

Christian author, Lori Freeland (**picture**) shares this powerful experience:

“A few days after my college-aged son relapsed with childhood cancer, I was cooking his favorite dinner and the realization that we were about to go into our second three-year battle for his life slammed me particularly hard. Alek, my middle son, walked into the kitchen, and I asked him to pray for his brother and our family. My then 16-year-old’s reply? ‘Sure, Mom. I’ll do it for you. But I’m not really riding the God train right now.’ ‘Not riding the God train?’ I stopped chopping vegetables and looked up at him. ‘Yeah.’ He shrugged tight shoulders. ‘Any god who’s let my brother have cancer twice? I can’t be part of that.’ His voice was rough, his words raw. Harsh. Angry.

But anger wasn’t what I saw in his eyes. It was disappointment. Disappointment with a God he’d trusted. A God he felt let him down.

When people let you down, it hurts. But feeling like God isn’t even on your side wounds so much deeper. Especially when you pour your heart out begging him to help, yet it seems as if He’s light years away. It’s easy to blame God when life goes wrong. He can do anything. Stop anything. Change anything. But sometimes He doesn’t. People have free will. The world is full of death and disease and sin. Bad things happen to good people—even good Christian people. I’ll be honest. If I’m given the choice, I’ll choose to live in a bubble where I’m safe and happy and whole every single time. Too bad that’s not ever been my reality. But maybe it wasn’t supposed to be.”

Has God popped your bubble? More times than I can count, He’s popped mine. If you read the pages of Scripture, you’ll find account after account where God popped someone’s bubble. Maybe you’re here this morning and you feel like God has popped your bubble. If you are, you can relate to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Please turn again to Luke 24:13-35 (p. 885).

When God pops your bubble...For many, that describes their experience with God. What they thought Christianity was going to be is not what they’ve experienced it to be. Disappointment and despair have settled in. That was the experience of these two traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus the first Easter. They were distraught and disappointed by the events that had transpired

What changed their perspective? An encounter with the resurrected Christ. What this account does for us is that it shows us how easy it is for us to try to make Jesus fit in our “box”—to conform to our preconceived ideas. It gives us hope when our bubble has been popped. When we can’t see Jesus for who He really is, the problem is always on the *receiving end*, never on the *revealing end*. Do you need hope? Do you want hope? Then you must see the resurrected, living Jesus for who He is. If you’re taking notes...

Bubble-popping experiences leave you broken and bewildered. This account is one of the favorite yet most dramatic of all of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. Luke is the only one who records it in his Gospel. It’s also Luke’s first record of an actual appearance by the risen Christ.

Two otherwise unknown believers are walking home to Emmaus at the end of that first Easter Sunday, a journey of about seven miles. Since Emmaus isn’t there now, we can only surmise its location. Obviously, it wasn’t a large town.

These two people could have been a man and a woman. A masculine noun is used in the original Greek, but the word could refer to a couple. Since they shared a home, there’s speculation that it was Cleopas and his wife.

They’re sad and bewildered. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (**picture**) in her work on the stages of grief says that *Denial* is the first of the five stages. In this stage of *denial*, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We are in a state of shock. Often, it seems like a bad dream.

That’s these two weary travelers as they walk home. They’d been hoping that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would redeem Israel. Their hopes were dashed when the religious leaders succeeded in crucifying Him. They’re going home, dejected and disappointed, still in shock. They didn’t understand why God let them down. Before they left Jerusalem, they’d heard rumors that Jesus’ tomb was empty. They’re broken but now bewildered. Verse 17, *“they stood still, looking sad.”*

Why are they sad? They’re just like us. God hasn’t done what they expected Him to do. They’d seen and understood the glory of Christ’s coming Kingdom, but missed the suffering. Cleopas and his companion are so discouraged you can almost hear their feet dragging as they shuffle along in sadness. It’s easy to detect the despair in their words. They spoke about Jesus in the past tense: *“He was a prophet. He was handed over. He was crucified. We had hoped He would be the one.”* Their dreams are shattered, hopes cruelly crushed.

Death crushes us. Some of you have walked in the valley of the shadow. One person described it this way: *The longest walk you’ll ever take is the walk away from the grave of someone you love. To walk away and feel as if the world has come to an end. To walk away and think about what used to be and what might have been. To walk away and realize, “I’ll never be the same again.” To play over and over in your mind the good times, the laughter, the crazy stories. To reach out and*

touch a face and find it gone forever. To cry until you can't cry anymore. To watch them bury your dreams and hopes and all that was good about life. To know it is over, done, finished, the end, and there is nothing you can do about it. To walk away to friends who cannot understand and to a world that hardly cares. It is the longest walk and the saddest day. Every step takes you away from the tombstone of a broken dream. That was these two disciples. They'd walked away, all of their hopes dashed, from their Lord's tomb.

When you lose hope, you're traveling on the road to despair. Hope is fragile. When it's lost, it's hard to find again. Are you walking the road to despair, broken and bewildered. Part of our experience in this sin-contaminated world is that we all face times when we're disappointed with life and with God.

Well-meaning people, even pastors, try to comfort grieving people by saying that some terrible tragedy was not God's plan. And while they mean well, those who say such things actually rob God's people of comfort. If anything can happen outside of God's plan, then God is not absolutely sovereign. If He's not absolutely sovereign, then Satan is in some sense sovereign, at least sometimes, which is a frightening thought! And if this were so, we would have no guarantee that God's ultimate purpose will triumph!

Personally, I find it much more comforting to affirm what the Bible teaches, that God works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). Even the blasphemies of the wicked antichrist fit within God's sovereign purpose!

Twice in Luke 24, it's emphasized that God decreed the death of Jesus Christ. The risen Savior tells these two that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer these things (vs. 26). Earlier (vs. 7), the angel reminds the women at the tomb of Jesus' earlier prediction, *"that the Son of Man **must** be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified."* The word translated *must* is a favorite term for Luke. He uses it 18 times in his Gospel. It points to God's sovereign purpose. It highlights that God is in charge of everything, including history, moving it along according to His sovereign purpose. This is especially true of the greatest tragedy in history, the crucifixion of the sinless Savior.

Though it was the worst crime that could ever be committed, and the men who did it were responsible for their wicked deed, at the same time, God sovereignly ordained it. Jesus' crucifixions didn't thwart God's plan; it fulfilled it. The Bible makes it clear that sin is part of God's sovereign plan, yet at the same time, God is apart from all sin and not responsible for it. Now that's way above my mental pay grade, but I know it's true, because it's what the Bible says. Here's how this works out practically: *If the worst sin ever, the death of Christ, was a part of God's sovereign plan, then no sin can thwart God's sovereign purpose.* This divine fact gives us hope and brings great comfort in a time of tragedy if we'll cling to it.

Yet, it's still hard when we've prayed and hoped for something we thought was God's will, and it doesn't happen. They had hoped that Jesus was God's Messiah who would redeem Israel. They didn't understand God's plan in that they were thinking of political redemption from Israel's enemies. That wasn't God's will for His Son at that time. When our expectations don't match up with God's plan, we wrestle with disappointment with God.

2. Bubble-popping experiences leave you blinded. It's possible to look at the true source of hope and not be able to see it, verses 15-16, *"While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him"* and verse 24, *"Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see."*

Jesus joins them and asks, *"What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? ...one of them, named Cleopas, answered Him, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And He said to them, 'What things?'"*

Cleopas responds to Jesus' initial question with depressed, biting sarcasm. It's almost humorous. They're accusing Jesus of not knowing what's going on, but they didn't have a clue who they were talking to and that His Resurrection had in fact taken place. They're so depressed and blind, that in their confusion, it's beyond their capacity to make the obvious connection. If you've ever been depressed or sought to help someone who's depressed, you know that such individuals are amazingly resourceful at finding reasons to not take comfort in anything that you say to them. They're committed to bad news.

Cleopas lets loose – his confusion, disillusionment, shrinking faith, even his anger. But does Jesus stomp off? No, He encourages them to share their true thoughts and feelings. He already knows anyway. Our Lord honors candor and honesty. Oh, that we'd learn to be more honest with the Lord and with each other. Jesus is *"the Truth"* and invites our honesty. He can handle it. Our Savior wants us to tell Him the truth.

Michael Wilcock ([picture](#)), in his commentary calls this *"the Gospel according to Cleopas."* The word *gospel* means "good news." There's no "good news" unless we have a risen Savior. Cleopas is the one who doesn't have a clue what's going on in Jerusalem. Jesus knew it better than anyone. It'd happened to Him. Tenderly like a skilled surgeon, He helps them to see it. They thought that the crucifixion meant Jesus was a failure. They assumed the cross was a big blunder. Their hearts and minds are blinded to the truth.

Are you truly seeking the truth, the whole truth? I encourage you to keep traveling on the road to truth, to honestly investigate the truth. I believe the Lord Jesus will open your eyes in the same way He opened the eyes of these two disciples. God promises in Jeremiah 29:13, “*You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart.*” In their blindness...

They underestimated the Person of the Messiah. “*We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel.*” They believed that Jesus is a prophet and the Messiah, but He’s more than that. He is the Son of the living God, God incarnate. Though they believed true things about Him, they underestimated the person of the Messiah. The Jews were looking for a Messiah to deliver them politically. They underestimated that God Himself would come to deliver them, but it wasn’t from Rome, it was from a far worse problem, sin.

Before you pick on these disciples, do you realize that they’ve clearly built their world around Jesus? They believe that He’s the Messiah. Their world has been shattered because of His death. Their lives revolve around Him.

Do we build our world around Jesus? They built their world around Jesus even though Christians since the New Testament was completed, have known more fully who Jesus is than they do at this moment. Have you built your life around Jesus? Is your life wrapped up in Him? It was for them, even though they underestimated who He was.

They underestimated the Cost of Redemption. They didn’t understand that God in Christ was going to shed His blood and sacrifice Himself for our redemption. The cross was not a part of their Messianic expectations. They were blind and as a result, hopeless.

They underestimated the Power of God in the Resurrection. Not only did they underestimate His person and the cost of redemption, they underestimated God’s power at work in the resurrection. It’s clear they know something significant was supposed to have happened on the third day, but they don’t expect the resurrection. They looked at the crucifixion and believed that their world had come to an end. Their hopes died with Jesus. They underestimated the power of God.

And so do we. It’s harder for the rug to be pulled out from under you when your confidence is in the power of the resurrection. It’s hard for your bubble to be popped. Because if God can conquer death, what can He not conquer? Many of you need to know this today. You’re defeated because you’re not living in the power and hope of Christ’s resurrection.

3. Bubble-popping experiences can degenerate into an unbelieving heart. “*And He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*” What’s the problem? They didn’t know their Bible. *Moses and all the Prophets* is the Jewish way of referring to the Old Testament.

Do you read the Bible selectively? Do you read the Old Testament? The prescription for the struggles in this life are found in God’s Word. But we can’t be comforted or guided by what we don’t know. Jesus taught and we stand on *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone is the sole infallible rule of faith and practice. But our faith can’t be reduced to a creed or doctrinal statement. We’re not asked to believe the doctrine of the resurrection. We’re asked to meet this Person of the resurrection, Jesus, raised from the dead. Ultimate truth is found in our Lord. You’ll not know Jesus until you read His Word. Romans 10:17 “*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*”

They succumbed to unbelief because they didn’t know Scripture. It’s very rare to find a believer who struggles with doubt who is also faithfully reading God’s Word. It never ceases to amaze me how reading God’s Word brings about an “attitude adjustment” in my own heart and life.

Talk about a TED Talk, what a TED talk this must have been! Don’t you wish you could have been there? Imagine the greatest Teacher explaining the greatest themes from the greatest Book and bringing the greatest blessing to our lives. We must have eyes open to see Him, hearts open to receive His Word, and lips open to tell others what Jesus says!

Remember the movie, *The Sixth Sense* (picture)? After seeing it once and being shocked at the ending, you want to see it again. Once you know the ending, you go back to earlier scenes in the movie and say, “Ah, here’s Bruce Willis and here’s a woman, they’re in the same room, and the first time I thought they were talking to each other, now I realize she doesn’t really look at him.” During that second viewing you see every scene differently. Now You know the ending. The movie begins to make sense only after you’ve seen it once and know how it ends. The same is true of the Bible. It only makes sense if you read it in light of Jesus’ life, sacrificial death, and resurrection.

The Bible isn’t a book about parenting or finances or relationships or morality or love or whatever. It’s the Book about Jesus Christ and God’s redemption found in Jesus alone. It’s God’s Word that brings hope, comfort and peace.

If you want to learn how to swim, it’s not enough to have someone tell you how or to watch a Youtube video. You must get in the water and kick and stroke. The same is true in our relationship with Jesus. If we want to know Him, we can’t just listen to what others say. We actually have to dive into the Bible and read it for ourselves.

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is about Jesus. The Old Testament says, “*Someone is coming.*” The Gospels say, “*Someone has come.*” And the epistles and Revelation say, “*Someone is coming again!*”

Don't you wish you could have walked along and heard how Jesus explained how all of the Scriptures pointed to Him. The key to understanding the Bible is to see Jesus on every page.

In *Genesis*, Jesus is the Ram at Abraham's altar; In *Exodus*, He's the Passover Lamb, in *Leviticus*, He's the High Priest; In *Numbers*, He's the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; In *Deuteronomy*, He's the city of our refuge; In *Joshua*, He's the Scarlet Thread out Rahab's window; In *Judges*, He is our Judge; In *Ruth*, He's our Kinsman Redeemer; In *1 and 2 Samuel* He's the trusted Prophet; In *Kings* and *Chronicles*, He's our reigning King; In *Ezra*, He's the faithful scribe; In *Nehemiah*, He's the rebuilders of everything that is broken; In *Esther*, He's the Mordecai sitting faithfully at the gate; In *Job*, He's our Redeemer who ever lives; in *Psalms*, He is my shepherd and I shall not want; In *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*, He's our wisdom; and in the *Song of Solomon*, He's the beautiful bridegroom; In *Isaiah*, He's the suffering Servant; In *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, it's Jesus that's the weeping prophet; In *Ezekiel*, He's the wonderful four-faced man; In *Daniel*, He's the fourth man in the midst of the fiery furnace; In *Hosea*, He is my love that's forever faithful; in *Joel*, He baptizes us in the Holy Spirit, in *Amos*, He's our Burden bearer; In *Obadiah*, He's our Savior. In *Jonah*, He's the great foreign missionary who takes the word of God around the world; In *Micah*, He's the messenger with the beautiful feet; in *Nahum*, He's the avenger, in *Habakkuk*, He's the watchman that's ever praying for revival, in *Zephaniah*, He's the Lord, Mighty to save; In *Haggai*, He's the restorer of our lost heritage; In *Zechariah*, He's our Fountain, and in *Malachi*, He's the Son of Righteousness risen with healing in His wings. And that's just the Old Testament and where Jesus directed their hearts as He explained God's eternal plan.

Do you know the Bible, the whole Bible? It's only as we know God's Word that our hearts will move from brokenness, blindness and unbelief to faith, assurance, hope and confidence.

4. Believing hearts become burning hearts. *"So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if He were going farther, but they urged Him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.'" So He went in to stay with them. When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And He vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?'"*

Jesus wasn't rude. He waits to be invited. Christians must be people of conviction, yet be the epitome of graciousness and civility. Jesus loves it when we invite Him to stay, when we linger in His Word and in prayer, when we linger in worship. Our Lord was never rushed and never in a hurry. You can't rush a relationship with Jesus. There is no microwave spiritual maturity.

Amazingly, though the guest, Jesus acts as the host. Breaking the bread here is not Communion. So, how did they recognize Him? Personally, I believe that they saw His nail pierced hands and then knew that it was Jesus. That explosive moment was burned into their minds for eternity. Now their hearts are on fire!

When you see Jesus, when the Bible comes alive – your heart will be on fire! Belief is always followed by action. They immediately walked seven miles, now in the dark, back to Jerusalem. Belief brings response and action. The best evidence that we've met Jesus is that we have something exciting to share.

I don't know how you can truly see Jesus and have a cold heart. I don't know how you can see Jesus and be inert or inactive. Read the pages of Scripture for yourself. Cold Christianity is abnormal. Meeting Jesus should set our hearts on fire. Is your heart on fire? If not, maybe it's because you haven't seen Jesus.

They'd plodded to Emmaus. They nearly ran back to Jerusalem and now the eleven disciples are believing. The resurrected Christ had appeared to Simon Peter. It's the beginning of what would become the fellowship of burning hearts, a band that would bear potent witness to Christ around the world.

When we see Jesus, when the truth of God's Word becomes clear, our hearts will be set on fire. It was that blazing joy that prompted Henry Martyn (**picture**) the missionary statesman to exclaim, *"Now let me burn out for God!"* It's what caused David Brainerd (**picture**) to write in his diary, *"Oh that I could be a flame of fire in the service of my God!"*

Don't you long for that? I do. I want our church be a fellowship of burning hearts. I don't want to play church. I want our church to reach our world around us. I continually pray the Lord will give us Burlington, Rochester and Waterford. Will you join me? Will you ask the Lord to set our hearts on fire? May we be known as a fellowship of burning hearts.

Conclusion: Phil Callaway (**picture**) said that one sleepy Sunday afternoon when his son was five-years-old, they drove past a cemetery together. Noticing a large pile of dirt beside a newly excavated grave, his son pointed and said: "Look, Dad, one got out!" Phil said, "I laughed, but now, every time I pass a graveyard, I'm reminded of the One who got out."

Jesus Christ is alive! He got out! God raised Him back to life on the 3rd day.

Have you been walking along the Emmaus Road? Has your bubble been popped? Alone and overwhelmed, with doubts creeping in, your heart giving way, you sometimes feel you can't go on. These discouraged disciples thought that Jesus

was dead and gone, when He was the one walking and talking with them. He was near to them even though they didn't recognize Him at first.

When you're disappointed and discouraged, you may think that the Lord is a million miles away. But if you're one of His flock, even though you're being faithless and don't see Him, He's there with you. He promised, "*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you*" (Heb. 13:5). And as in the case of the two followers on the road to Emmaus, we must allow God to open our eyes. While this is something He must do on our behalf, we can nonetheless make the process less difficult in *five specific ways. How?*

Invite Jesus in. Have you invited Jesus into your life? Cleopas and his companion listened intently to the Voice of truth and invited Him into their home. If you haven't, invite Jesus into your life today.

Surrender your expectations. We have so many expectations about how things should be, how people should behave and life should work. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had expectations about who Jesus was. God wants us to trust Him and surrender our expectations to Him.

Seek God's perspective. To help the two disciples see their circumstances from God's perspective, Jesus explained the Scriptures. We have the same opportunity to share God's vantage point by reading the only completely reliable source of truth, the Bible. It doesn't have to be complicated. Simply set aside as little as ten minutes each day and read His Word.

Trust God's timing. God, in His perfect discernment, didn't allow the two disciples to recognize Jesus until the time was right. He didn't allow them to suffer in grief longer than absolutely necessary, yet He didn't end their discomfort too soon. Spiritual maturity never occurs instantaneously. Growth requires a journey. Submit to God's will and trust His timing.

The good news is too good to keep. If like the disciples, you've met Jesus and surrendered your life to Him. If you've experienced forgiveness, peace and a new life, but you don't tell family members or friends because you're not sure how they will respond...something is wrong. The question is: Do you really love your friends? Do you really love Jesus? The good news of Jesus is powerful. It's life-changing and it's meant to be shared. It's too good to keep to yourself!

The resurrection changes everything! It changes our approach to life and our view of death. It changes our priorities and our relationships with others. It's truth that should burn within us, excite us, and motivate us to live differently.

If the news of Jesus' resurrection doesn't radically change your life like it did these two disciples, then you haven't understood the resurrection. Let Jesus change your life. Let His resurrection bring you into real life today.