

**WHEN YOU DON'T
RECOGNIZE JESUS!
LUKE 24:15-21**

Finding Hope in Disappointment

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RODMAN STREET CHURCH | 4.12.26

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Title: When You Don't Recognize Jesus: Finding Hope in Disappointment

Sermon Summary: This powerful message takes us on a journey with two disciples walking away from Jerusalem after the crucifixion, their faces downcast and hearts heavy with disappointment. It explores how pain, unmet expectations, and life's struggles can cloud our ability to recognize Jesus's presence in our lives. It uncovers the reality of spiritual disappointment and confusion that believers face even after experiencing God's power. The central question confronts us directly: what happens when we're so overwhelmed by pain that we can't recognize Jesus walking right beside us? Drawing from Luke 24:15-21, we're reminded that the greatest tragedy isn't Jesus being absent—it's Him being present while we remain blind to His companionship.

The sermon explores three profound realities: the painful walk of disappointed believers, the present Savior who meets us on our dusty roads, and the powerful Word that opens our eyes. We're challenged to examine those moments when our expectations become demands, when we shift from 'we hope' to 'we had hoped'—moving our faith into past tense. The message beautifully illustrates how disappointment can cause us to walk away from our 'Jerusalem,' our place of promise and purpose, not in one dramatic departure but through a slow drip of discouragement. Yet even in our confusion, even when we're heading in the wrong direction, Jesus draws near and walks with us.

This isn't just ancient history—it's our story when grief clouds our vision, when unanswered prayers shake our confidence, when life doesn't unfold as we expected. It challenges believers to understand that God's presence is not dependent on our awareness but on His faithfulness. The message culminates in the revelation that comes through engaging with God's Word and recognizing that Jesus has been present all along, even in our darkest moments. The call to become a 'community of hope' reminds us that we're surrounded by disappointed believers who need someone to walk with them, not judge them, until their eyes are opened to recognize that Jesus has been there all along.

Chapters

Chapter 1: The Painful Walk of Disappointment

We explore the experience of walking through disappointment and confusion even after experiencing God's power, as illustrated by two disciples walking away from Jerusalem.

Chapter 2: The Present Savior Who Walks With Us

We discover that Jesus himself draws near and walks with us in our confusion and pain, even when we fail to recognize his presence.

Chapter 3: The Powerful Word That Opens Eyes

We understand that recognition comes through the Word of God, which opens our eyes to see Jesus has been with us all along.

Key Points:

- Life can hit so hard that our vision becomes cloudy, our spirit heavy, and our faith quiet, causing us to walk away from places of promise
- Disappointment happens when expectation and reality don't line up, causing believers to say "we had hoped" instead of "we still believe"

- Jesus doesn't wait for us to get ourselves together; He meets us on our road, walks with us in confusion, and talks with us in our disappointment
- The greatest tragedy is not Jesus's absence but His presence when we still don't recognize Him
- Recognition of Jesus often comes through relationship and spending time in His Word
- God changes how we understand before He changes what we see; He opens the Scripture before He opens our eyes
- Just because we don't recognize Jesus doesn't mean He isn't there— His presence is based on His faithfulness, not our awareness
- The Community of Hope represents the church's mission to walk with people in their pain until they recognize Jesus
- Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, not just by seeing or feeling

Scripture Reference:

- Luke 24:15-21 (primary passage about the road to Emmaus)
- Psalm 34:18 (the Lord is near to the brokenhearted)
- Psalm 23 (walking through the valley)
- Isaiah 43 (passing through waters and fire)

Stories:

- The two disciples walking to Emmaus after the resurrection, unable to recognize Jesus walking with them despite their three and a half years with Him

- The story of a man who fell into a deep pit and couldn't get out; various people passed by offering words, but one man climbed down into the pit to help him out, prompting the question "Are you Jesus?"
- The Lion King cartoon illustration of Simba living in the past, being hit on the head by Rafiki who says "it doesn't matter, it's in the past"
- The Footprints poem about seeing two sets of footprints during good times but only one during trials, realizing God was carrying us
- Personal testimony about elderly members (93, 91, and 100 years old) sharing wisdom, including "sometimes you forget that you forgot" and "I haven't forgotten God who brought me over"
- Personal testimony about telling God he would serve anywhere except where it's cold, but God sent him to Pittsburgh for the LIFE Male STEAM Academy
- Reference to the Last Supper and Jesus breaking bread, which became the moment of recognition for the Emmaus disciples

Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Mentioned Scripture References:

1. **Luke 24:15** - "As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them"
2. **Luke 24:15-17** - The Emmaus road encounter (primary text)
3. **Luke 24:21** - "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"
4. **Luke 24:30** - "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them"
5. **Psalm 23** - Referenced regarding "valley of the shadow of death" and "goodness and mercy shall follow me"

6. **Psalm 34:18** - "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"
7. **Isaiah 54:17** - "No weapon formed against me shall prosper"
8. **Romans 10:17** - "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"

Alluded to or Quoted Scripture References:

9. **John 16:33** - "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"
10. **Revelation 1:5** - "Nothing but the blood of Jesus" (hymn based on multiple scriptures about Christ's blood)
11. **Isaiah 43:2** - "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you go through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire, you will not be burned"
12. **Lamentations 3:22-23** - "Great is Thy Faithfulness" (referenced through the hymn)
13. **Psalm 139** - Implied in discussion of God knowing us intimately
14. **Jeremiah 20:9** - "Fire shut up in my bones" reference
15. **Matthew 28:20** - Implied in "I am with you always"

Relevant Verses for Main Themes:

Theme: God's Presence in Difficult Times

- **Deuteronomy 31:6** - "He will never leave you nor forsake you"
- **Hebrews 13:5** - "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"

Theme: Disappointment and Unmet Expectations

- **Proverbs 13:12** - "Hope deferred makes the heart sick"
- **Isaiah 55:8-9** - "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"

Theme: Walking Away from Faith

- **Hebrews 10:38-39** - "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back"

Theme: God Working When We Don't See It

- **Romans 8:28** - "All things work together for good to those who love God"
- **Habakkuk 2:3** - "Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come"

Theme: Recognition Through Scripture

- **Hebrews 4:12** - "The word of God is alive and active"
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** - "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching"

Theme: God Carrying Us

- **Psalms 55:22** - "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you"
- **Isaiah 46:4** - "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you"

QUOTES:

The greatest tragedy is not that Jesus is absent. It's that He is present and you still don't recognize Him.

Pain will make you misinterpret what God is saying and what God is doing. We are surrounded by a whole lot of disappointed believers.

Disappointment is what happens when expectation and reality don't line up. Sometimes God answers your hope not in the version that you thought it would happen.

Just because you don't recognize him doesn't mean that He is not there. His presence is not based on your awareness. It is based on His faithfulness.

Sometimes the way that people will recognize Jesus is by how we show up in their lives. We don't just point people to Jesus. We walk with people like Jesus.

Before God changes what you see, He'll change how you understand. Before He opens your eyes, He will open up the scripture.

You thought you made it by yourself, but He was there. I should have lost my mind, but He was there. I made it through the storm because He was there.

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5-Day Devotional: Recognizing Jesus in Your Journey

Day 1: When Hope Feels Past Tense

Reading: Luke 24:13-21

Devotional: "We had hoped" - these three words reveal the heartbreak of disappointed expectations. Like the disciples on the Emmaus Road, you may find yourself walking away from your Jerusalem, your place of promise, because life didn't unfold as expected. Your faith hasn't disappeared; it's just exhausted. But here's the truth: Jesus doesn't wait for you to return to Him. He meets you on your dusty road, walks alongside your confusion, and listens to your doubts without condemnation. Your painful walk doesn't disqualify you from His presence. Today, acknowledge where you've moved hope into past tense, and invite God to restore your expectation. He's already walking with you.

Reflection Question: What "we had hoped" statement are you carrying today?

Day 2: The Present Savior You Don't See

Reading: Psalm 139:7-12

Devotional: "Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him." God's presence isn't dependent on your awareness - it's anchored in His faithfulness. You can't see air, but you're breathing it. You can't see the wind, but you see it moving. Similarly, your inability to recognize Jesus doesn't mean He's absent. When you were going through that crisis, He was there. When you survived what should have destroyed you, He was carrying you. The problem isn't His presence; it's your perception. Before you conclude

you're alone, check the shoe size on those footprints. When there's only one set, it's because He's carrying you through the valley.

Reflection Question: Where have you experienced Jesus' presence without recognizing it was Him?

Day 3: The Power of God's Word to Open Eyes

Reading: Luke 24:25-32; Hebrews 4:12

Devotional: Before Jesus revealed His identity, He opened the Scriptures. Before He changed what the disciples saw, He changed how they understood. This is God's pattern: He moves you with understanding, not just feelings. When your heart is burning within you as the Word unfolds, that's the Holy Spirit preparing revelation. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The disciples' eyes were opened not during a spectacular vision, but at the breaking of bread - in the ordinary moment made extraordinary by His presence. Your breakthrough isn't found in seeking signs; it's discovered in staying in the Word. Whatever you need - strength, direction, healing, hope - it's in the Word.

Reflection Question: How consistently are you allowing God's Word to shape your understanding?

Day 4: Building a Community of Hope

Reading: Galatians 6:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Devotional: The world is filled with disappointed believers - people walking with heads down, moving away from their Jerusalem. They don't need judgment; they need someone to walk with them. Jesus didn't scold the Emmaus disciples for their doubt or direction. He joined their journey.

This is our calling: to be the hands and feet that walk with people in their pain, the voice that speaks life into confusion, the presence that reminds others they're not alone. We don't just point people to Jesus; we show up like Jesus. When you climb down into someone's pit to help them out, you become the answer to their question: "Are you Jesus?" And you respond, "No, but He's working through me."

Reflection Question: Who in your life needs you to walk with them on their difficult road?

Day 5: From "Had Hoped" to "Still Believe"

Reading: Romans 8:24-28; Hebrews 11:1

Devotional: Disappointment happens when expectation and reality don't align. You hoped for a conquering king, but God sent a suffering Savior. You hoped He'd remove the mountain, but He gave you strength to climb it. Your hope wasn't wrong - just incomplete. God often answers your prayers not in the version you expected, but in the way that accomplishes His greater purpose. The resurrection already happened, but your emotions haven't caught up yet. That's okay. Keep moving from "we had hoped" to "we still believe." Despite the diagnosis, still believe. Despite the broken relationship, still believe. Despite the closed door, still believe. Your blessings are closer than they appear, but you're driving forward while looking in the rearview mirror. Turn your eyes ahead - Jesus is there.

Reflection Question: What needs to shift from past-tense hope to present-tense faith in your life?

Closing Prayer for the Week: Lord Jesus, open my eyes to recognize Your presence in every circumstance. When I'm walking through disappointment, help me remember You're walking with me. Transform my "had hoped" into "still believe." Let Your Word burn in my heart and open my understanding. Make me a vessel of hope for others who cannot yet see You. In Your name, Amen.

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Small Group Guide: "When You Don't Recognize Jesus"

Based on Luke 24:15-21

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin by asking God to open hearts and minds to recognize His presence in both mountaintop and valley experiences.

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Question: Share about a time when help or an answer to prayer came in a way you didn't expect or initially recognize.

Key Scripture

Luke 24:15-17 - "As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him."

Discussion Questions

Part 1: The Painful Walk (20 minutes)

1. **The disciples were walking away from Jerusalem (their place of promise) after experiencing disappointment.** When have you found yourself "walking away" from something God called you to because things didn't go as expected?
 2. **The pastor mentioned "drip, drip" - how disappointment happens gradually.** What are some warning signs that someone might be slowly drifting away from their faith or spiritual practices?
 3. **"We had hoped" (verse 21) shows disappointed expectations.** How do you handle it when God doesn't answer prayers in the way or timing you expected?
 4. **Reflect on this statement: "These were not unbelievers. They were disappointed believers."** How does this change the way we should approach people who are struggling spiritually?
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Part 2: The Present Savior (20 minutes)

5. **Jesus met the disciples on their road, not waiting for them to come back.** What does this teach us about how God responds to us in our lowest moments?
 6. **The sermon emphasized that "His presence is not based on your awareness. It is based on His faithfulness."** Share a time when you later realized God was present in a situation where you initially felt alone.
 7. **The pastor said, "Sometimes people experience Jesus before they ever recognize that it is Jesus."** How have you seen this principle at work in your life or in others' lives?
 8. **Discussion about the LIFE Male STEAM Academy showed practical ministry to those who don't yet recognize Jesus.** How can we as individuals or as a group "show up like Jesus" for people in our community?
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Part 3: The Powerful Word (15 minutes)

9. **Before opening their eyes, Jesus opened the Scriptures to them.** Why is understanding God's Word essential before we can truly recognize His presence and work?
 10. **"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (verse 32)** When has God's Word caused your heart to "burn" with new understanding or conviction?
 11. **The disciples' eyes were opened when Jesus broke bread with them.** What spiritual practices or moments help you most clearly recognize Jesus' presence?
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Key Takeaways

- ✓ **Disappointment can distort our spiritual vision** - Pain and unmet expectations can make us walk away from God's promises, even when He's right beside us.
 - ✓ **Jesus meets us on our dusty roads** - God doesn't wait for us to get it all together; He walks with us in our confusion and doubt.
 - ✓ **God's presence doesn't depend on our awareness** - Just because we don't recognize Jesus doesn't mean He isn't there.
 - ✓ **The Word opens our eyes** - Before God changes what we see, He changes how we understand through Scripture.
 - ✓ **Recognition comes through relationship** - The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we'll recognize Him in our circumstances.
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge (Choose One or More):

1. **Daily Scripture Reading:** Commit to reading a passage from the Gospels each day this week, asking God to help you recognize Him in your current circumstances.
 2. **Gratitude Journal:** Write down three "Nothing But God" (NBG) moments from your past where you now recognize Jesus was present, even if you didn't see it at the time.
 3. **Walk with Someone:** Identify someone in your circle who might be on a "painful walk" and intentionally reach out to them this week - call, visit, or send an encouraging message.
 4. **Examine Your "We Had Hoped":** Reflect on an area where you've put hope in past tense. Bring it back to God in prayer and ask Him to renew your expectation.
 5. **Community Engagement:** Research one way you can personally support or get involved with a ministry serving those who are struggling (like the Life Male Steam Academy mentioned in the sermon).
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Reflection Questions for Personal Journaling

- Where am I currently walking? Toward my Jerusalem or away from it?
 - What disappointments have clouded my ability to recognize Jesus?
 - How has my expectation become a demand on God?
 - Where do I need to shift from "we had hoped" to "we still believe"?
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Closing Activity (10 minutes)

Testimony Time: Invite group members to share briefly (1-2 minutes each) about a time when they later recognized Jesus was with them in a difficult situation.

Prayer Partners: Break into pairs and pray specifically for each other's ability to recognize Jesus in current struggles.

Closing Prayer

Pray together:

"Lord, open our eyes to recognize You - not just in the spectacular moments, but in the ordinary walks, the painful valleys, and the confusing seasons. Help us to trust Your presence even when we cannot perceive it. Give us burning hearts as we encounter Your Word and make us people who walk with others the way You walk with us. In Jesus' name, Amen."

For Next Week

- Read Luke 24:13-35 (the complete Emmaus Road story)
 - Come prepared to share how you recognized Jesus this week
 - Bring a friend who might need to hear about God's faithful presence
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Leader Notes

- Be sensitive to group members who may currently be in a "painful walk" season
- Emphasize that doubt and disappointment don't disqualify us from God's love
- Create space for honest sharing about struggles with recognizing God's presence
- Connect the sermon's themes to your group's context and current life situations
- Consider reaching out individually to anyone who seems particularly discouraged

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus mirror times in your own life when Jesus was present but you failed to recognize Him?
2. What are some modern-day examples of walking away from your 'Jerusalem' when disappointment causes you to leave the place God has called you to be?
3. In what ways can unmet expectations transform into demands we place on God, and how does this affect our faith journey?

4. The sermon describes disappointed believers rather than unbelievers. How does disappointment differ from doubt, and which is more dangerous to spiritual growth?
5. What does it mean to experience Jesus before recognizing Him, and how might this apply to ministry work with people who don't yet know Christ?
6. How can we move from saying 'we had hoped' in past tense to declaring 'we still believe' in present tense when circumstances haven't changed?
7. The pastor mentions that sometimes God answers our hopes not in the version we expected. Can you share a time when God's answer was different but better than what you requested?
8. What is the significance of Jesus opening the Scriptures to the disciples before revealing Himself, and how does this inform the role of God's Word in our recognition of His presence?
9. How can the church become a 'community of hope' for those walking with downcast faces, and what practical steps can we take to walk alongside hurting people?
10. The sermon emphasizes that Jesus' presence is based on His faithfulness, not our awareness. How does this truth change the way we approach seasons of spiritual dryness or confusion?

God is putting you in a position where you have to trust Him. It feels scary, but it's actually the safest place to be.

Thinking Lamp