

**Columbia, Missouri**  
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**The Scripture**  
**Acts 11:18**

*Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder*

God?” When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

**The Message**  
**“11 Indispensable Relationships: You Need a Yoda”**  
**Mark Briley**

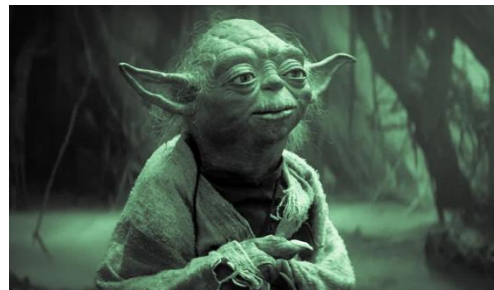
Ten billion dollars. That’s what you get, I guess, when the Force is with you. The *Star Wars* movie empire, consisting of 11 movies (*three different sets of trilogies, not in chronological order mind you and two additional anthology films*) made that kind of money at the box office. Anybody here see all 11 films in the theater? The first movie was released in theaters in 1977, so unless you caught a re-offering from a theater years later, you’d need to be at least in your forties to have seen them in the order of release in movie theaters.



The *Star Wars* franchise has bested the wizarding world of *Harry Potter* by a billion or so and only trails *The Marvel Cinematic Universe* as the highest grossing franchise of all time. I confess at the risk of losing tremendous street cred that I never got into the *Star Wars* phenomenon. One of my best friends still has on display his *Star Wars* action figures that have never been taken out of their original packaging... you know, to maintain their purity and integrity. He’s in his forties and his wife doesn’t seem to mind so more power to him.

Even with my distance from the series, I am amazed by how much *Star Wars* has found its way into mainstream culture. The Evil Empire played a big role in the film and was later used politically by Ronald Reagan when referring to the Soviet Union. Princess Leia, Chewbacca, and Darth Vader remain three of the most popular outfits that show up at costume parties. I was part of a ministry organization of which the leaders were referred to as The Jedi Council. Luke Skywalker, R2-D2, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jabba the Hut all sound familiar to most Americans.

And then, of course, that famous little green character named Yoda. Yoda first appeared on the scene in the second film of the original trilogy: *The Empire Strikes Back*. Yoda was responsible for training the main character, Luke Skywalker, in the ways of the Jedi. Yoda was the Grand Master Supreme Jedi, which meant he achieved the highest Jedi status and essentially deemed the wisest of them all. The Jedi use



a quasi-telekinetic power, known as the Force and weapons known as light sabers, which emit a controlled energy flow in the shape of a sword, to serve and protect their Republic and the galaxy from the Dark Side.

In 2008, Yoda was selected by Empire Magazine as the 25<sup>th</sup> greatest movie character of all time, and his star seems to keep climbing. Now there's baby Yoda, known as *The Child*, and on and on the influence goes. But... Yoda has given us some gems that some fans take to greater heart than Christ-followers take to Scripture.

Here are a few of Yoda's deep thoughts: "*Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.*" Here is another, "*Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose.*" Perhaps the most memorable comes in Yoda's mentoring of young Luke Skywalker. He tells him, "*A Jedi's strength flows from the Force.*" He tells him "*You must feel the Force around you.*" And engraining the power the Force has in the lives of those who will use it for good, Yoda's protégé quotes at the end the most famous of all parting words, "*May the Force be with you,*" which is why May 4<sup>th</sup> is *Star Wars Day*... "*May the 4<sup>th</sup> be with you.*" Star Wars is everywhere – even on our calendars!

We all need a Yoda in our lives. Someone wise. Someone connected at a deeper level to some Force of which we also long to be connected. Yoda's are prophetic. They are not perfect people, but they are thoughtful people who have considered the evidence, stretched their spirits to the edge in search of truth and meaning, and will humbly impart their wisdom to others to spur them on to greater good.

As we push forward with our summer sermon series, entitled *11*, we focus today on your Yoda witness as one of the indispensable relationships you most need in your life.<sup>1</sup> Yoda's will help you rise above your fear and challenge you to make the hard decisions that maybe even go against the grain of the norm in order to be grounded in the force that matters most – the Spirit and nature of Christ. A

Yoda was who Sir Isaac Newton was referring when he said, "*If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.*" Whose shoulders have you stood to realize the success you know or see the truth you have seen? Who sets standards to which you aspire? Whose blessing do you seek? That person is your Yoda. There is no such thing as a self-made person. Someone has helped you see further or cleared some debris from your path that you might find success with less hindrance. "*The ancient rabbis said that even one who has memorized the whole Bible, and the Mishnah, too, is still only an ignoramus, heretic, or even worse unless they have carried out a proper apprenticeship with a Master.*" (Sweet).

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<sup>1</sup> References in support of this message stem from Leonard Sweet's "*11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't be Without*" which inspired this summer series. David C. Cook Publishing. Colorado Springs. 2008.

Jesus was clearly the Grand Master Supreme Jedi if you'll allow me to use those terms. He pushed the envelope, and nothing he did fell in line with the norm. Traditions overturned, practices altered, Truth told in a whole new way. If we are honest with ourselves, we'd have a really tough time with Jesus if he was on our Church Board. It sounds shocking to say that, but think about it. He would challenge every comfort you have, every resistance to change, every budgetary consideration, and surely like most the rest of us, would have an opinion about the color of the new carpet, which is badly needed.

His take on *prophetic love* before *prophetic law* would make us uncomfortable. We like things a certain way. We like rules and structure, and we've known God in a particular way... we would be like those gathered around Jesus who said, "*His teaching is hard. Who can understand it? Who can possibly follow it?*"

And so, we have spent our lives trying to decipher just how to do that... how to live like Jesus. Peter is our Yoda of focus today. Jesus was one of his *witnesses*. Pete walked with Jesus, struggled through the life changes required of this new teaching... wrestled with the theology... considered the cost of disrupting his happy, Jewish upbringing with this new concept of grace and acceptance of Gentiles. He sorted it through, prayed, trained as a Jedi of this new movement of the Force, and became the foundation of the church. "*On this rock I will build my church,*" Jesus says of Peter. Yoda Jesus speaking to Jedi Peter, "*Go with this spirit, this knowledge and wisdom, this courage and faith... build the Church in this spirit.*"

Much of this plays out in the book of Acts. Dr. Luke, whom we first think of as the Gospel writer, continues the story in the book of Acts: the account of how the Church pressed forward following Jesus' departure from earth. Peter has this wild vision of a blanket from heaven coming down, purifying all foods for consumption... a huge deal for the Jewish tradition to contend with. This account is told almost word for word twice in the book of Acts. This is most likely a literary move to demonstrate how important this event is to the Christian movement.

Luke has always portrayed Jesus as an active advocate of the progression of the church from a sect within Judaism to an invitation of faith open to all people (*Luke 4:24-30*). Featured prominently in both Luke and Acts are the inclusion of the outsiders – foreigners, outcasts, and anyone undervalued in society. This vision Peter has – against everything he's ever been taught – leads him to believe that the Gentiles should not only be tolerated in the Christian movement but should be equally valued as God's beloved children. Just like the departure from the strict observance of Jewish dietary laws, this acceptance of Gentiles comes from the simple theological

understanding that what God has created and called, “good,” or in this instance, “clean,” is to be accepted and revered.

These were big gulp moments for Peter. He would be asking the core of the movement to accept the Gentiles into the fold. “*Who am I to stand in the way of God?*” he says. They have received the Spirit just like we did. This is still an issue in the Church, isn’t it? Who’s in? Who’s out? In our pride, we often stand in the way of God and say, “*Not this one or that one.*” “*Surely not him.*” “*Certainly not her.*” Whether groups of people who believe differently than we do or individuals whose individual choices differ from ours we say too often with our actions, “*God, we will stand in the way of your movement... you surely don’t mean they have a place in the church.*” Peter is dealing with this, struggling with the implications but he cannot do it any longer. The Spirit is offered to them, too... who then am I to reject them? Yoda’s consider the hard questions and live into them faithfully. Do you have a Yoda?



Now, don’t limit your imagination of where you might find your Yoda’s. We often think of the wise, seasoned, sage but your Yoda might be younger than you. **[St T. Slide]** Saint Teresa of Avila is known best for her book “*The Interior Castle*” as she explored the interior life of prayer and soul. She was called by Pope Paul VI the “*Doctor of the Church.*” Father Baltazar Alvarez became her spiritual advisor in 1559. She was 45. He was 20.

Leonard Sweet says his kids are techno-Yoda’s for him. Who do you take with you to buy your next technological device? “*Sometimes,*” he says, “*you have to be willing to sit at the feet of your children to learn about things.*” My kids blow me away sometimes. They have so much more access to information than we did as kids. Listening, and trusting, their take on some things, has taught me how much the world keeps growing, shifting, changing.

I found myself in a beautiful, unexpected afternoon conversation on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with a couple of brilliant guys with very different backgrounds from each other, and from me. We just soaked in each other’s experiences. One was a young twenty-something from Tanzania –lived through multiple Civil Wars, as a family among other hardships if living through a genocide was not atrocious enough. He’s writing a book about his experience now. It made my small-town upbringing in Macon seem pretty tame. We spoke about our families and the many zigs and zags in our lives that took us around the country, and the world, in some instances. Somehow, somehow, we all ended up in a backyard together on Independence Day. Life is an extraordinary mystery, isn’t it? I had so much to soak in from these wise men – and when you’re open to the wisdom

and the perseverance and experiences others must share with you, Yoda moments find you, and you can be transformed by the renewal of your mind, heart, and soul. For a Yoda soul to pour into you, you must let down your guard, set aside your pride and listen. Any Yoda worthy of such a title will be the first to say they are constantly learning themselves.

Sometimes – its academia. Others – the school of hard knocks. It's why approaching every person as someone you can learn from is a game changer. The world becomes your classroom and humanity becomes your teacher.

Peter – in this pivotal encounter with Gentiles coming to faith – opened his heart to learn from everybody and when he did – God opened him to a new level of understanding and inclusion of those once deemed unredeemable. There will be people in your life that are your Yoda to the core, and you'll turn to them time and time again. But an attitude of seeing all as children of God who can teach you something will greatly enrich your life.

If you are to hone in a Yoda for your spirit training, there are some things worth considering. Sweet says to "*beware of the name-dropping, head-lobbing, chest thumping, knock-and mock mentor.*" That sort of spirit you'll find in those who are more concerned about themselves – what it does for them to be in the spotlight. They don't make it a humble offering from their experience as something that might aid the growing journey of another. The true Yoda is like a good tour guide – they point you to what you're looking for and give you some understanding of the how's and why's of things, but you don't leave their presence with a picture of them... the lingering image is of the wisdom that will guide you forward. A Yoda's primary function is to guide and guard us into a living, dynamic relationship with God and to help us grow in grace and wisdom.

For a Yoda to stick long term, a relationship will be necessary. When looking for a Yoda, Sweet suggests that if you were to choose a mentor based on three things, choose these: "*Watch the way they treat their spouse (or the most important person in their life). Two: are the walls of their study permeable to their kids (or others)? Three: Are they constantly learning, or do they consider themselves too good for that?*"

Other characteristics will be natural to the best of Yoda's. Humility is a biggie. This fits Peter as he says, "*Who am I to stand in the way of what God is doing.*" Get on board with God's love as opposed to standing in the way of it. A Yoda humbles themselves knowing that the mystery of God is beyond them, and they are simply given the gift of question... prayer... and dialogue. The Dalai Lama, whose title literally means, "*Ocean of Wisdom*" often says before he speaks, "*I am just a simple monk.*" A Yoda worth learning from accepts fallibility and actually uses it to drive his or her life. Yodas want

to study with you... they want to discover with you... not simply demand that you study under them. Such a humble Spirit is worth learning from.

My father had the privilege to know the great preacher Fred Craddock as Yoda during his time at Phillips Theological Seminary.

Craddock is revered throughout the states and across the globe as one of the greatest preachers ever; introducing an inductive style of preaching that shifted the homiletic experience from a three points and a poem practice to an unfolding of the Gospel through the gift of story. I met Dr. Craddock once when I was with my father. My father hadn't seen him in years, and when my dad was introducing us, he said, "*Dr. Craddock taught me so much*" to which Craddock replied, "*Bill, you taught me, too.*" The gift of humility is a worthy Yoda quality. If you've seen Dr. Craddock, you'd know he and Yoda are about the same size, so the image fits all the more.



Honesty is another must-have trait. The best Yodas will be honest enough to share their secrets with you. They are not hoarding a secret recipe to life. They are open about their mistakes and short comings... about the dead ends they have found and the ones that found them. They would never treat you like the one who teaches you how to play a new game but doesn't tell you the ultimate way to win in the end. Yodas don't hold back. They don't live life afraid or threatened by others. They show you all the moves they know.

Honor is the third "*H*" in the Yoda trilogy. Like the idea, "*You are what you eat,*" "*You become what your honor.*" Sweet shares that "*One of the worst things you can say about a person is that greatness passed by, and he or she did not recognize it.*" To be blessed by and to bless a mentor are two of life's richest blessings. Honor your Yoda by going beyond the limits you imagined for yourself. They saw the potential in you. Live it well and pass it on to another Jedi. Jesus said to Peter: "*You are the Rock upon which the movement will be built.*" Peter lived up to the calling. He made hard calls... he went against the norms of the faith... he pursued to the depths what "*God is love*" truly meant and how it was to be lived out. He included all and his foundation still stands if we are willing to stick our faith out, if you will, and honor Jesus, our Grand Master Supreme.

Thank your Yoda this week and honor them by living in strength all you have gleaned from them. Be open to others who might teach you something as well, never settling with the idea that you've grown as much as you're going to grow. Life, if it lasts only one day more, is worth living fully, learning, giving, teaching, including, listening, and

imagining what is possible even yet, with God. The Spirit of God... a Spirit of humble love is beckoning you forward that you might open your mind to change, to hope, to the truth, to the Way, to the Life. May that Force be with you.

May it be so.

## **Song of Response**

### **"To Be"**

**Michael Tatum**

WORDS AND MUSIC: MICHAEL TATUM

#### **Verse 1:**

I'm a darkness dweller in the wilderness.  
I'm lost, but not ashamed to be.  
There's a tomb that's waiting just beyond the trees,  
Alone, but not constrained to be.

#### **Pre-Chorus:**

There's a million reasons why a soul has to die.  
As time passes by, I let go and realize.

#### **Chorus:**

That I'm renewed, refreshed, restored in you, Lord.  
I'm alive and not afraid to be.

#### **Verse 2:**

I'm a wandering spirit in the desert sea.  
Unbound but not resigned to be  
There's a god that's calling to the heart in me.  
Unchained but not arranged to be.

#### **Pre-Chorus:**

There's a million reasons why a soul has to die.  
As time passes by, I let go and realize.

#### **Chorus:**

That I'm renewed, refreshed, restored in you, Lord.  
I'm alive and not afraid to be.

That I'm renewed, refreshed, restored in you, Lord.  
I'm alive and not afraid to be.

#### **Bridge:**

Create a willing heart; sustain me from the start.  
Repair these broken parts; renew the spirit in me.  
Restore the song that I sing.

*(Continues on the next page.)*



***Chorus:***

That I'm renewed, refreshed, restored in you, Lord.  
I'm alive and not afraid to be.

That I'm renewed, refreshed, restored in you, Lord.  
I'm alive and not afraid to be.

***Ending:***

I'm a darkness dweller in the wilderness.  
I'm lost, but not ashamed to be.

**BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH**