

The Jesus Option

**How to embrace the options Jesus
gives you today that leads to success
tomorrow.**

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THE JESUS OPTION

A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Jesus has an awesome plan for your life. He is for you, not against you; He loves you and will not abandon you. His strength can make up for your weakness. His peace can settle your unrest. He wants you on His team. He accepts you today and wants to encourage you each day of your life.

You have done nothing in the past that He does not know about or understand. Your life is an open book to Him—your mistakes, your failures, your accomplishments and your victories. He knows it all. He would go to the cross and die for you again if it would give you an opportunity to be with Him in His Kingdom forever.

The STORY - The storm on the sea.

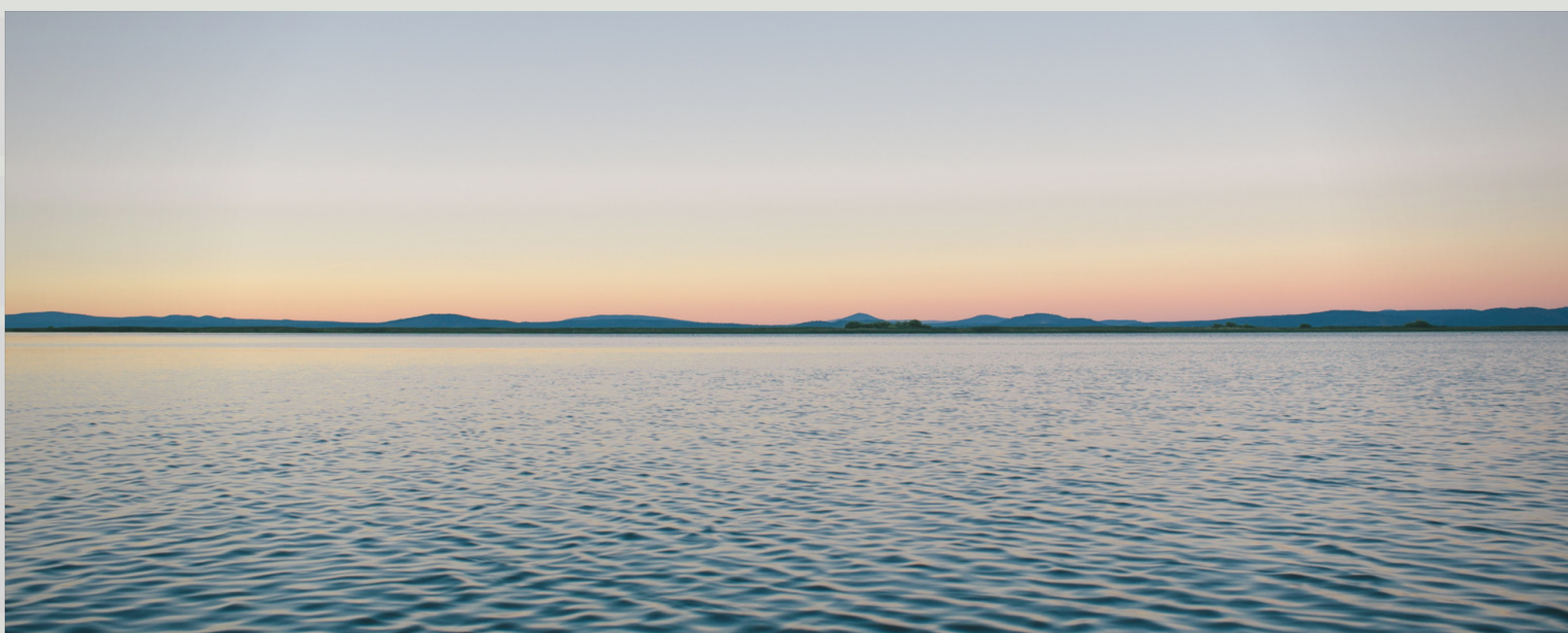
“Let’s go over to the other side,” Jesus told His disciples. With that command, He and His disciples embarked on an epic night on the Sea of Galilee. Not long into their journey, a fierce wind descended upon the sea.



The wind caused the water to dash against their small boat. The waves shoved them up, tossed them down, and tipped them sideways. They looked like a toy boat caught in the run-off from a spillway. As they struggled, water began to fill their vessel.

The disciples knew what to do—they bailed more water and rowed faster. Yet, as hard as they fought, they did not stand a chance against the storm. Their strength could not deliver a victory. At the same time, Jesus, the Creator and Son of God, was sleeping in the back of the boat. What a contrast!

In utter desperation, one of the disciples cried out to Jesus, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38). With confidence obtained from His Father in heaven, Jesus stood up as the boat lurched back and forth and commanded the sea: “Peace, be still.”



The DILEMMA - How is it that you have no faith?

The wind stopped and the sea became as calm as water in a bathtub. Now Jesus had something to say to His disciples, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mark 4:40).

At that moment, there were no words of comfort from Jesus. He wanted more from His disciples in the midst of the storm, and He let them know. He wanted a response of faith, but He got one of fear. Even when they finally asked for His help, their request came with the accusation, “Do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38).

Even though Jesus wanted faith but received an accusation, He did not reject or abandon His disciples. Jesus understood their desire to take on the storm without His aid, and he understands our desires as well. Yet, He can show us a better way.

The SOLUTION - A New Way of Thinking.

In that night on the sea, how might the disciples have expressed faith in Jesus? Let's imagine the worst case scenario: that, as Jesus slept, the boat sank. Imagine the disciples treading water in the darkness in the churning waves. With no boat, the waves threaten to drown them all.

Then one of the disciples cries out to Jesus over the howling wind, “We have tried our best, but the ship sank anyway. Yet, it was just a boat, and we are still together with You and we know You love us.” If the story concluded like that, would Jesus have asked His disciples, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mark 4:40)

Would losing their boat have been a real problem for them? Would Jesus have drowned, and would Jesus have let the disciples drown? If the boat sank and they all had to tread water in the middle of the storm, what might Jesus have done? He could have raised the sunken boat. Or, He might have just told His disciples, “Come on, we’re walking on over to the shore.”

To walk the rest of the way across the surface of the Sea of Galilee in a mighty storm after the boat had sunk would have been a “Jesus option.” A “Jesus option” comes to us only through trusting in Jesus. “Jesus options” present alternatives to our human fear, anger, pride, and jealousy. His options flow out of His unyielding love for us.



A New Way of Thinking - Checklist.

1. Can you remember a situation where you wished you had waited for a different option before you took an action or spoke? Did Jesus use that experience to teach you more about how to choose His options?

2. Can you remember an experience where Jesus did something special, something that you appreciated and understood He did to help you? What did you learn from that experience?

3. When you pray, ask Jesus for His help to understand more about the different options he presents to the challenges you face each day.

The Jesus Option - Part Two

An Uncommon Perspective

Jesus has options for the challenges you face in your life today. He has a plan for you, and He will provide the strength for you to make His plan a reality. Remember, He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows you will find fulfillment and pleasure in following His plan. Have you experienced this kind of personal friendship with Jesus?

If you attended church as a child or a teen and have drifted away, you can start choosing “Jesus options” today. If you've had a prejudice against Christianity or if you are exploring the possibility of getting to know Jesus for the first time, you can discover how to choose His options for your life.

His options do not represent conservative or liberal ideology. They represent a humble perspective that trusts in Jesus. You can experience the truth of Philippians 2:13, “... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

The STORY - The Workers in the Vineyard.

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Jesus revealed how choosing His option starts with humility. In retelling Jesus' parable, I would like to give the landowner a name. I'll call him “Jesse.”

Jesse hired some local workers at six o'clock in the morning. They agreed to work for a regular day's wages. Some vineyard owners might have cheated their workers, if they could, and paid them only a half-day's wages for a full day's work, but not Jesse.

As the day continued, Jesse kept looking for more people who needed work. At nine in the morning, he went back to town to hire more workers, and then again at noon, and then again at three in the afternoon. To each new group he said, “You also go to work in my vineyard, and I will pay you what is right.”

Finally, at five in the afternoon, just one hour before quitting time, he found a few more workers who had not yet been hired, and he told them, “Go work in my vineyard, and I will pay you what is right.”

At six o'clock quitting time, he instructed his foreman, “Line up all the workers to receive their pay, with the last ones hired being first in line.”

As Jesse began paying the workers, the first hired got excited. They saw Jesse pay a full day's wages to those who had worked but a single hour! They all smiled; certainly they would get more than the agreed amount. It would only be fair. They had worked all day in the hot sun. Logic dictated that they should receive more than those who had worked for only a single hour.

As they stood in line, I can imagine them saying to one another, “Maybe we'll get a full day's pay for every hour we've been working today. Then we won't have to work for several weeks!”



The DILEMMA - Equal Pay

But when Jesse put just the amount of pay that they had agreed upon into their hands, they cried: "That's not fair! Everyone has received the same pay, no matter how long or hard they worked!"

Jesse responded, "I have done you no wrong. This is my vineyard, and this is my money; I can do with it as I please. You agreed to work all day for this amount; I have done what I said I would do."

The temp workers who had labored all day expected more.

Wouldn't you? It's just common sense that, if you work more, you should get paid more.

In this parable, Jesus created a dilemma between what could be considered fair (the amount of pay given to the workers who did not work all day) and what the landowner could do with his own money. Why did Jesus make this point?

When the workers who agreed to work for a full day's pay called into question the landowner's judgment for being generous with the other workers, they revealed an attitude that Jesus wanted to address. It was an attitude based on competition and self-reward rather than on humility and love.

If the full-day workers had valued the landowner's expression of love, they could have rejoiced in the outrageous gift that he gave the workers. They might have returned early the next morning and said, "This is the kind of person we want to work for. We cannot wait until evening. It will be awesome to see the look in the eyes of the other workers when they get a full day's pay after only one hour of work! Just think how their families will rejoice over the money they receive!" To select such an option would be a radical departure from that chosen by most people.

**JESUS HAS OPTIONS FOR
THE CHALLENGES YOU
FACE IN YOUR LIFE
TODAY.**

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The SOLUTION - Jesus Options

To rejoice with a person who received the equal pay for a lot less work, to forgive someone even though they do the same thing to us over and over, to own up to our part in our conflicts with others, to be patient in frustrating situations, and to be gracious, treating others as we would like to be treated— we have to ask, does Jesus ask us to choose such radical options in our lives? Couldn't we just get by with nice, convenient options? Would Jesus want us to choose a radical option that makes us uncomfortable? Do we really need to go to such extremes?

When Jesus had an evening conversation with a religious leader named Nicodemus, He told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again and that he needed to have a new set of priorities. Nicodemus responded, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4).

Nicodemus chose the logical human response to Jesus' comment. However, Jesus had something bigger and better in mind. He was inviting Nicodemus to choose His "born-again by the Spirit" option.

In another story, when Jesus asked an invalid who sought healing at a pool called Bethesda if he wanted to get well, the invalid responded, "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me" (John 5:7, NIV). People at that time believed that, when the waters in the pool stirred, it revealed the presence of an angel of God. When the angel was present, the first sick person to enter the water would supposedly be healed. The invalid chose to be healed by the "jumping into the pool of water first" option. Yet, Jesus challenged him to choose the "get well by believing in Jesus" option.

Looking at a rock concert sized crowd of 5000 men, plus women and children, Jesus asked His disciple Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip opted for the obvious option of "eight months' wages could not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite." Jesus desired the less obvious but faith-filled option of "believe in Me and feed all these people."

Do you remember reading the story about the storm on the sea in part one of The Jesus Option? In the story, Jesus asked His disciples, "Why do you have so little faith?" The disciples failed to meet His expectation in their stormy predicament. Their trust in Jesus faded as the storm grew more violent. One of the disciples even accused Him of not caring about them. They failed to take a humble position in the storm and lost sight of His options for their challenge. However, Jesus did not reject the disciples. He helped them. In doing so, He tried to make it easier for them to say "yes" to His option the first thing the next time.

In the parable of the vineyard, when the landowner placed the same amount of money in all the workers' hands, the full-day workers took it as an insult. The landowner asked the all day workers, "... Are you envious because I am generous?" Then Jesus concluded the story by saying: "So the last will be first and the first will be last" (Matt. 20:15, 16, NIV).

In the vineyard and on the sea, Jesus had an option they could not accomplish or even consider without humility. Humility that knew they needed help from Jesus.

In my life, I've experienced God's gracious pay scale and His faith-based options that have led to real success. With humility born from understanding my need of a Savior, Jesus has brought true success and purpose to my life. You can experience this same kind of success in your life today. Have you experienced the truth of Philippians 2:13, "... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."?

An Uncommon Perspective

Checklist

1. Why does accepting the option Jesus has for our challenges start with humility?
2. Think about a situation you currently face; take time to write down three or four ways you could take action. Then, pray and circle the one that you believe would most honor Jesus.

The Jesus Option - Part Three

An Honest Encounter

One Friday after a busy morning, limited sleep the night before, and more things scheduled for the evening, I decided to take a short afternoon nap. My wife decided to get a little rest too.

After getting up to check on our napping baby boy, she came back in the room to lie down. After she had rested for a minute or two, I asked her if she would please get up and shut the bedroom door, which she had left open.

“Sure,” she said as she got up and shut the door. When she climbed back into bed, I scolded, “Would you stop getting in and out of bed! You’re shaking it, and I can’t get any rest.”

The irony is something we can both laugh about now, but the sad truth is that I was rude to my wife, the one that I love. I could have dismissed the discomfort of my conviction by rationalizing the incident as being just a moment of fatigue. I also could have eased the pressure by comparing myself to others and thought, I’m not as bad as this person or that person. I’m really OK. But, then I would be deceived by my own selfishness.

We Have Options

We do not have to follow our selfish options in the issues we face in life. We have another option available. It is the “Jesus option”—the Philippians 2:13 option—“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” To take advantage of His option, we need to ask Jesus to help us to be honest with ourselves. We must first understand our need of what Jesus offers us.

The challenge of an honest relationship with Jesus can be scary. However, when we get past the fear of facing the reality of our deepest desires, we gain freedom because we are no longer slaves to those negative emotions.

Jesus revealed how an honest relationship with Him is the first step in choosing His options that lead to a successful life. In a conversation that Jesus had with a woman beside a well, Jesus illustrated the importance of an honest, open, soul-searching relationship with Him. The following is a paraphrased account of Jesus’ encounter with that woman, as taken from John’s Gospel, chapter four.

The STORY - A Woman at a Well

Jesus waited for His disciples. Sitting alone, He had time to think and review recent events regarding how some of the religious leaders intentionally created division between His disciples and the disciples of John the Baptist.

Then the sound of footsteps interrupts His solitude. He looks up, makes a visor with His hand to shield His eyes from the sun high in the sky, and spots a woman approaching. She carries a water pot. Upon seeing Him, a man dressed in the fashion of the Jews, she keeps her eyes down, hoping He will simply ignore her. Jesus waits and says nothing to her at first.

The woman has come at this odd time for drawing water because she would rather face the heat of the day than the crowds of women at the well in the morning. As she fills her water pot, Jesus remains silent. Once it is full, she turns to make her escape. Yet, at that moment, Jesus speaks to her. "Give Me a drink," He says.

The woman stops, looks at Jesus and says something that reveals her surprise; "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?"

The comment bounces right off, and Jesus says, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Confidently she observes, "You don't even have anything to draw with. How can you give me living water?"

Jesus pauses and looks down at the well before He speaks again. "With this water you will get thirsty again, but I can give you living water that will become a fountain of fresh water in your soul that yields eternal life."

The woman tightens her eyebrows, and with a hint of curiosity retorts, "Well then, give me this living water so I'll never get thirsty and won't have to come to this well!" Jesus looks at her with deep, penetrating eyes and says, "Go call your husband to come and meet Me."

Deep inside, an unseen force strikes hard at her heart. Fighting back the flood of emotions and hoping to ward off further inquiry, she says in a soft voice, "I have no husband."

Jesus commends her for being honest and then lets her know that He knows the whole truth when He says, "... you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." Like an unfaithful husband standing before his wife who is holding a hotel room receipt she found in the trash or like a teenager looking at his mother who holds the bag of dope that she found in his sock drawer, the woman at the well has been caught, exposed, and she has nowhere to run.

Reacting to the forcefulness of His honesty and in an effort to redirect the flow of conversation, she turns to the contemporary controversy about where to worship. Yet, Jesus focuses the light of truth on her heart and refuses to become defensive. Instead, He sums up God's view of the controversy in five words, "Worship in spirit and truth."

The conversation has not been going as she expected. In fact, a strange excitement has been building in her heart, soothing her deep pain. She has felt acceptance, love, and compassion, even though Jesus knows all about her past, her unhealthy choices, and her ugly mistakes. With a sparkle of hope in her eyes, she says, "I know that Messiah is coming.... When He comes, He will tell us all things."

Jesus looks thoughtfully into the windows of her soul and says, "I who speak to you am He." Just then the disciples break into the scene, surprised to see their Master talking with this woman. The interruption cuts the conversation short. What does the woman do next? She leaves her water pot at the well and goes into the city to tell others about the Man she has met.

The DILEMMA - Seeing Yourself

The same woman who avoided others by coming to the well at noonday has gone to others in town, proclaiming the message, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (John 4:29). Now, just for clarity, did Jesus really tell her all the things she ever did in that short conversation? No, obviously not, but she was convinced that He could have done so.

Why did this woman get so excited about an encounter with a man who told her all things she ever did? Would such an encounter excite you if it meant the full exposure of all the things you ever did? Some things we have done, we do not want everyone—or even anyone—to know. As far as we are concerned, the skeletons can stay in the closet.

The woman at the well went and invited the people in the city to come and hear "a Man that told me all things that I ever did." What did the people of the town say after they came out to talk with the Man who knows all? They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (John 4:42, NIV). They now grasped an important principle: the closer you come to Jesus, the more He will teach you about yourself.

The SOLUTION - An Honest Relationship

As I have gotten to know Jesus better, I also have gotten to know myself better. In His way and time, Jesus has taught me about my real motives. He hasn't condemned or rejected me; in fact, I've come to understand more about His love for me. I know that it's safe, and helpful, to be honest with Him.

Beholding my selfishness can sting; understanding my real motives can take my breath away. That is why humility comes before honesty. Then, with my next breath, I can praise God. I can be honest with Him about my own struggles with selfishness. He will help me to become all that He wants me to be. This is what I call a "humble-honest relationship" with Jesus.

Jesus does not ridicule me; He does not make fun of me or treat me as a worthless person. He has big plans for my future. He always has my best interests at heart. He wants me to be successful, to use the gifts He has given me.

In the world in which we live, it becomes apparent that just because people claim to be Christians does not mean that they have a humble-honest relationship with Jesus. The Christianity that has been revealed to you may be missing this important element. Are you willing to try a "humble-honest" relationship with Jesus?

An Honest Encounter

Checklist

1. Reflect upon this last week: did you invite Jesus to help you be honest with your desires and emotions each day?
2. Why might some people be afraid to ask Jesus to help them understand the desires and emotions that drive their decisions?
3. Pray and invite Jesus to teach you more about yourself. Then, you can be honest about your desires and get the real help you need each day.