

XP3: Collide
Session 1 Devotional for week of November 13th

Unexpected Collision
By Sarah Anderson

Have you ever thought about what it would have been like to have an encounter with Jesus? Have you ever imagined what it must have felt like to have Jesus heal your disease, cure your sickness and come to your defense? I have. I have spent lots of time imagining even the possibility of just one exchange with the Son of God, because there is no doubt about it, anyone who felt the presence of Jesus left changed. For nearly every person who encountered Him, there was a happy ending that followed. For nearly everyone...but not everyone. There were a couple of exceptions.

In fact, in Matthew chapter 20, we see a rather bizarre and interesting encounter between Jesus and the mother of two of His disciples. Here, the mother of John and James approaches Jesus and makes a request on behalf of her sons. So what does this proud mom ask of the Son of God? Matthew says it this way: *Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom (Matthew 20:21 NIV).*

To people living in 1st century Israel, they would have understood exactly what the mother of John and James was asking. She wanted her sons to be honored. She wanted them to be recognized and praised and esteemed for their status. It was a bold request. To her it must not have seemed like that big of deal. I mean, if Jesus was able to turn water into wine, raise people from the dead and multiply some fish and bread to feed thousands, then surely what she was after couldn't have been *that* big of a deal. So she did what we just started talking about doing this past week. She collided. She put herself in a position to collide with the Son of God and made a request.

And Jesus said, "No."

These typically aren't the stories we spend time focusing on when it comes to studying Scripture. But we can't deny they are in there. Here, this woman makes a decision to collide with Jesus and she walks away not having received what she came for.

So what does this mean for you? Don't ask for an assigned seat next to Jesus in heaven? No. I don't think that is the point of this story. I think the point is bigger than that, deeper than that, more meaningful than that. See, while we have been talking about colliding, about walking away changed, there is the temptation to think that when we do collide—when we put ourselves in a position to be changed—we start to believe that change has more to do with what *we want* that change to be, and not what *God intends* that change to be.

The mother of James and John boldly put herself in a position to collide. She saw what this man, this teacher her boys had dedicated their lives to following, was capable of. And so she decided to put herself in the path of a collision, but only because she had an end in mind for what would happen after having collided with Him. For a lot of the stories in Scripture, Jesus said "Yes." "Lord, open my eyes. Lord, cure my leprosy. Lord, cleanse my son. Lord, raise my daughter." And Jesus did it. But tucked in the pages of the New Testament are also some stories where Jesus didn't do what was asked. Because sometimes the change people wanted wasn't the change He wanted in them.

When Jesus told the mother of James and John that he would not grant the request she made, He was reminding her, and reminding us, that He isn't a genie. He isn't a magician. He is God. And as God He has something in mind for you that may be different than what you have in mind for yourself.

And sometimes, when we put ourselves in the path of a collision, while we are guaranteed to see change, it may not always look like the change we anticipate. Colliding isn't about getting the guts to pray for, ask for or work for the end we have in mind. Colliding is about putting yourself at the mercy of a God who has bigger plans than you have ever imagined and bigger purposes than you can dream of—who is bigger than any collision we can dream up. It doesn't mean you always get the answer you want. It does mean you get the thrill and the excitement of trusting God to determine exactly what you could and should learn from colliding, from intersecting with the people in your path and thus, with God.

Colliding is scary—even more so when you aren't exactly sure how the encounter will result. Putting yourself in a place where you collide means embracing mystery and some uncertainty. But it also means embracing the God who is strong enough, big enough and powerful enough to be involved in the process. Who knows how a collision will leave you. Who knows the person you will be at the end of the process. Those things may not be for us to decide. But the good news is you can trust the God who does decide—who is involved in and encourages you to live a life in the path of a collision.

We may not always get the answer we want. But we will always get the God we need, who is in the process of making us into the people He needs.

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XP3: Collide
Session 2 Devotional for the week of November 20th

Not So Different
By Sarah Anderson

I am a fiercely competitive person. From athletics to board games, I like to win. And with each game, match, or competition, I have the tendency to trash talk—to demonize and dehumanize the opposition. Essentially when it comes time to play, I will throw friendship out the window. The objective is to win—no matter what the cost.

In the right place, this can be entertaining. But when I take this line of thinking into the wrong context, it can be pretty unhealthy—maybe even detrimental. See, what is okay when it comes to playing a game, or being involved in a competition, isn't right and isn't okay when it comes to everyday life, when it comes to relationships, when it comes to *people*.

Maybe you know what I am talking about. Competition can be fierce and inherent in competition is the belief that something separates us from others. You could call it an “us versus them” mentality—the idea that there are two teams—the team you are on, and the one you are trying to beat, the one you consider yourself better than. Are you starting to see how this might be a problem in real life? Because when we live with the understanding that we have something, possess something, that doesn't just make us different, but makes us *superior*, people—especially people different from us—start to appear less valuable. We start to think of people not just as believing something different, but as *being* different, being something “other” than who we are. And the more we think this is true, the easier it becomes to avoid colliding with them, to steer clear of interacting with them, learning from them, relating to them.

But this isn't how we are intended to live. We can't live in bubbles surrounded by sameness, refusing to look at others who look, think and believe differently from us—making them less than ourselves because their differences separate us in ways we are not used to. Because the truth is, as different as we may be from the person whose locker is next to us, the person who sits across the cafeteria from us, the person who lives across the street from us—or maybe even the person across the globe from us—we can be certain that there is something, at least one thing we have in common.

Look at Genesis chapter one. In the very beginning God made something clear. We may not all be the same, but we do have a sameness to us, a unifying characteristic that may not make us carbon copies of each other, but draws attention to a likeness we all share. *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27 NIV).*

There may be people in your life who you have never considered as having anything in common with you. But you do have this in common: God made you, and God made them. God made you to desire love. And God made them to desire love. God made you to crave acceptance. And God made them to crave acceptance. God made us all able to laugh, to dream, to cry, and to experience a full range of emotions and feelings.

So the next time you find yourself afraid to collide with, afraid to learn from, afraid to understand, afraid to welcome and afraid to appreciate someone who isn't as like you as you expect or are used to, remember this: you do share one thing in common—one important thing. You share the stamp of God's image on you—both of you. And that is a good place of commonality to start.

Colliding with someone not like you doesn't mean abandoning the things that you hold dear. It doesn't mean you lose what makes you unique, or forget the things that mean a lot to you. And it certainly doesn't mean you become instant friends. It means that when we are tempted to look at someone else and see them as less than we are—as someone who has little to offer us, as less

valuable than we see ourselves—that we instead choose to see the fact that God had His hand in making and creating you, and making and creating them. And with that much in common, it just may be that there is something you can learn from them that you didn't expect or anticipate.

Don't be afraid to collide because it is unfamiliar. Don't be afraid to collide because it isn't what you expect. Don't be afraid to collide because you think it may be too awkward, uncomfortable or just plain pointless. Collide because God's image is in you and every other person on this planet. Collide because God has asked us to. And collide because you just may be surprised by what you will get from the experience.

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XP3: Collide
Session 3 Devotional for the week of November 27th

Post Collision
By Sarah Anderson

I totally admire creative people—people who can look at a blank canvas, start painting, and within a matter of hours have something beautiful to look at. That kind of thing has never come easy for me. Too many possibilities of getting it wrong. Too much white space to fill. I am more of a paint-by-numbers kind of person. Tell me the area I need to fill in and the color that needs to fill the space and I can handle it. Then I am certain to get the results I want because I followed the appropriate steps through the process. Paint blue, red and green here, here and here, and you get a masterpiece. Totally easy. Do these three steps, and you will get this desired result.

If only all of life promised and delivered such desired results. If only we had a guarantee that if we did something a certain way we would have a certain end. But we don't. And the truth is, this isn't a surprise to you. You know that even if you did all the right things, followed the right rules, got the good grades, practiced the hardest and studied the most, it wouldn't mean that you would always get the results you expect. And the reason this is the case may be a lot simpler than you think.

Life isn't lived off the recommendations of a step-by-step formula like we might find on a paint-by-numbers. Life, as followers of Jesus, is spent colliding with a very real, very alive, very unpredictable and big God.

If you think about it, this makes sense. Because if life was all about a simple procedure with simple rules and simple guidelines than I think the Bible would be a lot shorter—especially the Gospels where Jesus encounters people on a regular basis to heal their internal and external wounds. If there was only one way things were supposed to go—only one desired result—than I think all we would get is one story. Jesus would tell this one person what they should do, and whatever one thing He said would apply for all of us.

But it doesn't really work that way, does it? There are four Gospels. And each Gospel is filled with stories—stories of individuals, stories of personal pain, delicate hurts, specific pasts and particular relationships. And Jesus doesn't just say one thing to each of them. Jesus doesn't just have one word, one cure, one message. When Jesus has an encounter with people, He collides with them. The Gospels are a collection of stories where time and time again a person collides with Jesus Christ—in fact, all of Scripture is the story of people colliding with a Creator God. And no collision is exactly the same.

So what does this mean for you—someone in middle school or high school? Someone who would consider himself or herself to be a follower of Jesus, but isn't exactly sure what to do now? Well, if there was a phrase, if there was one thing that Jesus said over and over again to people He encountered, it was this: *Follow me*. In Matthew chapter 16, verse 24, Jesus says this to His disciples: *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

"Follow me," Jesus said. Where? Doing what? How? Well, you may not want to hear this, but I am not sure how to answer that. Only you can. It may mean going on a mission's trip. It may mean serving in a place and serving people you don't typically interact with. It may mean extending kindness, forgiveness and care to people who don't deserve it. It may mean getting up early to pray one day a week or giving one week's allowance to a charity or cause bigger than yourself. The point is, only you know what following Jesus—what colliding with Jesus—looks like in your life.

See, just like the Gospels are uniquely personal, so too is your story. If you are interested in following Jesus—if you are interested in being a disciple and in colliding with Jesus—then you are the only one who can determine what that means for your life. Colliding with Jesus is personal. It is unique. It will result in a story no one else can tell because it involves you and the God who made you.

I can't give you a list of steps, directions or rules to follow to determine the collision that will take place when you intersect with God. I can't make a promise about the result, about the destination or about the implications for your life. No one can. Except you. There is only one thing that is the same for all of us, only one call and one mandate that we can be certain applies to everyone—regardless of age, maturity, location, skills or fears. Jesus says to follow Him. He says to walk in His steps, even without the certainty of where you will go and how you will get there. Yes, it can be a scary proposition—the idea of colliding offers little guarantee for what just may happen as a result. But you can be sure that something will happen. To you. In your story. Because of your obedience. Because of God's bigness. Because of your desire to love and honor the call Christ asks of you. Collide with God—not because there is a promise involved but because there is a big God involved, and because your story is involved—your story is on the line. And you just may be surprised to see what God can and is able to do when you surrender yourself to His lead. Follow Him and hang on. Only God knows where you will go from here.

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