persons here who are having to consider the cost of being a Christian, the difference between what is convenient and what is right. What is convenient for them to do is not what You approve. Therefore, You're calling them to the high cost of discipleship. To acknowledge the truth that Amos said so long ago, "To obey is better than to sacrifice and to harken, better than the fat of rams."

With the hymn writer, we say, "Keep me true Lord Jesus, keep me true. There's a race that I must run, there are victories to be won. Give me power every hour, to be true." We know, Lord, that You'll never let the finish line be written on our life

Kornfield's death held a resurrection for Solzhenitsyn. Whatever suffering we bear because of our linkage with You will have its own resurrection, because Your work never ends at crucifixion. It's never over there. Lord, there may be others here who have a fresh view of their priorities and goals as they look at the life of Simeon. And they say, "Lord, help me to have those qualities in my life." Others are looking at simple steps of obedience. Give them courage to obey and a will and a heart to serve You. Lord, there are yet others who look at the externals of what they're facing, maybe uncertainties of unemployment, maybe sheer boredom and routine. Your world needs to enter into their world, because if they're to ever get joy and peace, it's going to have to be by being raised up to the realities of Your world. Lord, when we become

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### **Luke 2:8–35**

aware of You and know who You are, it changes our whole outlook, our whole perception of the world in which we live. Suddenly, we see we're not alone. We're not cosmic specks drifting on a lost spaceship of earth, with uncertain origin and indefinite destiny. We're children of the heavenly Father, made in the image of Christ Jesus, destined for glory in heaven and eternal life. Made in His likeness, clothed with His nature, appointed to be justified, to be made righteous, to be complete. That's who we are. We don't take our identity, our cue from the world around us. We reach for something higher. For You and what You're showing us about who we are. We thank You that Your world has come into our world. Lord, if there's anyone here that's defining the reality of their world without You, I pray that this service would be a service in which You enter their own heart and life. That an invitation would come out of their heart and their lives today to You, saying, "Lord Jesus, You were born in Bethlehem long ago. But I'm asking You now to be born anew in my heart. Come into my world and live." Fill our worlds with Your presence. We ask, through Jesus, who loves us. Amen.