

40 loaves

Breaking Bread with Our
Father Each Day



Daily Readings
to Renew a
Hungry Spirit

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Why do I want Jesus in my life?

I KNOW A WOMAN WHO SPENT years doing all the things the preacher said a good follower of Jesus should do: she obeyed the preacher's rules, she worked hard at believing, she prayed faithfully, and she mailed her checks regularly to the address on the television screen.

But one evening she wrestled with an uncomfortable realization. She found herself staring at a picture of Jesus, only to feel resentment instead of love. It was then that she had to admit to herself that the Jesus she knew exhausted her.

She turned away from the picture, suddenly realizing that she had not wanted Jesus in her life out of love for him. He was too hard to love. Yet she still wanted Jesus in her life. Why?

Then it hit her like a bucket of cold water.

She had wanted Jesus in her life for her sake alone. She wanted material blessings. She wanted to feel righteous and maybe superior to others. She wanted peace and joy. And she wanted Jesus close so he

wouldn't punish her—something of a fire insurance policy to keep her out of hell.

But she didn't really want Jesus.

I wonder why I really want Jesus in my life. Do I really want to take him *by* the hand or just take *from* his hand?

Like the woman above, could it be that the Jesus I know is some cosmic force I fearfully try to manipulate for my benefit? Is that why I focus on his gifts and dodge his anger, all the while avoiding his eyes?

I'm afraid I do sometimes feel this way and, frankly, it's no wonder many of us do.

Many of us have only ever been shown Performance Jesus—a “carrot and stick” Jesus. On the one hand, this Performance Jesus doles out blessings if we toe the line, and on the other, he's ready to strike us hard for disobeying. He's a daunting presence that we need to either appease or avoid.

Most of us know people like that...

We call them abusers.

Do we really want them in our lives? Of course not. In fact, we shouldn't. So why would we want *that* Jesus in our lives? We shouldn't.

Unfortunately, performance Christianity unwittingly presents just that kind of Jesus. Performance Christianity keeps many from seeing Gospel Jesus, and so we don't experience Jesus's love. Without feeling his love, it's hard—actually it's impossible—to love him. So we obey

him out of self-interest and fear but never follow him out of love and gratitude.

But there is good news.

The Jesus of the gospel very much wants us to want him in our lives. He understands why we've struggled to love him. He feels our anger with that other Jesus, but he wants to reintroduce himself as he really is.

Gospel Jesus is the only person in the universe who truly loves us as we are.

And he has a gift waiting to pour into our opened hearts. It's called grace.

So let's ask him for the gift...every day. Let's ask him to show us how much he loves us in spite of ourselves. Let's ask him to teach us the gospel daily—to remind us over and over that he loves his children no matter what.

Let's ask him daily to show himself as he really is—a big lover of big sinners.

And when he answers us, we will be changed. No longer will we obey for our own gain, but instead we will simply follow him, and gladly. For each time we feel his love overflowing in our hearts, spilling over into every part of our being and bursting beyond ourselves in love for others, we will love him again, and again, and again (see 1 John 4:19).

Those are the times we will really want Jesus in our lives.

Those are the only times we *can* really want Jesus in our lives.

