An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in vibrant, textured strokes of gold and yellow, with some blue and red accents. The background is a deep, rich blue, also with visible brushstrokes and some lighter blue and green speckles. The overall style is expressive and modern.

the
GOSPEL
OF JOHN

BY DEB GIAIMO

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January 2022

Thank you to those who took the time to edit, proofread and contribute to this material:
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All scripture verses are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

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WELCOME!

Dear friend,

Welcome to our study of the Gospel of John! You have chosen to set aside this time and season to walk through this amazing book of the Bible...and for that I am really proud of you and very excited for you! Why? Because I believe that you will be forever changed by the working of the Holy Spirit in you, as a result of reading, studying, and applying the Word of God! God wants us to KNOW Him, but even more importantly, He wants us to GROW in Him. As we do, we will be all the more prepared and equipped to GO make a difference in this world!

I have had an interesting and exciting time preparing this studyguide for you, for a couple of reasons. I love studying the Bible! I love researching topics and verses and meanings and things that are a relevant way of illustrating a point or that will make our time in the Word deeper and more meaningful. It's always a challenge to read the Word of God in order to hear His Word for someone else. But I accept the challenge, when I know God is giving me the opportunity, making sure to always approach the Bible with humility and hunger to learn more! 😊

I invite you to approach this study of the Gospel of John in the same way! Come humbly before God every day, positioning yourself to hear from Him and respond to Him in a way that allows His Holy Spirit to work mightily in you.

As you do this, ask yourself regularly:

1. What is God saying to me?
2. How does this apply to my life?
3. What is God asking of me?
4. How do I take what I am learning to those around me?
5. What is my part in what God is doing all around me?

Wow! What an opportunity to grow! We will be searching through the Gospel of John to discover more about Jesus – the Son of God! We will be observing how He talked, acted, responded, and related to others. We will see how much He loved God the Father, depended on Him, trusted Him, listened to Him, obeyed Him, and honored Him.

If we could grasp even a little bit more of who Jesus is and all that we have and are in Him, then I would say – mission accomplished! Set your heart on the great expectation that God will meet you and speak to you and heal you and change you as you gaze upon His Word!

God bless you!

With love and devotion,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeb" followed by a simple smiley face "☺". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

SALVATION PRAYER

It is very important, before you begin this study, that you know that true growth in your faith is not possible without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ! Revelation and understanding of God's Word come by the Holy Spirit working in you, to give you this knowledge. This happens when, in faith, you invite Jesus into your life. Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The only way to heaven is by asking Jesus into your life, first as Savior, forgiving you of your sins. Second, as Lord of your life, which means that you have decided to give Him complete control, you will do life His way. This is a lifelong journey of seeking Him, spending time with Him, reading His Word, and growing in Him. If you do this, you will experience the abundant life He has for you!

I cannot assume that every person who picks up this studyguide is a Christian. Therefore, I must ask the question: "Do you remember a time when you asked Jesus to come into your life, as your personal Savior and Lord?" If you can't remember doing that, then I encourage you to take a step of faith and invite Him in! The Bible says that all have sinned. We all fall short of the glory of God. We all need Him! Each of us must face the reality that we have sinned and are separated from Him forever unless we turn away from our sin and receive His gift of salvation. It is by His amazing grace - through faith - that you can receive this wonderful gift from God. If you haven't done so already, won't you ask Him into your heart today?

If you would like to do that right now...you can pray on your own...or read the following prayer:

Father, I come before You today, recognizing my need for You. I realize that I have sinned, and I need a Savior. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die on a cross to take the punishment for my sins. Thank You, that by His death on the cross, and because He rose from the dead and is seated with You in heaven, I can have a personal relationship with You and receive salvation. I repent of my sins. Please forgive me. I ask You, Jesus, into my life right now; to be my Lord and Savior! Holy Spirit fill me, right now, to overflowing. Help me to live for You, every day, for the rest of my life. I understand that this is a lifelong commitment...a new life devoted to You. I am ready to walk the rest of my life as Your child, under Your watchful care, knowing Your perfect love, help and provision. In Jesus name, Amen!

If you prayed that prayer for the very first time, I encourage you to share your decision with others.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The first four books of the New Testament in the Bible are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books are commonly referred to as the gospels. The word gospel means “good news”. It seems a very fitting title, since all four of the gospels tell the amazing story of Jesus! They give eyewitness accounts of His life here on earth, how He lived and what he came to earth to accomplish! The fact that Jesus – fully man and fully God – came to earth to live a perfect life and die the most sacrificial and gruesome death, to provide a way for our salvation, is the greatest story ever told! It’s the best news anyone could ever hear and receive!

The gospels are written by four different authors, from different backgrounds and experiences, giving each gospel story a unique perspective of Jesus life. One could say that these four books combine to give a balanced revelation of Jesus, to give us the most complete picture of Him as possible. Ultimately, Jesus came to earth to be the perfect representation of God the Father, and to make the way for those who believe in Him to know the Father too. For Father God loves us so deeply and wants an intimate relationship with each one of us! Hebrews 1:3 says this quite clearly and emphatically:

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Before we take a look specifically at the Gospel of John, let’s first look at how these four books relate to one another and how they differ. All four tell the story of Jesus and in some cases, they wrote about the same events, people, and teachings of Jesus. However, each Gospel has its own purpose, its own audience, and its own revelations about Jesus. Below is a very brief overview of each book and what it emphasized:

- Matthew:
 - Written to the Jews
 - Emphasized that the Promised One was here
 - Revealed the Messiah
- Mark:
 - Written to the Romans
 - Emphasized how Jesus worked
 - Revealed the power of the Holy Spirit
- Luke:
 - Written to the Greeks
 - Emphasized what Jesus was like
 - Revealed His nature and that He was the perfect image of God the Father

- John:
 - Written to the Church
 - Emphasized who Jesus really is
 - Revealed that Jesus is the Son of God

Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on the more public and outward actions of Jesus – His human nature. John, however, tells us more about the inner facts and aspects of Jesus life – His divine nature. Some of the names given to Jesus in this gospel are the Word, the Life, the Light, and God’s Son. These names give us insight into His relationship to God the Father and to people.

The author of this gospel is the apostle John, who was a first cousin of Jesus. Most date the writing of this book around 90 A.D.

As a side note, the following quote from biblestudytools.com explains this date reference:

While most believe AD stands for after death, it actually comes from the Latin phrase “anno domini” which means “year of our Lord”. Dionysius believed, perhaps rightly, that history should be divided by the greatest event in human history; namely, the birth of Jesus Christ. Thus, all the time after the birth of Christ became known as AD and all of history before the birth of Christ was labeled BC for “before Christ”.

John was the one described as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). He was one of the three named in Jesus’ inner circle: Peter, James, and John (Luke 5:4-11). It is not clear why Jesus chose these three, but they were the only ones with Him during these events: the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2); raising Jairius’ daughter from the dead (Mark 5:35-37); and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-37). Maybe it was because they were with Him the longest, or that He simply chose them, and was preparing them to carry on His work and lead the Church when He was gone. John is also named as the author of 1, 2, 3 John and the Book of Revelation.

John’s purpose in writing the Gospel of John is for us to see Christ as the Eternal Son of God and to receive Him as our personal Savior. It’s a gospel of salvation. One of the main messages is eternal life by believing in Jesus. The words believe, life and live are used 55 times, reiterating the truth that Jesus is the only way to the life that God created us to live!

The NIV Study Bible’s introduction to this book states that the Gospel of John was written to:

“...build up believers as well as to win new converts”.

Also, some of the themes that the NIV Study Bible suggests are: the light and life of men; witness; testimony; grace; truth; ministry; signs and wonders; what God gives us; Jesus depended on the Father and did the work of the Father; Jesus is the Bread of Life (with Him we won’t hunger or thirst again); example of humble service; to reveal the glory of God; protection; and to bring about faith that leads to life.

In conclusion, I would like to use a few quotes from the NIV Quiet Time Bible's introduction of the Gospel of John to further describe this book:

The most significant fact in history can be summed up in four words: Jesus Christ is God! The great declaration of the bible is that God in human flesh was born in Bethlehem. It was God in the person of Jesus Christ who astonished the people of his day with his miracles and amazed them with his teaching. It was God who lived a perfect life and then allowed himself to be put to death on a Roman cross for humanity's sins. It was God who three days after he died broke the bonds of death and came out of the grave alive. The deity of Jesus – the fact that he was God in human flesh – is the bottom line of the Christian faith.

John never mentions himself by name in the Gospel. He refers to himself simply as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." We have in the Gospel the memories of an intimate friend about the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ had transformed John's life. I hope you are prepared to have that happen to you! You are about to begin a fascinating study focused on the greatest person who ever lived – Jesus Christ. If you will respond to what John writes in faith and obedience, you, like John, will experience a whole new kind of life!

I couldn't have said it better myself!

S.O.A.P. JOURNALING INSTRUCTIONS

Every week you will start with a **S.O.A.P.** journaling exercise. This method of reading the Bible focuses on: (**S**) picking out one scripture verse from your reading (can be more than one verse); (**O**) observing what the verse is saying; (**A**) applying it to your life; and (**P**) writing a prayer about the verse(s) that expresses how your heart is responding. This will help you to continue to learn how to read the Bible on your own and how to get more personal meaning and application from scripture. Rather than just reading it for information, you can use this method of reading the Bible to recognize the ways that God is speaking to you personally from His Word. As you spend a few minutes thinking about each scripture, God will show you how it is relevant to you and how to apply it to your life. This will allow the truth of God's Word to penetrate deeper into your heart to bring the transformation and growth that He wants for your life!

Begin by reading the scripture passage listed for that chapter. As you read, notice how a verse captures your attention, speaks to you, or raises interest in you. Then journal the following:

S (Scripture) = on these lines, write the verse that speaks to you the most

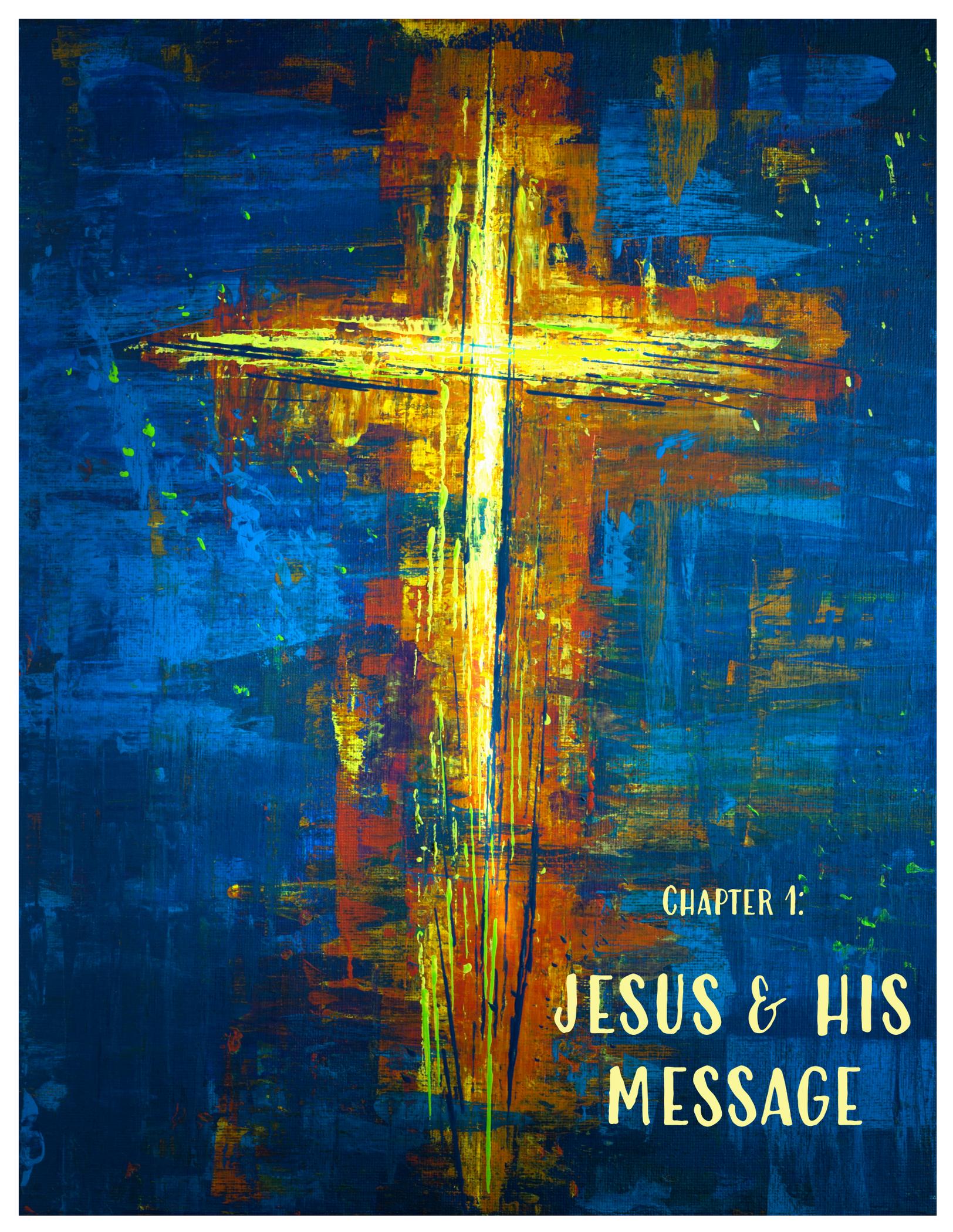
O (Observe) = on these lines, write down what that verse is saying or teaching

A (Apply) = on these lines, write down how that verse applies to your life

P (Prayer) = on these lines, write a prayer about this verse, and ask God to work in you

By using this as our Day 1 exercise each week, at the end of this Gospel of John study guide, you will have a personal journal of your experience through this book of the Bible in addition to working through the questions of each lesson.

You may want to use this method as you continue to read the Bible even after you complete this experience. What a wonderful way to keep a written record of your journey through the Bible!

An abstract painting featuring a central cross. The cross is rendered in warm, golden-yellow and orange tones, with visible brushstrokes and texture. It stands out against a background of deep, vibrant blue, also with visible brushwork and some lighter blue and green accents. The overall style is expressive and textured.

CHAPTER 1:

JESUS & HIS
MESSAGE

John 1:1-5

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.*

*³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made
that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

S: _____

O: _____

A: _____

P: _____

DAY TWO: JESUS – THE SON OF GOD!

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
(John 1:1)*

BOOM!!! Right off the bat, right out of the gate, right away in the first chapter and the first verse, John declares that Jesus is God! He must have been so passionate and excited about sharing this great news with the world, that he got right to the point! What incredible insight and inspiration he had from the Holy Spirit about the Son of God! The things revealed to him must have been overwhelming and awesome! And even though Matthew, Mark and Luke had already written their versions of Jesus's life, John must have felt there was still so much more to say! And he was right! It's hard to imagine the Bible without the Gospel of John and the perspective of John's testimony!

John knew Jesus very well! He spent a lot of time following Jesus, listening to Him, working with Him, and observing Him. What a privilege it must have been to walk alongside Him during the three years Jesus touched people's lives, shared countercultural messages, and trained those who would carry on the work of God the Father! Can you even imagine what it would have been like to live when Jesus lived and to be a part of His life so intimately as John was? Wow!

1. What do you think it would have been like, to live in the times when Jesus was here on earth?

Don't you think it's interesting that the word "Word" is used to describe Jesus? As I was reflecting on that I thought "Hmmm, a word is supposed to communicate something. So, if Jesus was called the "Word", then He was meant to communicate something to us." If we pay attention to or "read" the life of Jesus, we should be learning something. We should pay attention to the messages that He was teaching us through how He talked and acted.

Jesus was sent to tell us about the Father, to communicate to us who He is and the life that was available to us in Him. Jesus Himself was the perfect representation of the Father, so if we know Jesus, then we know the Father.

2. List some other things that we learn about Jesus in John 1.

Many of the disciples in Jesus' time had heard of the coming Messiah. Some were even waiting for Him to appear and expecting Him to come any day. John 1:23 says:

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord,'"

And John 1: 45 says:

Phillip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

I wonder if it was a difficult transition for them to go from hearing about Jesus' coming, to knowing Him personally, because He had finally appeared! Some did find this difficult to accept, so they gave up and walked away. But to those who believed and expressed the faith to believe, their lives were transformed forever!

3. Why is it so important that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

4. Why is this hard for some people to believe?

5. Do you really believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Why, or why not?

John 1:12-14 says:

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

If we really believe that Jesus is the Son of God...that should change our lives! If we let it – it will change EVERYTHING! If we believe that He is the Son of God and pay very close attention to how He lived His life on earth, then we will become more and more like Him. We too will carry on His message of salvation, grace, and truth to those around us.

Wow...as I wrote this...I had to stop here...and thank God...the Almighty and Holy One...for receiving me...forgiving me...holding onto me... pursuing me, relentlessly, when I turned away from Him... for believing in me...for using me...for revealing His truth to me, to correct, teach, guide and love me...for His incredible grace that gives me so much more than what I deserve...and for enabling me to do what He has called me to do.

6. Take a minute to do the same. Don't rush this. Approach God with reverent awe and wonder...enjoy His presence...and in your own words thank Him. *(Write it down below)*

Jesus, the Word of God, had a message. John the Baptist had a message. Andrew had a message for Peter. Phillip had a message for Nathaniel. Wherever God takes you, He has a message for you to bring to those you will encounter there.

Are you listening? Are you willing? Will you share the message and trust that God is using you to fulfill His great plan for someone's eternity? Do you believe what it says about John the Baptist in John 1:8 is also true for you?

He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

DAY THREE: MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

This conversation makes me think about the whole concept of a “message in a bottle”. It intrigued me so much that I looked it up on Wikipedia online and found some very interesting details.

The form of communication of putting a message in a bottle and setting it afloat at sea or some other body of water may date back to 310 BC! (Didn't see that one coming...). This method has been used by scientists, military, biologists, other coastal and ocean studies, and of course for various personal uses. It seems that the messages for personal use were various also. Some were to express grief over a lost loved one, some who thought they would die at sea, sent messages of goodbye to loved ones, and so on.

I found this detail in Wikipedia a little humorous:

In the sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth I reputedly created an official position of "Uncorker of Ocean Bottles", and—thinking some bottles might contain secrets from British spies or fleets—decreed that anyone else opening the bottles could face the death penalty.

Ok, so this may have been a myth, but wouldn't that be an interesting job? ☺



This was an interesting study because some messages were actually found over 100 years from the time they were written, and some were found quite close to the location from which they were sent. Others may have traveled around the world. Some created romantic connections, while others brought the news of family or friends and their tragedies at sea. This website listed several real examples. Here are a few:

In 1956, Swedish sailor Ake Viking sent a bottled message "To Someone Beautiful and Far Away" that reached a 17-year-old Sicilian girl named Paolina, sparking a correspondence that culminated in their marriage in 1958. The affair attracted so much attention that 4,000 people celebrated their wedding.

In June 2019, three hikers trapped above a waterfall on California's Arroyo Seco tributary released a Nalgene bottled S.O.S. message that was quickly discovered a quarter mile (0.4 km) downstream, allowing them to be rescued by helicopter the following morning.

7. If you could send a message in a bottle. What would it say? (It could be serious or funny!)

Although this would be a fun “experiment” and a unique way to send a message, I don’t think that is what God has in mind for us as we carry His message to the world.

Let’s go back to the Gospel of John for clarification on what I am trying to say here. At the end of Day 2, I mentioned that it is recorded in John 1 that Jesus, John the Baptist, Andrew, and Phillip all had messages to share. Jesus had a message for the world and for those attending the wedding; John the Baptist had a message for anyone listening; Andrew had a message for Peter; and Phillip had a message for Nathaniel. But they didn’t tuck that message into a bottle and send it in hopes that someone would hear it. They had a message for someone in their life, right in front of them. And that message was to be spoken immediately. In each case, there was a very specific purpose: to bring someone to Jesus or to help build their faith in Him.

8. How is your heart responding to the above paragraph?

We can share this message in so many ways. For instance, Jesus simply attended a wedding. A crisis happened – they ran out of wine – creating a need. Jesus just happened to be there to help meet that need. But that wasn’t the only reason He was there. Let’s look at John 2:11:

*This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee.
He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in Him. (NIV 1986)*

9. What did Jesus accomplish by meeting the need at the wedding? What message did he communicate?

What about the story of Jesus clearing the temple? That was kind of a crazy way to share a message...but it was effective...right? The Bible doesn't specifically list any "reasons" for Jesus doing this, but I can imagine that He cleared the temple to declare that it was God's house and meant for God's purposes. Maybe He cleared it out so that the scriptures could be read, the message of the gospel could be preached, and the work of the ministry could be done. Maybe He wanted to make sure that anyone entering the temple would honor and respect the house of the Lord and have the best chance of hearing the good news and responding to it.

Jesus and his disciples took the message in their hearts everywhere they went and shared it with whoever would listen. Sometimes they spoke to a crowd and sometimes to only one person.

10. Where have you been "invited"? What is the message in your heart? Who are you supposed to share it with?

Knowing Jesus means knowing what He came to earth to do. As we start to read the Gospel of John, we are reminded that He came to share the message of God's love and salvation with everyone. Wherever His life took Him, wherever the Father led Him, He shared that message. We are to do the same! We should NOT treat it like a message in a bottle...tucked away for "maybe" someday. Instead, we should proclaim it boldly and confidently and NOW, knowing that God has an eternal purpose for it.

I will end this Chapter with a story. In 2003, I received a letter saying that I was chosen to be inducted into the Mentor High School Sports Hall of Fame. When I received the invitation to participate in the ceremony, I remember responding something like this:

What in the world is this all about? I could care less about being in a sports hall of fame. I am way past that in my life. Geesh! It's been 17 years since I graduated, why would God ask me to do this now?

For real. True story. Maybe not word for word, but very close. I had no interest in participating in this event. BUT as I received more information about it, I found out that I would be able to stand in front of everyone and say whatever I wanted...there was no time limit either. So, after humbling myself before the Lord and resolving to share the gospel and exalt the name of Jesus in my speech...I decided to accept the nomination and participate. I truly believe that because I did, someone heard about Jesus that day, and responded to Him. Maybe, it was only to increase someone's faith in Him, or to remind someone that He was there for them. I may never know until heaven. All I was supposed to do was obey and share the message on my heart. So, I did. I am truly grateful for that opportunity!

Prayer:

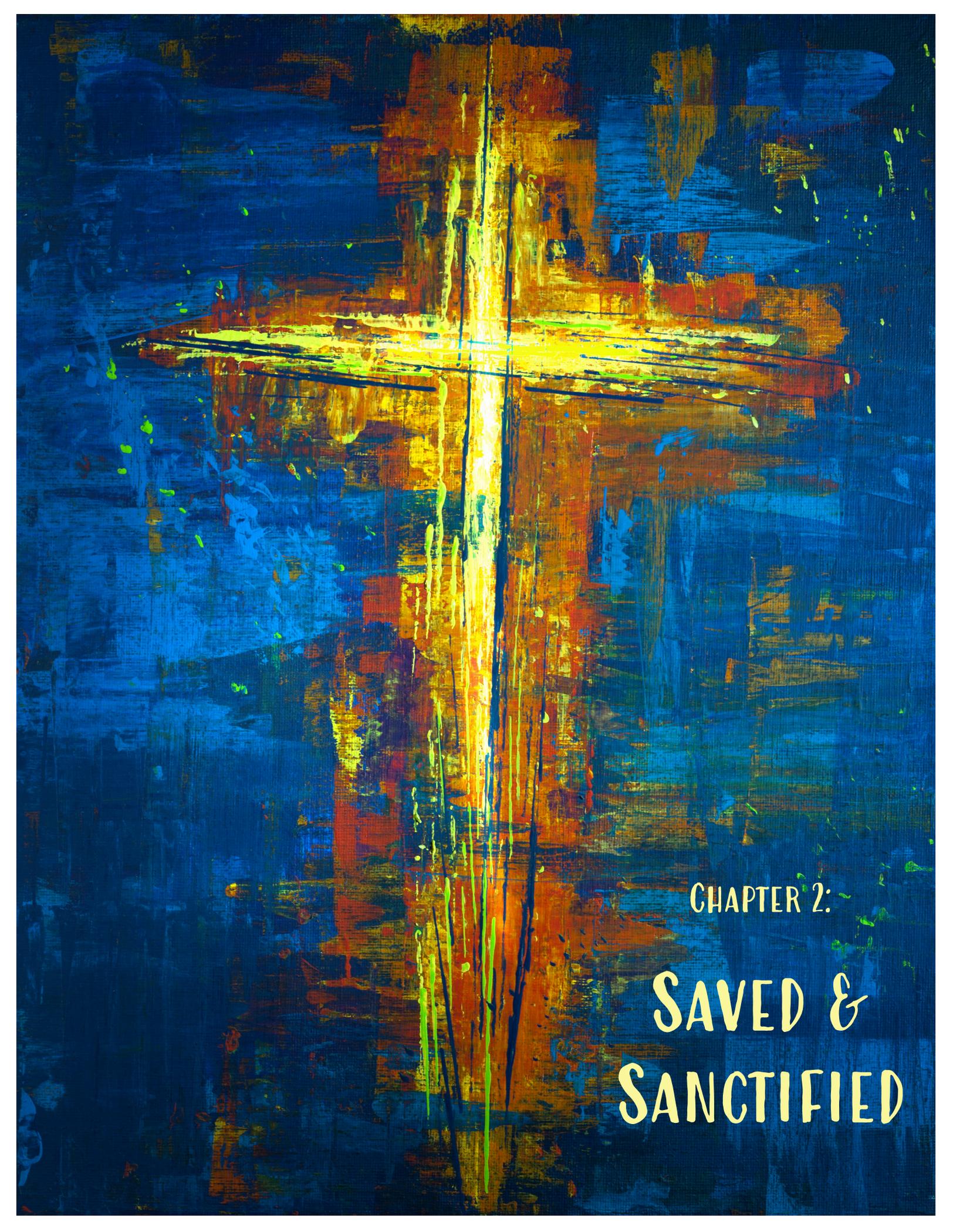
- Write a prayer thanking God for who He is, asking Him to clarify the “message” of your heart, and to give you the courage to share it wherever He leads you.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 1 & 2
- Share the “message” of your heart with someone this week!
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

- John 1:41-42 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in warm, glowing colors like gold, yellow, and orange, with a textured, brush-stroke appearance. It stands out against a background of deep, vibrant blue and dark indigo. There are also some smaller, lighter blue and green brushstrokes scattered throughout the composition, particularly around the cross. The overall effect is one of spiritual light and depth.

CHAPTER 2:

SAVED &
SANCTIFIED

John 3:30

*He must become greater;
I must become less. (NIV)*

*This is the assigned moment for him to move into the center,
while I slip off to the sidelines. (MSG)*

*Jesus must become more important,
while I become less important. (CEV)*

*He must increase,
but I must decrease. (NKJV)*

(Pick one of these to use for your S.O.A.P. exercise)

S: _____

O: _____

A: _____

P: _____

DAY TWO: NICODEMUS AT NIGHT

John Chapter 3 is all about salvation. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus turned very quickly to this subject. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. This meant he would have been extensively trained in the Jewish law and theology. He was a respected religious leader as member of the Jewish ruling council. Yet, he slipped away at night in secret to find Jesus and talk to him. Why did he feel like he needed to do that? Was he afraid that someone would see him and question what he was doing? Was he worried about his reputation? Or was this symbolic of the fact that he himself was "in the dark" about Jesus. He obviously did not understand or believe who Jesus was, nor had he put his faith in Him, yet.

It's a little humorous if you think about it. When he arrived where Jesus was staying, he started by saying:

Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. (John 3:2)

I wonder if Jesus was thinking "And you came all the way out here at night to tell me that?" ☺ Maybe Nicodemus felt that he needed to impress Jesus with his religious jargon. Maybe he was nervous or embarrassed that he still just didn't understand.

1. Do you know anyone like Nicodemus? What do you think motivates the way they talk and act?

2. Is there anything about Jesus, and faith in Him, that you still question or that you have not yet asked anyone about? Is there any way that you are "in the dark" about your faith?

Getting back to Jesus and Nicodemus, don't you think it's awesome how Jesus gets right to the point? He knew why Nicodemus was there, and what he needed to hear, even though Nicodemus was not admitting it or asking the right questions. Maybe Jesus was just tired and didn't want to be up all night. Whatever the reason, Jesus didn't waste any time bringing the conversation to the REAL issue – true salvation. His reply was:

Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. (John 3:3)

After Nicodemus questions Jesus about his reply, Jesus says this:

*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.
(John 3:5)*

3. Why do you think Jesus responded this way? What was He trying to communicate to Nicodemus?

4. What is He speaking to you about in the first five verses of John Chapter 3?

Jesus' response the second time was a little more specific and pointed. His first response declared that salvation was necessary. The second one described what salvation should look like. Let's break that down for a minute because this is very important. We MUST understand what true salvation is. True salvation is all about repentance – true repentance.

5. Before we go on. In your own words, how would you define true repentance?

To repeat, John 3:5 says that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. First, let's define the "kingdom of God" (also sometimes referred to as the kingdom of heaven). This means the realm over which God is King and rules. It's His sovereign rule over the universe. As His people, we are a part of this. 1 Peter 2:9 says:

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. (NLT)

We are a nation of people that belong to God and are under His rulership. He is our King! We are His kingdom, both here on earth and will continue to be in heaven for eternity! So, to be a part of the “kingdom” we must be born of water and the Spirit. To be “born of water” can be a reference to a couple of things. First, it is a reference to water baptism which is an outward expression of our salvation. Acts 2:38 says:

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Secondly, it is a reference to purification. Purification comes when we express true repentance. When we allow the truth of God’s Word to wash us clean. Ephesians 5:25-27 says:

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Here is an amazing quote I found, about what repentance really means:

Repentance is a decision that results in a change of mind, which in turn leads to a change of position and action. The first call of the kingdom is to repentance. The implications of biblical repentance are threefold: 1) renunciation and reversal, 2) submission and teachability, and 3) continual shapeability.

*There is no birth into the kingdom without hearing the call to salvation, renouncing one’s sin and turning from sin toward Christ the Savior (Acts 3:19). There is no growth in the kingdom without obedience to Jesus’ commandments and a childlike responsiveness as a disciple of Jesus, yielding to the teaching of God’s Word (James 1:21-25). There is no lifelong increase of fruit as a citizen of the kingdom without a willingness to accept the Holy Spirit’s correction and guidance (Eph. 4:30)
(New Spirit Filled Life Bible pg. 1293)*

However, let’s not confuse true repentance with false repentance:

False repentance is scary because it can trick us into thinking we’ve truly repented when, in reality, we’ve only found more crafty ways to hold on to our sin. Do you constantly long for your sin? Do you love your sin more than Jesus and find yourself only hating its consequences? Do you avoid brothers and sisters who will be honest with you about your sin because you don’t want to be held accountable? There is still hope for you. (Online article by Adriel Sanchez with CoreChristianity)

Wow! I don’t think I have ever really considered the concept of “false repentance”. Have you? But this puts things into proper perspective, doesn’t it? All I know is that, after reading this quote, I had to stop and examine my heart. What about you?

6. What is your response to the above verses and quotes on repentance?

Next, to be born of the Spirit means an act of the Holy Spirit, and not a ceremony or religious act or a declaration only to be saved from the fires of hell without any intention of changing our ways. It's a response to an invitation of the Holy Spirit to a new life in Christ!

It seems that most religious leaders of the Bible were more concerned with how they looked and how important they were in the presence of others. The same is true today for anyone who goes through the motions of religion or that makes the practices of religion more important than what is going on in their own heart. Transformation should be happening. I can imagine that for a Pharisee like Nicodemus that would have been very difficult. Did you notice that in John 3:11 Jesus referred to Nicodemus as "you people"? He had not made a decision to believe in Jesus, yet. Maybe that's why, in the conclusion of Jesus conversation with Nicodemus, he referred to "darkness" again (John 3:19-21). Was this an invitation to Nicodemus to come out of his darkness and into the light? Was Jesus asking him if he was going to love his life in the "dark" or believe in Him and step into life with Him in the light? What do you think?

I think it's interesting that the rest of John Chapter 3 includes more about John the Baptist. I wonder if that's because his life was a great example of true salvation. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is John 3:30. True salvation can be very simply defined as Jesus increasing and us decreasing. In other words, true salvation will bring about change in us. We will think, speak, and act differently. In Acts 26:20, Paul said,

"...I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds."

7. Let's stop and think about this. What do you think it looks like for Jesus to increase in you?

8. What do you think it looks like for you to decrease?

Whew!!! That was a lot! But we had to go there. We must get this right first! You doing ok? Good! Let's continue...

DAY THREE: WOMAN AT THE WELL

Sanctification. That's just a big word that means the act of making something pure, right, or holy. As believers, we experience sanctification when we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us through the conviction of sin. When we choose not to make up our own rules about sin and righteousness, but let the Holy Spirit correct us by the truth of God's Word, our hearts and lives will change!

While Nicodemus, as a religious leader, appeared to act righteous, in truth, his heart was not right with God. As we move on to John Chapter 4 and the story of the woman at the well, we will see that although her lifestyle was not righteous, ultimately, she had a heart to believe in Jesus. Her life – in comparison with Nicodemus' life – was very visibly sinful and may have even seemed hopeless, yet she believed in Jesus and surrendered to His process of becoming holy.

Let's take a look at her story. Of all the people of the town of Sychar that God could pick to share His gospel message, there, He picked a woman who had been married five times and was currently living with a man she was not married to. Nothing pure or holy about that. Well, think about it. There would be no better testimony of God's love, salvation and transforming work of the Holy Spirit, than a radically changed life. Jesus was bringing the gospel message to Sychar. In His typical manner, he chose a person to do that. Someone who would have a testimony that would grab their attention and be incredibly fruitful!

9. Why does God choose people like this woman to do His work? How does your heart respond to that reality?

I love how Jesus addresses this woman in a way that speaks to her aching heart. John 4:10 says:

If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

John 4:13-14 says:

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Even though the woman didn't understand at first, Jesus knew that her heart longed to be healed, filled, and satisfied. He knew that her lifestyle was an indication of her attempt to quench her thirsty soul, and that if she continued in it, she would remain lost and empty. The reference in verse 14 to a "spring of water welling up" suggests that what Jesus had to offer her – and to us – was not just a life clean and free from sin, but a healthy, abundant life with an

endless supply of all that we need! When we walk through the process of sanctification with the Holy Spirit, the result, benefit, and reward is great! Imagine life with a satisfied soul, at rest and full!

Jesus' desire for the woman at the well was that, in believing in Him, she would turn from her life of sin that was destroying her. If she did that – if her heart stayed soft and humble - she would begin, and remain in, the lifelong process of transformation

10. What are some of the ways that your soul aches? Describe how you feel unsatisfied.

11. Take a minute to ask the Lord if there is anything in your life that He wants to “make holy, right and pure”. Then ask Him if that area is related to anything you wrote down in question #10 above.

1 Thessalonians 4: 1-3 & 7 says:

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³It is God's will that you should be sanctified...⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Sanctification is ultimately about surrendering to, yielding to, submitting to, and letting the Holy Spirit do whatever He wants to do in us. Sounds like fun, right? ☺ There's more! It's also admitting that God is God, and we are not. He is right – all the time. It's believing that His Word is true – in fact, the only truth. It's being patient with the process but staying in it.

The world and culture we live in screams at us all the time the opposite, doesn't it? It says that we have the “right” to live life our own way. We must NOT tolerate or succumb to this message or let it affect us in any way. Romans 12: 2 says

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Don't be conformed...be transformed. Be sanctified!

Prayer:

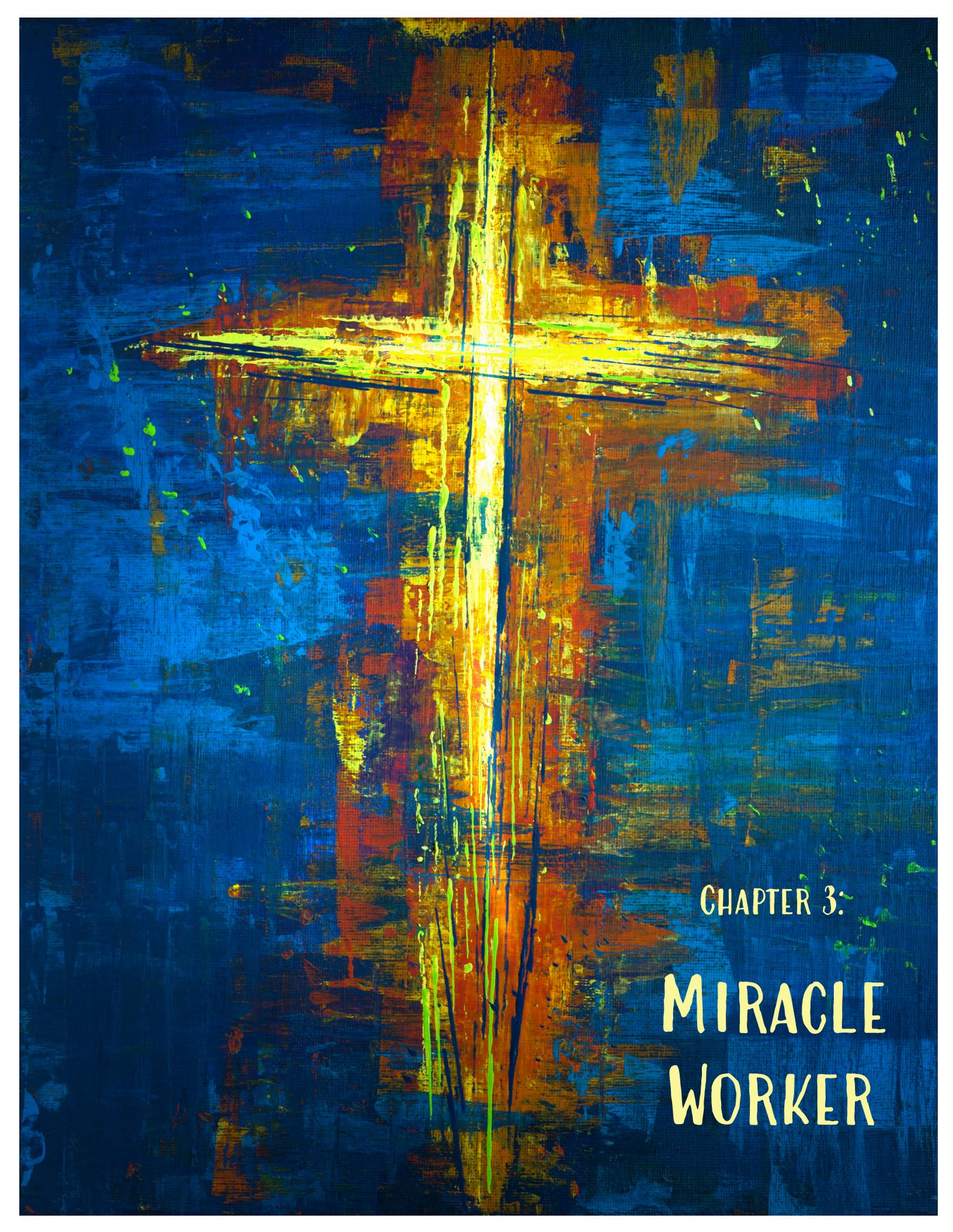
- Write a prayer asking God to show you where He must increase and where you must decrease.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 3 & 4
- Find one person this week that you can encourage.
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

- John 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less.

An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in warm, golden-yellow and orange tones, with a vertical line that appears to have a glowing or dripping effect. The background is a deep, textured blue, with various shades of blue and some green and red accents. The overall style is expressive and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, layered texture.

CHAPTER 3:

MIRACLE
WORKER

John 6:16-21

¹⁶When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

S: _____

O: _____

A: _____

P: _____

DAY TWO: MIRACLE WORKER

Sitting around a pool sounds amazing! Right? You know, relaxing in the sunshine, working on the tan, jumping in the pool when it gets hot, reading a good book or working on sudoku, doing some laps in the pool for exercise or floating on a raft, snacks, and drinks in your pool bag – yep – I could hang out there for a while. How about you?

As we start John chapter five, we hear about another kind of pool. The pool of Bethesda, in Jerusalem, was known for its healing powers. Some versions of the Bible include verse number four which states that an angel of the Lord at certain times would stir the water. If you were the first in the water when this happened, you would be healed (*see note at the end of this chapter for explanation of why this verse is omitted in some versions)

The name of the pool of Bethesda is derived from the Hebrew language and means either house of mercy or house of grace. A house of mercy because the pool was seen as a place of disgrace since those who were there were sick. A house of grace because some were healed there.

So, if you were around that pool for any amount of time it meant that you were sick, lame, or blind. And you would have been surrounded by many others who were sick (John 5:3). I am sure that no one back then would have wanted to use that pool, let alone stay there long, unless, of course, they needed healing. Nevertheless, all these people were waiting for a miracle.

1. What do you think it would have been like around the pool of Bethesda?

It walked Jesus! Life around that pool was never going to be the same! Why? Because Jesus – the miracle worker – had arrived! Until then, people believed that the waters had some kind of miraculous healing power and had to watch and wait for them to be stirred to even have a chance of getting their miracle. And no one knew how long that would take. But now, the miracle worker himself was there, in person! How did that change things?

I believe there are three things we can learn about Jesus here. My prayer is that knowing this, or being reminded of this, will increase your faith and trust and hope in Him!

There are three sentences in this story that are written in my Bible in red. That means that these are words Jesus actually spoke. Let's look at these three statements to discover more about His willingness to heal us, His ability to heal us and that He is determined to show us His power and keep us in the faith.

As the story goes, Jesus came to the pool at Bethesda and encountered a man who had been sitting there for thirty-eight years. Ok. Stop right there. Thirty-eight years? Um, that's a very long time to wait for healing.

2. What is the longest time that you have had to wait on God for a miracle?

The first thing we learn from this story about the Miracle Worker is that **HE IS WILLING** to heal us.

John 5:6 says:

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?'

3. Why do you think Jesus asked him this question?

The NIV Study Bible commentary on this verse gives us a little insight to this question. It says:

The question was important. The man had not asked Jesus for help, and a beggar of that day could lose a sometimes profitable (and easy) income if he were cured. Or perhaps he had simply lost the will to be cured.

The bottom line is that Jesus saw the need, approached the man, and was eager to heal him – give him his miracle – if he wanted it. We can be encouraged that Jesus is nearer to our situation than we sometimes realize. He wasn't at the pool of Bethesda for a swim or to catch some rays. He was looking for someone to heal. He was ready, willing and able.

Which brings us to the second thing we learn about the Miracle Worker – **HE IS ABLE**. While the man in the story gave Jesus his reasons or excuses for not getting well, Jesus was ready to do something amazing! John 5:8 says:

Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.'

Nothing more and nothing less. Just eight words spoken with great power by the Miracle Worker! Get up – pick up your mat – and walk!!!

Let's stop here to pray. I have never done this before, but I pray this over you right now:

In the name of Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit and the authority Jesus gave to His people. I pray over you right now. Get up! Get up out of depression, frustration, impatience, heaviness, doubt, anger, jealousy, sickness and pain. Get up out of poverty, hopelessness, fear and sin. Get up from the place that keeps you "down". Don't stay there anymore. I speak to the deception, sickness, and every evil thing that has kept you there – BE GONE in the mighty name of Jesus!

Pick up your mat! You will not need that "thing" anymore. You will not be staying there any longer. Find a way to get rid of that "thing". Do not hold onto it anymore. You are called to greater things! Your miracle is here! Just believe! Jesus wants you to partner with Him in this – you must pick up that thing you have been "sitting on" and discard it, turn away from it. He is asking you to trust Him...really trust Him. May He work a miracle in your life...right now.

In the name of Jesus walk! Move forward! Don't look back! Expect a miracle, reject the doubt. Do not return to your "mat". There is nothing there for you anymore. Walk in the new things that He is about to do and give you. Walk in joy and peace and health and strength. Be ready to tell someone about it, and give Jesus all the glory and honor and praise! Amen!

4. We should stop here so that you can respond to this. Write your thoughts here:

The third thing this story teaches us about Jesus – the Miracle Worker – is **HE IS JUDGE**. As Judge, He looks at the evidence of our lives and determines if we are guilty of sin or not. If we are guilty, he will help us move towards repentance, freedom and holiness. John 5:22-23 says:

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

John 5:27 says:

And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Everything He does is for a reason, an eternal purpose. What did this look like for the man at the pool that day? After Jesus healed this man, he slipped away (5:13). But, later that day, Jesus took the time to look for him and found him at the temple. Why did He do that? John 5:14 says

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.'

Wow! Something worse may happen to you? Jesus' words...not mine. Um...we better get this right, don't you think? Jesus wants to heal us to increase our faith and give us the strength to serve Him, but it is very clear, here, that He also wants to use it as a reminder that He is God, Holy and Just, and He wants us to live a holy life unto Him. In the case of the man at the pool, what could be worse than thirty-eight years of being sick? Let's stop and think about that.

5. Reflect for a minute on how eternal consequences of sin are more serious than anything.

Jesus is determined to keep us in the faith. He doesn't want to lose any of us. John 6:38-40 says:

³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Jesus is the Miracle Worker. He is willing and able. He is determined that we live our life free from sin! For He knows that the consequences of our sin are devastating and may even destroy us. May the miracles He does all around you be a constant reminder of His goodness and our undying need for Him!

In this story, the miracle the man at the pool needed was healing. There are many different kinds of miracles happening all around us every day! People are experiencing or waiting for a great variety of miracles. What kind of miracle are you waiting for? What should we do while we are waiting? Let's talk about that next...

DAY THREE: MIRACLE WANTED

We rejoice in knowing that Jesus is the Miracle Worker! He is working all the time in and through and around us. Let's celebrate His goodness! Take a look at these verses:

- Psalm 66:5 Come, see the glorious things God has done. What marvelous miracles happen to his people! (TLB)
- Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
- Psalm 77:14 You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.
- Job 5:9 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

I looked up the definition of miracle online. A miracle is:

- a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency.
- a highly improbable or extraordinary event, development, or accomplishment that brings very welcome consequences.
- an amazing product or achievement, or an outstanding example of something.

In other words, a miracle is something that only God can do. In all of the definitions above, those things are not possible only by human effort. We may partner with God to see His miracles, but He is the inspiration, source, the power, and the provision of them all.

6. Have you seen God doing any miracles around you lately? Explain below.

7. What is the thing you have been desperately wanting God to do, but hasn't happened yet?

All this talk about miracles may have some of us frustrated. Why? Because we have not received our miracle yet. One of the toughest things in life is the "waiting game". Proverbs 13:12 says:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

When we have to wait a “long” time for something our heart may get “sick”. Sick of waiting, sick of being disappointed, sick of hearing how other people get their miracle while we continue to wait, sick of people trying to encourage us with words that just don’t help, sick of the ache in our heart, sick of feeling guilty because all of the above is truly how we feel. We may even start to think things like: “This miracle is a lost cause”; “This is just impossible it’s never going to happen”; “No way, Jose, it’s just too late for this”. Yep...that’s a heart that is sick.

I hope that the verses listed above renew your hope today, but maybe you still need to know what to do while you are waiting. There are some important lessons we can learn in another miracle Jesus performed.

Read the story in John 6:1-15.

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near. ⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

If you are waiting for a miracle let your hope be restored as you read the lessons from this story listed below and work through the following questions.

8. **He sees your need** (v.5). What is your need right now?

9. **He might be testing you** (v.6). Do you think God is testing you? How?

10. **He already knows what He is going to do** (v.6). How does this give you hope?

11. **Give Him what you already have and He will multiply it** (v.9). Have you experienced this?

12. **He gives us instructions** (v.10). What is Jesus telling you to do right now while you are waiting? (i.e. worship, be content, be grateful, be hopeful, don't give up, be around people who will encourage you and lift you up, be prayerful, be patient, other)

13. **Give thanks before the miracle** (v.11). Write a prayer of thanks in faith for your miracle.

14. **He doesn't want anything wasted** (v.12) What are the good things that come from waiting? (our testimony, lessons learned, greater faith, etc.) Remember Romans 8:28. 😊

15. **He does more than we ask** (v.13). Write about how you have seen God do this.

16. **His miracles are for His glory and fame** (v.14). How have you seen this to be true?

John 6:67-69 says:

You do not want to leave too, do you? Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Maybe the Lord is asking you the same question. Have you lost hope for your miracle? Be encouraged that He IS the Miracle Worker, and when waiting gets really tough don't give up. After all, where else would you go? He is the Holy One of God, and He is at work on your behalf!

Prayer:

→ Write a prayer asking God to give you more faith in Jesus, the miracle worker, and to wait for your miracle with patience and hope.

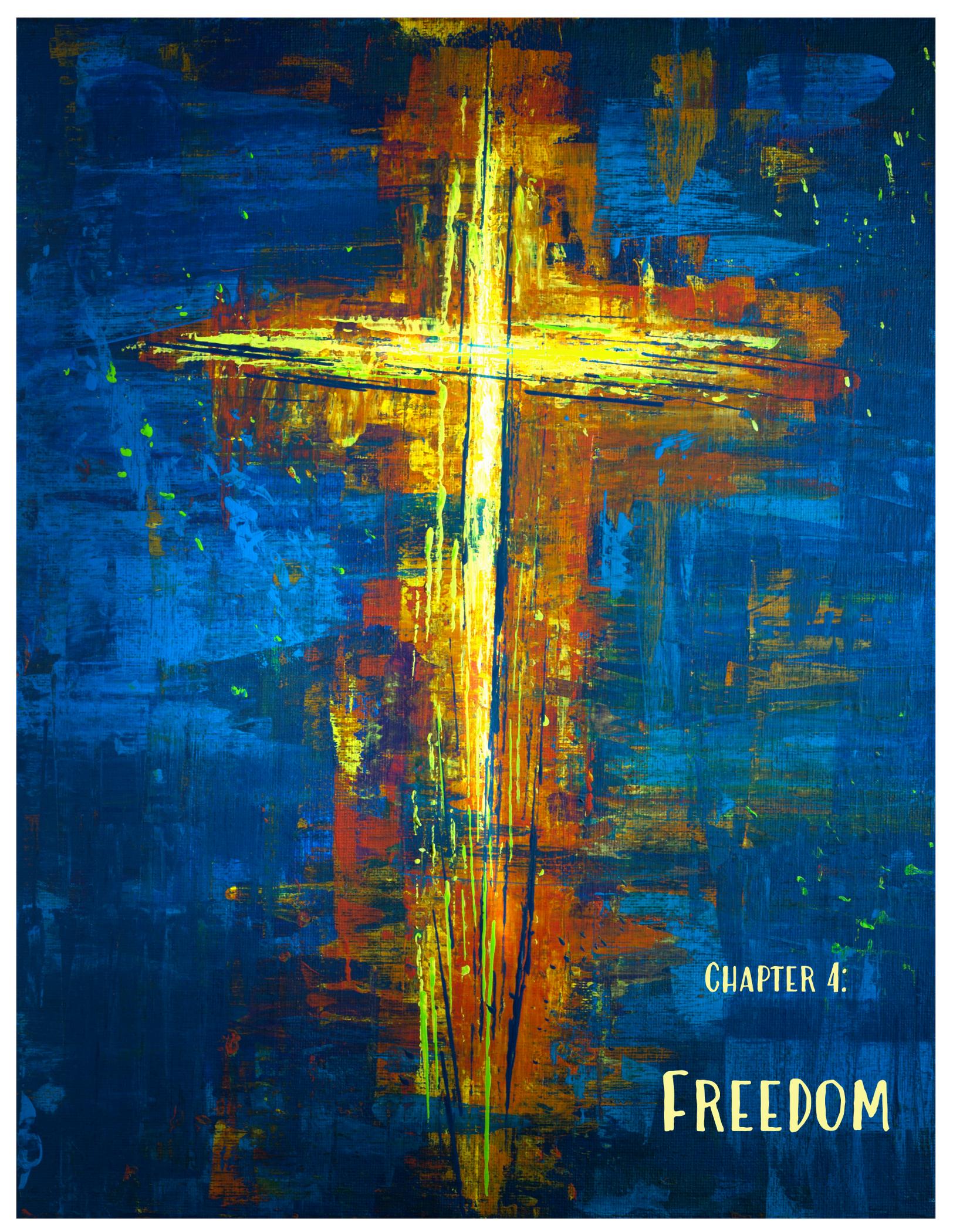
Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 5 & 6
- Look through these chapters and write the verses that declare who Jesus is.

Memory Verse:

→ John 6:35 Then Jesus declared “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

**In case your Bible version doesn't have the verse, the omitted words read: "for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted" (NASB). The verse is not just missing in the NIV; the situation is the same in the ESV, NRSV, CEV, NLT, and the net Bible. If you use the NASB or NCV you will see the verse, but it's been placed inside brackets, whereas the KJV and the NKJV contain verse 4 without any notation or demarcation. So what's going on here? Who took John 5:4 out of the Bible? If you're using a study Bible that doesn't have verse 4, you will likely see a note at the end of verse 3, or the beginning of verse 5, explaining why it isn't there. This is a textbook case of a disagreement between manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. What would be John 5:4 (the missing material that begins in verse 3) is not found in any of the earliest and most accurate manuscripts of the Gospel of John. Scholars who make a career of comparing manuscripts ("textual critics" and "paleographers") have discovered that in roughly two dozen manuscripts scribes put asterisk marks at the verse to warn the next scribe who would copy the manuscript that the verse was likely not original. To top it all off, four of the last five Greek words of what would be John 5:4 aren't found anywhere else in John's writings. This suggests that John 5:4 does not belong in the New Testament, which explains why many modern Bible translations have omitted it. (crosswalk.com)*

An abstract painting featuring a central cross-like shape. The vertical and horizontal bars of the cross are rendered in thick, textured brushstrokes of gold, yellow, and brown. The background is a deep, dark blue, also composed of layered brushstrokes. Small, scattered specks of light green and yellow are visible throughout the composition. The overall effect is one of depth and complexity, with the central shape appearing to glow against the darker surroundings.

CHAPTER 4:

FREEDOM

John 8:31-36

³¹ *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said,
“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.*

³² *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

³³ *They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants
and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”*

³⁴ *Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

³⁵ *Now a slave has no permanent place in the family,
but a son belongs to it forever.*

³⁶ *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

S: _____

O: _____

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P: _____

DAY TWO: WIDESPREAD WHISPERS

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. Well, whoever wrote that was just plain silly! Or they had never had a bad word spoken about them. Or maybe they were just in plain denial. This is what a couple of online sources have to say about this phrase:

Sticks and stones may break my bones' is a response to an insult, implying that "You might be able to hurt me by physical force but not by insults".

"Sticks and Stones" is an English-language children's rhyme. The rhyme is used as a defense against name-calling and verbal bullying, intended to increase resiliency, avoid physical retaliation and to remain calm and good-living.

...a childish rebuttal to teasing or other harsh speech.

I don't know about you, but I just do not agree with this statement or any of the comments on it. Words do hurt! In fact, sometimes words spoken to, or about us, can cause deep wounds and long-term damage if we do not seek the Lord for healing from their effect on our lives.

1. Do you remember a time when you said this phrase or heard someone say it in response to a hurtful situation? Explain below.

Here is the truth about words. Proverbs 18:21 says this:

"The tongue has the power of life and death."

Wow! What we say or what is spoken to us can cause life and health or death and destruction! If hurtful words, curses, or lies have been spoken to, or about us, these are some possible effects:

- We start believing the lies about ourselves
- They can wear down our self esteem
- They can break down our identity in Christ
- Words can cause negative emotions to overwhelm us
- All of the above can create an ache in our hearts and a desperate need to numb or comfort our pain, which can lead to wrong behavior

Jesus experienced this kind of mistreatment the entire three years he worked to spread the Gospel message and train up his disciples to carry on his work when he was gone.

Twice in John Chapter seven the word "whisper" is used:

*Among the crowds there was wide-spread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man."
Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." (John 7:12)*

The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. (John 7:32)

Some of the things people were saying about Jesus were not bad at all. But many times, the words about him were cruel, unfair, and simply not true! As I read through John seven and eight it was quite alarming to me the things that people said to Jesus. What about you?

2. Were you surprised when the crowd called him demon-possessed in John 7:20? Why or why not?

In the next section (Day 3) we will look at some of these comments and how Jesus responded to them. We should learn from him how to correctly handle those situations, so that we can remain healthy and free emotionally and spiritually.

For this section, let's spend a little time asking the Lord to show us any wounds that were caused in our lives by unkind, untrue, unfair, nasty, or judgmental words spoken to us or about us. I know that this doesn't sound like any fun, BUT God wants to heal our hearts! Maybe this is His timing and His way of leading us to freedom in this area...whether we are ready, or not.

These next several questions are not meant to cast blame on others. We are simply asking the Lord to reveal to us anything that is unresolved or troubling our hearts. These kinds of things can keep us from growing in the Lord and having healthy relationships with Him and with others.

Deep breath in...deep breath out. You got this! 😊

3. Ask the Lord to show you any hurtful words spoken over you recently. Write down what He tells you.

4. Ask the Lord to show you any unresolved issues from hurtful words spoken over you in the past.

5. Ask the Lord to show you any words spoken over or about you that caused you to doubt who you are in Christ.

6. Ask the Lord to remind you of any words said to you or about you that caused you to believe a lie about yourself.

7. Ask the Lord to show you any words said to or about you that caused negative emotions and the need to numb that pain.

8. Now...are you willing to lay these words, lies and all the hurt and negative emotions they have caused at Jesus feet? If so, in your own words, tell him that now:

9. Are you willing to forgive those who spoke the hurtful words about you? If so, in your own words, say a prayer now naming all the people or situations and confess your forgiveness of them.

10. God's heart is to replace all of those lies and negative words with HIS truth and what HE says about you. Ask the Lord to speak to you His truth about you. Write what you hear below.

One more thing...we also need to repent of any words we have spoken about others that were cruel, unkind or untrue. We are not truly free unless we repent regularly of our sin which separates us from God. Take a minute to do that now...

Let's look again at John 8:32 & 36 and celebrate the freedom we just experienced:

32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

We have this choice to make:

*Whispering words thrown into the wind, making their way through the air
Unkind and so cruel meant to harm me again, saying "See, they don't really care."
I could let them hurt me and toss me about, shaking me at my core.
Or I could look to Jesus for His truth and His love and not let them wound me anymore.
(Deb Giaimo)*

May this be our prayer and our practice – and - let's live healed and free!

DAY THREE: WHAT DID JESUS DO?

So, how are you doing? The last section was a little intense, but that's ok, right? We can never truly grasp the timing of Gods' work in us, but we can allow it and welcome it, trusting in His love and goodness!

Yes, I got the title for this section right. What did Jesus do? Not, what would Jesus do? I guess they are similar sayings, but I wanted to focus on the actual words and reactions of Jesus in John chapters 7 & 8 that show us how he responded to all the "widespread" whispering. It's interesting to note that He shows us how to respond when people say good or nice things about us, or when they are simply questioning us.

11. Read through John 7 & 8 what are your impressions about how Jesus responded to people?

All through John 7 & 8 Jesus shows us how to respond to people's words towards us. Jesus stayed humble in response to the good things people said about Him, and it is good for us to be reminded about that as we are certain to receive compliments once in a while.

In this section, however, we are going to look more specifically at Jesus' reactions to the negative or untrue words people said about or to him. Jesus focused on who He was because of the Father and not what humans were saying or doing or threatening to do to Him. He showed humility, self-control, strength and always turned His thoughts back to God – His Father - to declare who He was and what His purpose was. He didn't let what people said shake Him or affect His life in any way. There will always be the "critics" in our life, right? If so, how do we respond in a way that does not allow offense, hurt or unforgiveness to take root in our hearts?

12. What are your thoughts? How do you normally react to hurtful words spoken over you?

Could you imagine what your life would be like if the things people said about you had absolutely no effect on you? Wow...that would be awesome! It sure would save a lot of heart ache, wouldn't it? Well, we don't have to let our hearts be troubled or let words have a harmful effect on us. We can choose to respond differently. We can choose to react like Jesus did.

Let's look at three lessons we can learn from Jesus about responding to hurtful words.

He looked to the Father:

About a dozen times in the two chapters for this week, John 7 & 8, Jesus responds in conversations by referring to God. Everything Jesus was and did and thought and said was because of the Father, with the Father and for the Father's glory. There are countless examples of this in these two chapters, but let's take a look at one of these conversations.

Read John 8: 48-58. In this one conversation alone, Jesus was called demon-possessed twice, was asked "Who do you think you are?" and was almost killed. Now that's a tough conversation that had the potential to be quite destructive. But Jesus somehow stands His ground and "survives" by talking about His Father.

13. What is the most helpful to you about how Jesus responds here, and how can you begin to turn your conversations, that could potentially be hurtful back to the Father?

Could we create a new habit in our lives of how we react in tough situations with confident thoughts like this?

- But God, my Father, loves me
- My heavenly Father knows me and knows my heart
- I only need my Father's approval, not the approval of others
- My Father sends me and uses me and knows my purpose, I will trust in Him alone
- I am not alone; my Father is with me and He believes in me
- I will do what pleases my Father and not what pleases people

14. Could doing this make a difference for you? Why or why not?

He spoke the truth:

Read John 7:1-9. In coming to this chapter and reading these verses, something in my heart couldn't get away from the fact that, many times, it's words from our family that hurt us the

most. Here we read that even Jesus' own brothers thought He was trying to become a public figure demeaning Jesus to just a man who was looking for fame, to win the crowd over and gain their approval. Wow. They had no idea that Jesus was the Son of God! If they had heard this said about Him, they certainly did not believe it (7:5).

In this situation, and others, Jesus chose to respond with the truth about who He was and what He was called to do. It's hard for us to know what the tone or volume of His voice was, but I would imagine that most times, Jesus was patient, kind and gentle. In 7:6-8 Jesus states the truth. He knew who He was, what He was sent to do, and that His time had not yet come. He also mentioned that they could not possibly understand (mainly because they did not believe) what the Father's will was, or the weight of His mission that He alone carried.

15. Have you ever felt like your own family didn't believe in you? How have you responded to that and how does this lesson from Jesus help you?

One more thought about this. Jesus stated in John 7:7 that the world hates Him. Stop and think about that for a minute. That's quite a thing to say, believe or feel, isn't it? But it was the truth. Jesus knew what the critics were saying about Him. He knew that they hated Him, yet He stayed focused. Could it be that sometimes we need to accept or acknowledge what people say about us, keep it from bothering us, and just move on? Jesus seemed to do this all the time!

He did not respond:

Read John 7:12. In this verse, Jesus was accused of deceiving the people, yet there is no record of Him responding. Jesus was at the festival with these people, and if there was widespread whispering, He could have heard what they were saying. He was, after all undercover or there in secret so they would not have recognized Him as they were talking about Him.

Another great example of this is in Matthew 27:11-14:

¹¹ Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. ¹² When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" ¹⁴ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

16. Why do you think Jesus responded to the first question, but not the second one?

Think of all the ways that Jesus could have retaliated when He was challenged or mistreated. He could have called down angels to guard and protect Him or attack on His behalf. He could have asked the Father to do something to keep the people quiet or punish them. He could have asked God to show up and let the people see that He was telling the truth about who He was. But He didn't do any of those things. I am sure that Jesus knew the power He had and what He could do with it, but He was also aware that the greater purpose of God's will was at stake.

I shared a message once that talked about the power of restraint. I mentioned several examples of when Jesus did not respond to the words, questions, or situation He was in. What an incredible lesson:

We do not have to respond EVERY time we get upset or attacked or hurt!

17. Let that sink in a few minutes...then respond

People can be cruel and ungracious. Even Christians. In John 8:15 Jesus told the Pharisees that they were judging by human standards. We can do the same, and when we do, our words can be hurtful. This week we observed that sometimes Jesus responded to hurtful words by simply restating who He was in the Father, sometimes He responded by speaking the truth, and sometimes He just did not respond.

I also believe that Jesus was strong. He just had "thick skin". He let things go. 1 Corinthians 13:5 says that love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. When we allow anger and unforgiveness to settle in our hearts it also allows the hurt from those situations to keep hurting us over and over again. Friends, we don't have to live like that! Let's pursue righteousness, peace and joy and do whatever it takes to guard our hearts and our freedom!

Prayer:

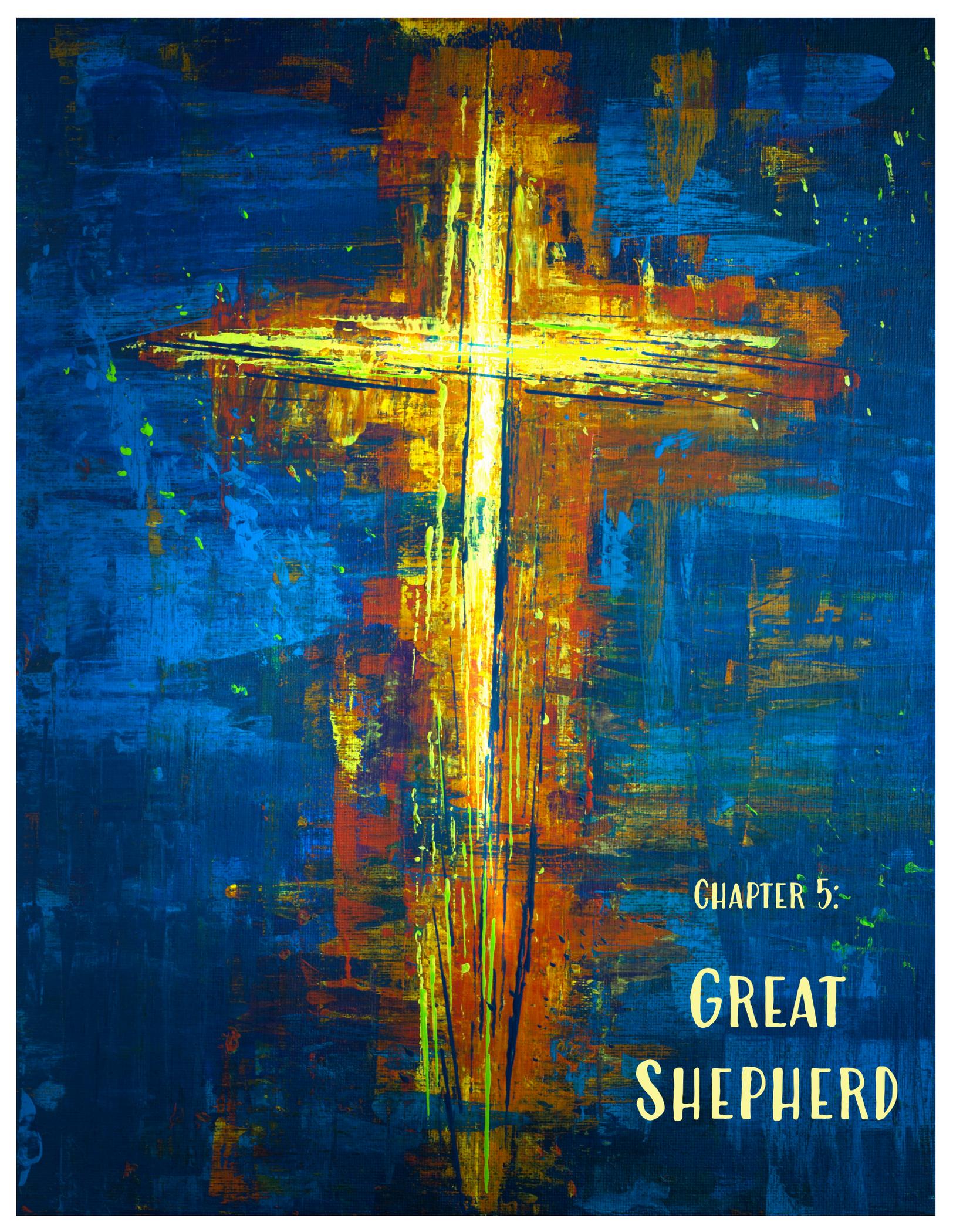
- Write a prayer thanking God for His truth about who you are, that He will continue to heal you, and that He would help you to respond to hurtful words spoken over you in a healthy way. Ask Him to help you to only speak words of life and encouragement to or about others.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 7 & 8
- Send a text to someone this week who you haven't heard from in a while.
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

- John 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in warm, golden-yellow and orange tones, with a vertical line that appears to have a glowing, textured quality. The background is a deep, rich blue, composed of various brushstrokes and textures, including some lighter blue and green accents. The overall style is expressive and textured, with visible paint application.

CHAPTER 5:
GREAT
SHEPHERD

John 10:7-13

⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

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DAY TWO: THE SHEPHERD & THE SHEEP

Some of you that know me well, know that I love to make people laugh. One of the ways I “try” to do that is by making up puns (a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings.) Also, some of you know that I kind of get that from my dad. He is really good at coming up with puns. His name is Ken, so sometimes when I try to make a pun people will say “That’s a “Ken” joke!”

Why in the world am I telling you this? Because I couldn’t help myself and just had to look up some great puns about sheep! I know...not very spiritual...but let’s just have some fun with this. Disclaimer...none of these are original...I found them all online. ☺ To be creative with them though, I put them into a paragraph describing this chapter of our study. Here it goes:

Even if this study gets hard, I just want to encourage you that all’s wool that end’s wool. Please know that I’ll always be there for ewe, we are in this together! People come in all sheeps and sizes, and ewe are one in a million, so let the Lord speak specifically to you. Time wool tell how this goes, but shear up, everything will be alright! Remember, you herd it here first.

Welp! It was worth a shot...did I make you smile? Then mission accomplished! I believe that Jesus loves to laugh! So, while we are about halfway through the Gospel of John, let’s remember to enjoy, relax, and laugh!

Now back to our study. In John 10 Jesus is recorded talking about sheep and their shepherd. In fact, almost the entire chapter focuses on this illustration of Jesus. It would be good for us to take the time to reflect on these verses to get a better understanding of what Jesus was saying then, and what He is speaking to us now.

1. When you hear the phrase “Jesus is our Shepherd”, what are your thoughts and emotional reactions to that?

At the end of John 9, Jesus talks about spiritual blindness. John 9:39-41 says:

³⁹ Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” ⁴¹ Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

His comment continues from John 9:41 to John 10:1 as He is still addressing the Pharisees who have been testing Him, criticizing Him, and most of them, still did not believe in Him. Jesus’ words in John 10 are directed towards those obstinate religious leaders and list clearly the difference between His leadership of people and their prideful attempt to do the same.

This illustration of the shepherd and his sheep that Jesus uses here, is to teach us that there are many people, things and teachings in the world that we could follow. We should be careful that it is Him, that it is His voice we are hearing and following.

2. What are some of the different “voices” of this world that are trying to lead us astray?

3. Have you noticed that you have been tempted to listen to those occasionally, or more often than you should? If so, which one(s) specifically are you listening to?

I think, however, that also inside the verses of this chapter of the Bible are some very important references to the relationship sheep have with their shepherd. This also illustrates the kind of relationship we can have with our Good Shepherd! This relationship is based largely on trust...right? If we are to truly get to know Him, hear, listen to, and obey His voice - we must fully trust Him.

4. On a scale of 1-10 (one being low and ten being high), how much do you trust Jesus as your Good Shepherd? Why do you or why don't you trust Him?

5. Read John 10:1-11 then list the characteristics of the shepherd that Jesus was describing.

Here are three lessons we can learn about the shepherd and his sheep from John 10:

The Shepherd calls and the sheep listen.

6. How well do you hear God's voice? How do you recognize it?

7. When was the last time you truly felt like you heard Him? What did He say?

8. What things can keep us from hearing God's voice?

The Shepherd leads and the sheep follow.

9. How do you know when God is leading you?

10. How can you tell when other "voices" (false teachings, worldly influences) are trying to lead you astray?

The Shepherd is good, and the sheep are cared for well.

11. How have you experienced God's goodness?

12. How have you experienced the abundant life mentioned in John 10:10?

13. When have you ever felt protected by God?

Studying the role of a shepherd and the relationship they have with their sheep is quite fascinating. I discovered a few very interesting facts in my searches online:

- A shepherd will pour oil over a sheep to keep insects off of it
- If a sheep keeps running away from the flock, the shepherd will break one of its legs and carry it around until it heals. The sheep learns to love the shepherd and becomes more dependent on him. It won't leave the flock again. (This is really true!!!) It is always better for the shepherd to do this than to let the sheep run free and be killed in the wild.
- The sheep in a flock will teach a new lamb or sheep how to hear the shepherd's voice. It learns how to follow that shepherd by watching how the other sheep follow him.

Hmmmmmm...so very interesting. Don't you think? There are some incredible similarities to how we relate to our Good Shepherd! I believe that John 10:27-28 sums this all up:

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Can I get a "YES, LORD" and an "AMEN!" to that?

DAY THREE: THE PEN & THE PASTURE

The Pen: As I read through John 10 several times, I wanted to capture the lessons about the shepherd and sheep. And we covered those things in Day 2, the last section. However, a couple of other things caught my attention as well: the pen and the pasture. There are some significant lessons we can learn from these two important parts of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

Through the years I know that I have been frustrated at times because I felt like a “caged bird”, or “stuck”, or “left out and forgotten”. It just felt like there were things I wanted to do or experience, but “something” was keeping me from it. When I would start to go my own way, there was always “something” that would pull me back. Sometimes it felt like God had just forgotten about me.

14. Have you ever felt this way? Explain below.

It was during a season like that when I read the following verse. Psalm 139:5 says:

⁵You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

The first time I really noticed this verse and paid attention to it I decided that I didn't like it. Yes, I said I didn't like it. I guess when I read this I did not like the way I was feeling and certainly did not understand the true meaning of this verse. Why would God hem me in? Why is He ok with me feeling left out or forgotten or stuck? Doesn't He want me to enjoy my life?

Let's look at it this way. A sheep's pen is a type of court or holding place that is surrounded by walls but open to the sky, and with only one entrance. The walls keep the sheep from wandering and protect them from wild animals. Take a look at these pictures:





Nothing fun or fancy about these pens...right? And that's what it feels like when God is "keeping you in the pen" or hemming you in. Nothing fun about it, at all. But, within these pens the sheep are safe, fed, in the company of other sheep, sheared, and watched by the shepherd. Looking back at these times in my life, I can see how God "hemmed me in" for some very good reasons.

15. What about you? Think about the times when you felt hemmed in or held back. What was God doing during those times? Write your thoughts below.

We've got to understand that it's because of the pen that we can enjoy safe pasture. And it's not just in the spiritual things. There are many "boundaries" in life that are meant to keep us safe. When we are safe, we can enjoy life better. Amen? For example, because of speed limits we can enjoy safe driving. Because the law says that no one under the age of 21 can buy alcohol, we can enjoy a safer childhood. There are hems on our pants so that we can enjoy walking more safely, and so we won't trip over them. Inevitably, the same is true about sheep pens...they are necessary. God needs to hem us in, to provide for us and to keep us safe.

So, the pen is the place where we stay and live with Jesus. Sometimes that feels like we are being hemmed in, stuck, forgotten, or even like we are missing out on something. But, we need to remember that God is always working for our good and He can see things that we can't see. We can trust the Good Shepherd to lead us to places that are healthy for us and from places that would cause us harm. Because we remain in His presence and care, He is able to lead us to the lush pastures of life to provide for our every need.

This online quote leads us into the next thing that caught my attention in John 10.

The Pasture:

Green pastures, shepherd and sheep, all these are connected. David was a shepherd and his background is around sheep and allowing them to find green pastures. Green pastures in David's time were bare, rocky hills with just enough vegetation to sustain the sheep for that day. The sheep were dependent upon the shepherd to lead them to the forage that they would need for the next day. "Green pastures" for the ancient Israelites were symbolic of the fact that they could trust God for their daily sustenance. "Green Pastures" meant that they had enough for this day and that they could trust God for tomorrow's portion. (ebible.com)

The word pasture, when used symbolically in the Bible, refers to all of the ways that God provides for us! He provides for our spiritual needs, our emotional needs, our physical needs, our relational and financial needs. When we stay in relationship with Him and trust where He leads us, then Psalm 23:1 will be very true for us:

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. (MSG)

There is definitely a connection between the pen and the pasture. We see this clearly in John 10:9:

*I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.
They will come in and go out, and find pasture.*

In other words, whoever enters the pen through the gate...will find pasture. We must remain in the "sheep pen"! It's the only place we are under His constant watchful care! He knows when and where to lead us. He knows where to find the places of provision for us. If we walk outside the pen on our own, we risk...well...we risk everything.

Read these verses:

Psalm 37:3-4 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 79:13 Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise.

Psalm 95:7 For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Psalm 100:3 Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

16. What do these verses mean to you? In your own words how would you describe the connection between the “pen” and the “pasture”?

John 10 is an amazing chapter in the Gospel of John that brings to life the realities of a shepherd with his sheep. We understand a little better how that is very similar to our relationship with our Good Shepherd – Jesus! What powerful lessons we can learn from this chapter and what wonderful promises are there for us to hold onto. Jesus has us in His perfect care. He is always watching over us. If we will listen to Him and follow Him, we will experience lush pastures and an abundant life!

Ok...3 more sheep jokes (I can't help myself!):

Where do sheep go to watch funny videos?.....Ewe Tube

What do you call 100 sheep rolling down a hill?.....A lamb-slide

Please don't tell me those jokes were really baaaaaad! (That was a Deb original)



Prayer:

- Write a prayer asking God to be the Good Shepherd of your life and to help you listen to His voice, follow His lead and be confident in how well He can take care of you.

Weekly Challenge:

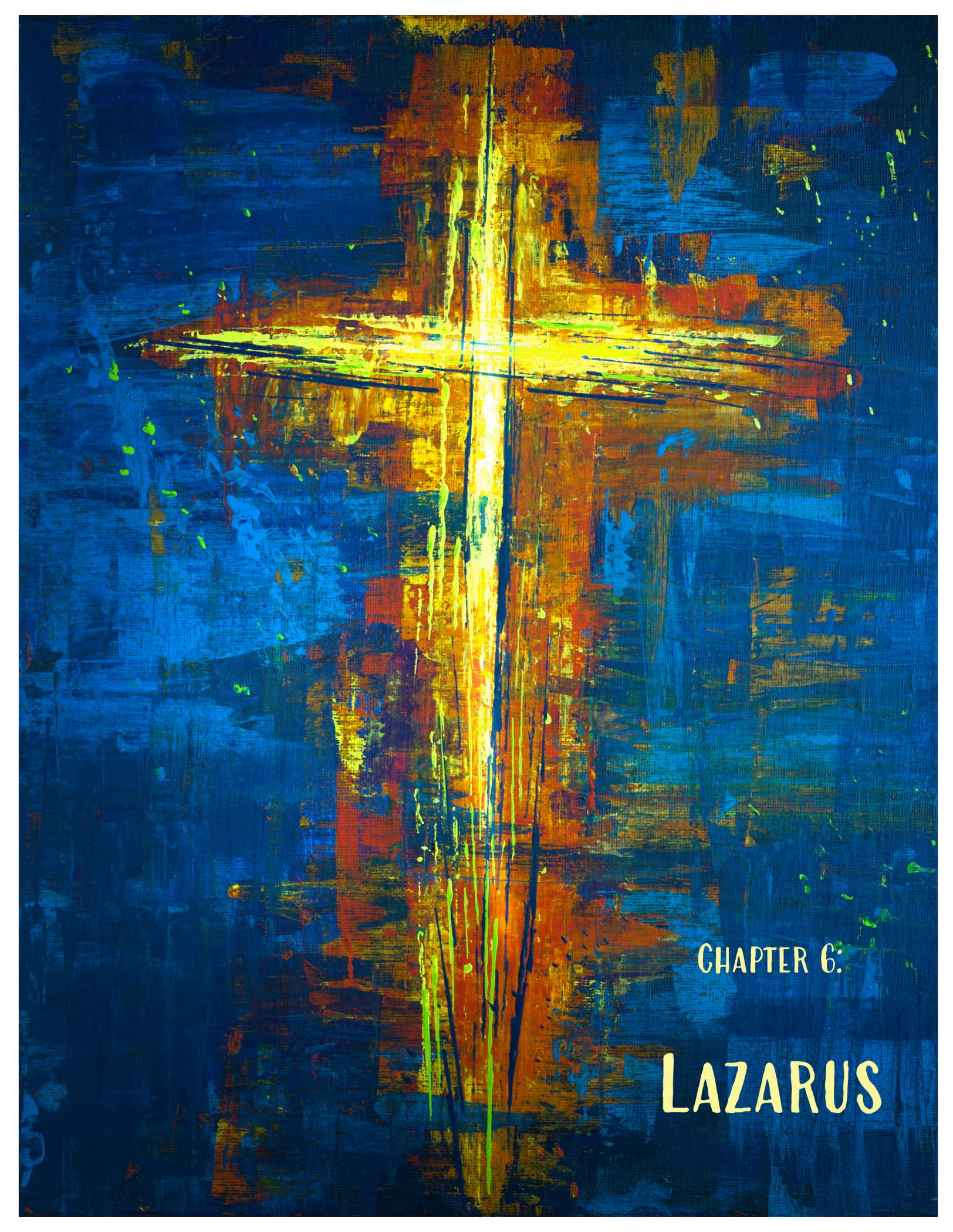
- Read John Chapters 9 & 10
- Read Psalm 139

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. ²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. ⁵You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ¹³For you created my inmost being you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. ¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you. ¹⁹If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty! ²⁰They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. ²¹Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? ²²I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. ²³Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

→ Journal your response to this Psalm and what you are hearing God say.

Memory Verse:

- John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in warm, golden-yellow and orange tones, with a vertical line that appears to glow. The background is a deep, textured blue, with various shades of blue and some green and red accents. The overall style is expressive and textured, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of depth.

CHAPTER 6:

LAZARUS

John 11: 38-44

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

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DAY TWO: GREATER THING

It is perfectly normal for us to try to figure out why things are happening to us or around us. Whether is it pure curiosity, or to help us process events happening, or even to have some sort of closure about a situation. Some of us need to know the “why” maybe more than others, but most of us at some time in our lives, if not several times in our lives, ask the question “Why?”

Many times, that question is directed towards God...right? If we are a Christian, then we believe that He is Sovereign, in control, and watching over everything. We believe that He is able to do anything to change a situation. He is all powerful and all knowing, so if anyone, He can move and work in any and all circumstances.

1. Is there a situation in your life right now, or has there been recently, that you are or have asked God “Why?” Explain below.

We can imagine that in the story of Lazarus in John 11, that the disciples could have been asking this same question. Maybe they were thinking “If Jesus loves Lazarus so much, why doesn’t He go right away to help him and heal him?” Mary and Martha seemed to ask this question. Even those around them, watching this family go through this, asked that question.

Let’s take a look at this entire story, and note the questions asked along with Jesus response:

Question: Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus telling Him that Lazarus was sick. We can assume that they were also asking Him to come and help (v. 3)

Jesus’ response: This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it. (v.4) Jesus stayed where He was two more days (v.6)

Question: Disciples asked Jesus why He would go back to a place where His life was in danger (v. 8)

Jesus’ response: In verses 9 & 10 Jesus could have been instructing them that if they walk during the light of day, it may not be so dangerous. He may have also been saying that if this was God’s will, then they must trust Him, even though in their eyes it seemed too dangerous or frightening.

Question: Why do you need to go to him if he is just sick? Clearly the disciples did not understand. (v .12)

Jesus’ response: Jesus explained to his disciples that Lazarus was dead (v.14). Then told them He was glad He wasn’t there because this situation would help them to believe and increase their faith.

Question: What Martha said to Jesus was not a question, but we can almost hear a question in her statement “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”. (v.21) In other words, “Lord, why did you let Lazarus die?”

Jesus’ response: Jesus assured Martha that Lazarus would be ok (v.23). Then he confirmed Martha’s faith in him (vv.25-26).

Question: Mary said the same thing to Jesus as Martha did (v.32).

Jesus’ response: He was deeply moved.

2. What are your thoughts in response to the questions and responses above? What do you notice or learn from them?

This exchange of questions and responses point out the reason and motive for how God does things or what He allows: He will always work for the **greater thing!** What does that mean? He will always work in a situation to allow someone the chance to know Him and believe in Him. He will always work in a situation so that He and the Father receive all the glory!

People kept asking questions...Jesus kept responding. We don’t always get the answers we want. Oh, we may get them in time, or we may never get them. But we keep asking the questions, don’t we? And that’s ok...really. We may ask questions, perhaps, like these:

- Why does a young child die?
- Why are Christian couples infertile?
- Why does life seem so unfair?
- Why are these wrong accusations and lies coming against me?
- Why have I not married yet?
- Why did my marriage end in divorce?
- Why are they so difficult?
- Why can’t we seem to get ahead financially?
- Why does my loved one have cancer or any illness?

3. Are you asking God any questions like this right now? Are you asking another kind of question? Explain below.

I believe that in response to any of our questions, that Jesus is deeply moved! I believe that God, our Father is watching and listening and even moving on our behalf! I believe that the Holy Spirit is right there for us offering comfort and strength and wisdom and truth.

Sometimes, it is very difficult for us to comprehend that. We just want our situation changed. We want comfort, healing, provision, closure, and peace. We want our suffering to go away! But God is always working on the **greater thing**...someone's faith and His glory!

4. How have you seen God move through the difficult situations in your life, to increase someone's faith, or that because of the outcome it gave Him glory?

5. It is a hard truth to accept and embrace...that we will suffer here on earth, but does it comfort you at all knowing that God will use it for His purposes? Explain below.

Read the following verses:

Psalm 119:71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Romans 5:3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed

James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

1 Peter 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.
Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

6. Which of the above verses speaks to you and why?

7. How do you respond, when you pray about a situation, asking God to do something to change it or make it better, but it doesn't happen?

Did you notice in John 11:31 that, when Mary got up quickly to go find Jesus, the people comforting her noticed and went with her? All through the rest of this story, there were people watching Martha's and Mary's experience and responding to their suffering. Because Jesus was with them, they were showing others how life can be different – even in very hard times – when Jesus is there!

God is at work doing “**greater things**” all the time all around us. We can be thrown for a loop when things take us by surprise, or when we feel like we are “going through” something for no reason at all. It can make us question God. And that's ok. But that is why, in those times, we need to remember God's sovereignty and trust in Him. That is also why scripture is so amazing! If we read it regularly, we will continue to learn God's ways and constantly be reminded of His great love for us! It will help us to have His perspective even when we don't completely understand.

DAY THREE: GRAVECLOTHES

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the mouth of the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." (John 11:38-39)

Wow...there is so much that is being said in these two verses. Jesus was deeply moved by the grief of Martha, Mary and the others...Jesus is deeply moved by our situations; Lazarus was dead lying in a cave...we can feel dead inside and stuck in a cold, dark place; the stone had to be rolled away in order for him to get out of the cave...there is usually "something" in the way of our freedom; there would be a stench because he had been in the cave for four days...our sinful life can "stink" to God; and Lazarus wore graveclothes that marked his death...we may "put on" things that keep us wrapped up and in a dead, cold place.

I found a great narrative on this part of the story of Lazarus, that I wanted to share with you:

We're told Lazarus' tomb was a cave with a massive stone blocking it. But the Son of God orders the bewildered onlookers, "Take away the stone" (v. 39). I love this part of the story, because we all have boulders and obstacles that seem to be standing in the way of the miracle we need from God. It seems impossible for Him to even see our situation, let alone remedy it.

In the case of Lazarus, there was another major problem. "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days," Martha informed Jesus (v. 39). What an appropriate picture of the difficult situations we may face today. Not only is there a huge stone blocking any hope of breakthrough, but the distressing circumstances have gone on for so long that there's a major ODOR involved! You would think the spotless Savior would want to avoid our stinky situations, but He never does. As long as we're willing to remove the stone and give Him access, He will take care of the rest.

The climax of John 11 occurs when Jesus cries out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" (v. 43). Jesus is saying these same words to you today, my friend. You can come back to life and exit your tomb. You can come out of the dark cave you've been locked in, walking outside into the bright sunshine of a brand-new day.

There was still another step in setting Lazarus free, and it's a crucial part in giving us true liberty as well. Although Lazarus miraculously came back to life at Jesus' command, he "came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth" (v. 44). This explains why some people get saved, yet struggle to find freedom from addictions, fears, and strongholds that were part of their life before meeting Christ. Even though they've been raised from death to life, they've allowed some aspects of their former life to follow them. Thankfully, Jesus wasn't satisfied with raising His friend back to life, only to have him walk around bound like a mummy! "Loose him, and let him go," Jesus told the stunned bystanders (v. 44).

Be brutally honest with yourself today: Are there still some smelly old graveclothes impeding your progress and fruitfulness? If so, Jesus wants to loose you and set you free. This can be YOUR day of resurrection and deliverance! (inspiration.org)

Good stuff, right? Let's break this down and reflect on the above comments with some questions.

8. Do you believe that Jesus is deeply moved by your life and any difficult situations?

9. Do you feel dead inside, like you are in a dark, cold place?

10. Is there some kind of obstacle in the way of your relationship with Jesus, or that is blocking something the Lord wants to do in your life?

11. Are there any "stinky" parts of your life? If so, how have you noticed God coming close to you to help you?

12. Have you heard Jesus calling to you to “come out” of the dark, cold, dead places of your life? If so, what is He saying to you?

13. What are the “graveclothes” that you have put on, or still have on, that are keeping you from experiencing true healing, freedom, and life in Christ?

Jesus allowed someone He loved to suffer...for His purposes...for the greater thing! So, we can stop saying “God must not love me if He is allowing this!” This story is proof that it is simply and clearly not true! He did work in Lazarus life to raise him from the dead and remove his graveclothes so that he could continue living. Isn’t it interesting that someone else had to move the stone and help him to take off those stinky cloths that he was wrapped up in? Let’s remember that when we are going through the tough times in life, when we just can’t seem to understand what is going on or what God is doing...it may just be that he is using you and your situation to do a much greater thing!

*Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary,
and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. (John 11:45)*

And that, my friend. Is the “why” in this story. Maybe it’s the “why” in your story too!

Prayer:

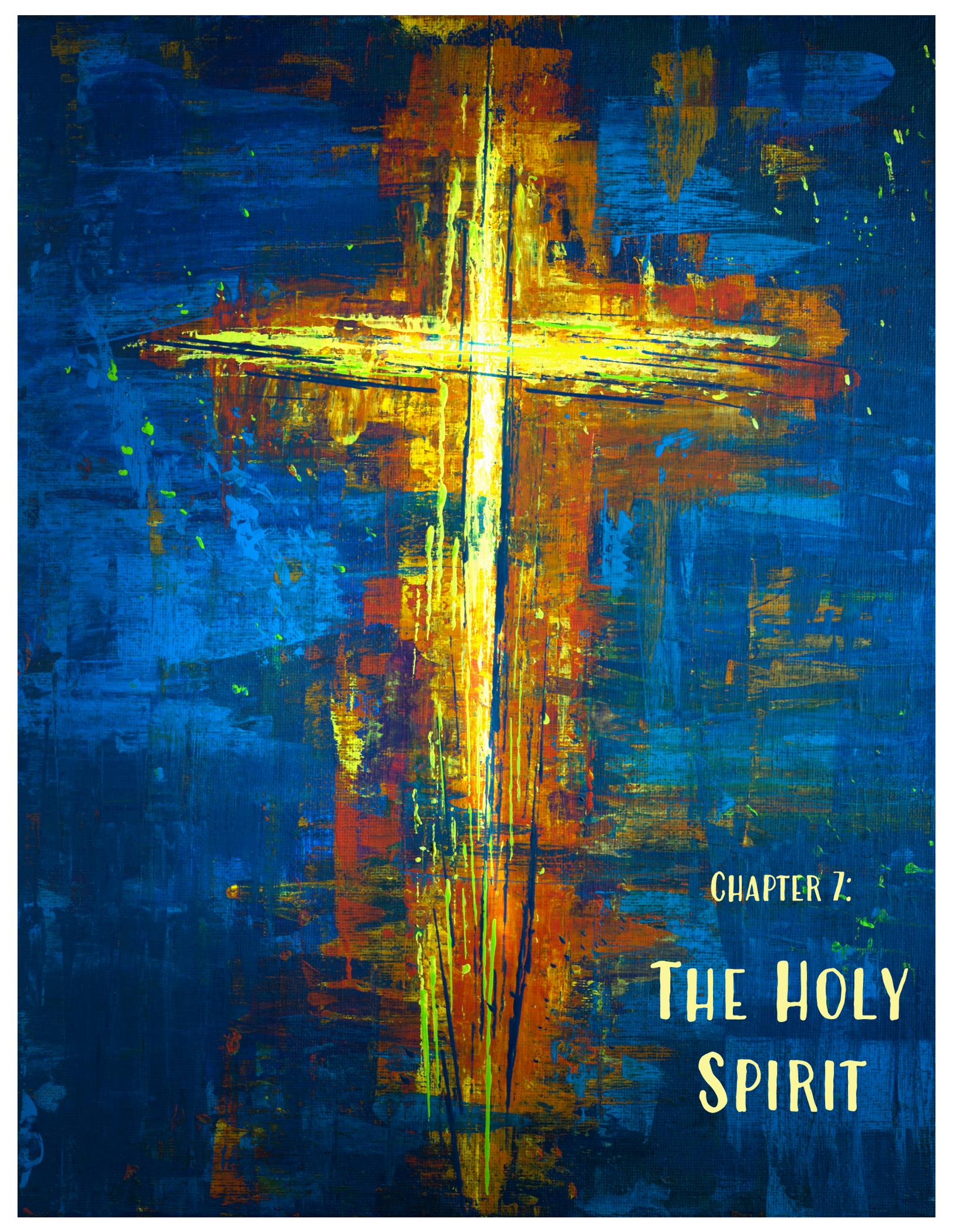
- Write a prayer asking God to give you the grace and strength for every situation. Ask him to show you any dark, cold dead places in your life and how you can partner with Him for your freedom.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 11 & 12
- Ask God to show you if there is anyone you need to call to reconcile with this week.
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

- 1 Peter 5:10-11 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in warm, glowing colors like gold, yellow, and orange, with a textured, brush-stroke appearance. It stands out against a background of deep, layered blues and dark purples. The overall style is expressive and textured, with visible brushwork and some splatters of paint.

CHAPTER 7:

THE HOLY
SPIRIT

John 14:23-27

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

S: _____

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DAY TWO: SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT

One definition of the word “sign” is:

something indicating the presence or existence of something else

Jesus’ presence here on earth was, in itself, a sign to the world that there was something more to life than what they were already experiencing. There was more to the mundane, average, meaningless motions they were going through day to day to day. There was even more beyond the goodness and good things of life like health, home, family, and all they owned. What could be better than even that? Jesus came to tell the world that He was there to save them from their sinful ways and give them eternal life – to be their Savior. He was here to let them know that the good, perfect, heavenly Father was extending His hand to them, for love and life. And as we will see in this chapter, Jesus came to do the will of His Father, and when His work on earth was done, He would send them the Holy Spirit, who would not just be with them, but in them. The end of John 14:17 says:

But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

To most people that would be such great news! That wasn’t all though. Jesus didn’t come into the world just to be here. Jesus – the Son of God - came to live on earth fully God, but also fully human, to show the world who the Father was, and how to know Him in the beautiful way of a personal and intimate relationship with Him!

1. Let’s pause here for a moment. Do you know the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the ways described above? Explain below.

Not much is recorded about Jesus first thirty years of life. We hear about his birth (Luke 2:6-7) and His dedication at the Temple at the age of eight days (Luke 2:22-24). We also hear about him around the age of twelve, when his parents left Him behind as they were returning home from a trip to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51). The Bible goes on to say that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor. The next we hear about Him is, at the age of thirty, at His water baptism.

Jesus had about three years after that, to show the world who His Father was and how to walk, talk, live, love, act, teach, and respond in the ways of life according to His Father. He did this so graciously, perfectly, and clearly. To anyone who was truly paying attention, if they watched Him closely, they would not only become familiar with Him, but the Father and Holy Spirit as well. He was a bold, obvious, truthful, and a much-needed sign to be read and noticed by all!

2. What are some of the most impressionable things about Jesus that speak to you of who He is, and that declare who the Father and the Holy Spirit are?

As we read through John 13, we see how Jesus is preparing His disciples for Him to leave them and go back to the Father. Instead of just telling them about the Holy Spirit, whom He would send to be with them, He continued to show them the ways of living filled with the Holy Spirit. In this great story of the Passover meal, Jesus displayed several of the Fruit of the Spirit, the Gifts of the Spirit and even some of the Motivational Gifts of the Spirit. You may be asking, what in the world are those? Let's take a look at each one of these and the examples from this chapter and part of chapter 14.

Fruit of the Spirit = the qualities and character traits that grow in us through life filled with the Holy Spirit. They are listed in Galatians 5:22-23

*²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

3. As you read through John 13 and 14, what are some of the Fruit of the Spirit that Jesus displays?

A couple that I found are:

- John 13:1 ...having loved his own who were in the world...(love)
- John 13:1 ...he loved them to the end (faithfulness)
- John 13:3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power (self-control not to use this power for His own benefit)
- John 13:6-10 explaining to Peter what He was doing (patience & kindness)
- John 13:12 When He had finished washing their feet...(goodness)
- John 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled (peace)

As a side note, should we say, "Fruit of the Spirit", or "Fruits of the Spirit"? We should say "Fruit" not "Fruits". Did you notice in the verse from Galatians 5 stated above that it says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is..."? Here is a brief explanation the helps to answer this question:

Several attempts have been made to explain the reason why "works" is plural and "fruit" is singular.

Some have suggested that the singular stresses the truth that the fruit is one cluster with many individual parts, as one diamond has many facets. Others have suggested that the singular refers to one harvest and the unity of the characteristics that the Spirit produces within the individual. Another possibility is that the fruit of the Spirit is actually one, love, with the other virtues being different manifestations of love in operation. A support of such a view may be 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, where several of the things itemized as fruit in Galatians are included as identifying features of agape [ajgavph] love. It is notable that the fruit of the Spirit, as listed, is in direct opposition to the works stemming from the flesh. (biblestudytools.org)

Another way to put it is, let's say that you have an apple, banana, mango, and an orange on your counter at home. Even though there are several pieces of fruit there, you would not say, "I have some fruits on the counter." You would say, "I have some fruit on the counter." Make sense? Good! Just thought we should clarify that. 😊

4. Is there one or more of the Fruit of the Spirit that you may need to grow in?

Gifts of the Spirit = a special ability given to a believer that communicates encouragement and comfort to others. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 speaks of them:

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Here is a brief definition of each one:

- Wisdom = the special ability to make choices and know God's will
- Knowledge = the special ability of understanding in situations
- Faith = the special ability to trust God and help others to trust Him, no matter what
- Healing = the special ability to use God's power to heal a person

- Miraculous Powers = the special ability to perform signs and miracles that give God the glory
- Prophecy = the special ability to speak a message from God
- Distinguishing of spirits (discernment) = the special ability to know if something is from God or what is actually going on in a situation
- Tongues = the special ability to communicate a message from God in another language given by the Holy Spirit
- Interpretation of Tongues = the special ability to interpret a message in tongues

5. How familiar are you with the Gifts of the Spirit? Have you ever operated in any of them?

These gifts are available to all believers, as they are filled with the Holy Spirit. If you sense the Lord leading you to use any of them, there are some basic guidelines. When the message is to be given:

- One on one: ask the person for permission to share it with them
- In a small group setting: ask the leader, or the group, if you may share the message
- In a church service: let a Pastor or leader know you have a message; they may decide whether it is for everyone and find a good time during service to do that. Or, they may sense that it is not for everyone and decide not to share it during the service.

1 Corinthians 13 and 14 go on to explain these gifts more and how to use them. It is very clear that the motivation should be love and to benefit others. We should always do things with order and peace and in humility and submission to our leaders and to each other. 1 Corinthians 14: 32 says that the message is subject to the control of the messenger, so the person using the gift should use discretion when offering it in any situation considering how it will affect a person, group of people, or church service.

Jesus showed some gifts of the Spirit in John 13 and 14. Here are a few I noticed:

- John 13: 1; 3; 11 Jesus knew (knowledge)
- John 13:3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all thing under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God (faith)
- John 21 ...Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." (discernment)

6. Did you find any others?

Motivational Gifts of the Spirit = a motivational gift is the underlying driving force that causes you to do the things you do the way you do them. (Charles Stanley)

These gifts are also displayed by Jesus in John 13 & 14. Motivational gifts are more practical in nature and identify what typically motivates or drives a person – it's the reason why we do things. Some say that these gifts are meant to reveal the personality of God in the way they are expressed. Most people are strong in one or two of them. Here is a definition of each:

- Prophecy: love to reveal what is right and wrong to others
- Service: love behind the scenes and serving others
- Teaching: love to study and teach others
- Giving: love to give and bless others
- Exhortation: love to encourage others
- Administration: love to organize and plan for others
- Mercy: love being sensitive to the feelings and needs of others

7. What motivational gifts do you see Jesus displaying the John 13 and 14?

8. What motivational gift(s) do you think you have? How have you used these gifts in the past, and how are you using them now?

Jesus was the fulfillment of God Himself and lived in a way that foretold of the Holy Spirit that was to come. All of the gifts of the Spirit that were evidenced through His life were signs of who God is and how the Holy Spirit wanted to move and operate in and through us. The more we read about Jesus and study His life the more we see this. The Holy Spirit is not only with us, but in us! Wow! That's definitely a game changer! That truth is definitely something that can give us hope, strength, comfort and the determination to not only persevere in this life, but thrive in it!

DAY THREE: SENDING THE SPIRIT

Jesus had just told his disciples that He was leaving them, and they could not follow Him. He had also just told Peter that he would deny Him three times. All of this must have caused them some concern and maybe even fear. That must be why, as we begin to read in John 14, that Jesus comforts them. John 14:1-4 says:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.”

9. If you were one of the disciples hearing this, would it have comforted you? Why or why not?

Jesus also continued to reassure his disciples, that to know Him was to know the Father. If that was true, then they would also continue God’s work, even when He was gone.

But He also promised them that they would not be alone. In John 14:15 through the end of the chapter, Jesus tells them that He would send them the Holy Spirit to be with them, to continue to teach them, and to remind them of all they had learned while with Him. Let’s read that now (I added the bold type for emphasis):

*¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate **to help you and be with you forever**—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” ²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will **teach** you all things and will **remind** you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. ²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so*

*that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.
"Come now; let us leave."*

10. Have you asked God to fill you with the Holy Spirit? If not, and if you want to, do that now...just ask Him. If you have done this, but want more of Him, ask Him to refill you!

11. How have you sensed or experienced the Holy Spirit with you?

12. What has the Holy Spirit been teaching you recently?

13. What is one of the most impactful things the Holy Spirit has taught you?

14. Is there anything that the Holy Spirit is reminding you of now or recently?

What an incredible gift we have in Jesus our Savior! What an amazing, perfect and loving Father we have! What an enormous blessing it is, that the Holy Spirit is in us, with us, teaching us and reminding us about all things! It is to our benefit to stay close and intimate with our Holy God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We cannot do life without their presence and participation with us!

We praise the name of the Lord our God! We exalt His name forever! Amen!

Prayer:

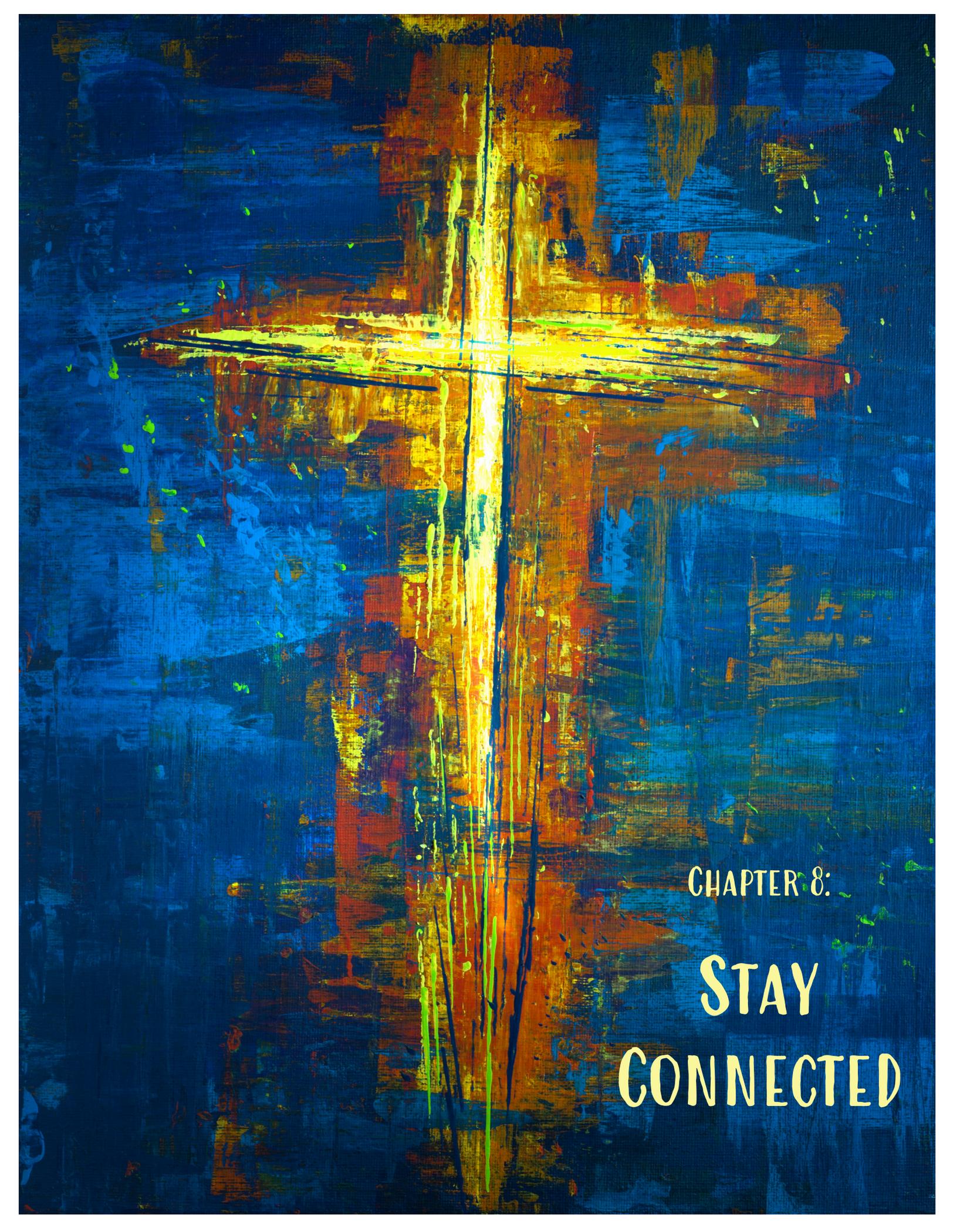
- Write a prayer thanking God for the Holy Spirit and asking Him to help you to operate in the fruit and gifts of the Spirit as He leads you.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 13 & 14
- Read 1 Corinthians 12-14 and ask the Lord to teach you something new.
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

- John 14: 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you



CHAPTER 8:

STAY
CONNECTED

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

S: _____

O: _____

A: _____

P: _____

DAY TWO: LESSONS FROM THE VINEYARD

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you.

*No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (John 15:1-4)*

Jesus starts by stating here that He is the true vine. Why does He use the word "true"? Are there other false vines, or at least some imposters? Let's think about that for a minute.

1. Why do you think Jesus says He is the "true" vine?

This entire chapter is a very clear and descriptive explanation of the type of relationship that God wants with us. It is very intimate, and completely dependent on how we cling to Him and remain in Him. Every time I read John 15:1, I stop at the phrase "true vine". We cannot overlook this obvious choice of words Jesus used. If He had to clarify that He is the "true" vine, then it must be possible that we can also become "connected" to, or dependent on, some "other" type of vine – or so-called life support system. Remember, He was talking to His disciples here. He needed them to know that He was the only way, the only true life.

2. What could those things be? What other things do we become so dependent on? What do we tend to cling to, besides Jesus, for our source of "life"?

The very next thing Jesus declares is that His Father is the gardener of this "vineyard". He is the one who watches over our life in Christ and tends to our lives as necessary. We do have such a good, good Father in God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, don't we? We can trust Him! We must trust Him! Even when He does the work of a gardener. Cutting and pruning seem like harsh ways to tend a garden, yet we know it is necessary for the most abundant and healthy harvest!

What does it look like for the Father to do some pruning in our lives? Pruning is to cut away the dead parts and branches of a plant, but it is also cutting away what seems to be healthy...why? So that the plant can grow bigger and healthier, and produce an even greater crop!

3. What does it look like when God prunes our lives?

God will always work in our lives so that we are growing, increasing, and becoming more effective for Him. There are so many things that we add to our lives, or continue doing or holding onto, that can become a hindrance to producing the best out of our lives. He communicates His desire for us to let go of those things in many ways too. He may allow us to become dissatisfied, or frustrated. He may lift the grace or ability or effect from what we are doing. He may speak to us through others, circumstances, or new opportunities. He may allow us to experience situations that bring out a negative attitude or emotion or reaction that He wants to “cut away” from our lives.

4. Have you ever experienced this in your life? What did that look like?

5. Stop right here and ask the Lord to show you anything in your life that He would like to “prune” away. Write what you hear Him say below.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:5-8)

The word “remain” is used 11 times in 7 verses (John 15:4-10)! I bet some of you went back and counted...am I right? 😊 The word remain means to stay, live in, settle down and grow “roots”. Sounds permanent, doesn’t it? Well, that’s what is intended here. Remember, Jesus is instructing His disciples just before He leaves them to go to be with the Father in heaven. He

knew the pull and tug and temptations of the world that would come against them – and us. He had to use words that would be clear and easily understood.

6. What does it mean to remain in Jesus?

7. What do you personally do to remain in Jesus? Have you drifted away at all? Why or why not?

Jesus said that apart from Him, we can do nothing. Wow! Nothing, nada, zilch, zip, zero. Without Him...our life amounts to nothing. Pretty sobering huh? I don't know about you, but I certainly don't want that!!!

8. What is your personal reaction to that statement Jesus said – “apart from me you can do nothing.”?

*⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.
(John 15:9-17)*

Ok, we've got to talk about the fruit now...right? There is so much said here about fruit! What is it anyway? Why is it so important? Why can't we just be a nice-looking branch? Why the need for fruit? And did you notice all the levels of fruit mentioned? No fruit, fruit, more fruit and fruit that will last. Oh, and let's not forget that no branch can bear fruit by itself. What does all this mean?

Bearing fruit for God is the evidence of a life in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. This will look differently in each of us, but basically, our lives will show more and more "fruit of the Spirit" increasing in us. There will also be the fruit of good works – or ministry – through us, because of our life in Christ. I always say that bearing fruit for God is anything we do for Him, especially when it lifts the name of Jesus and gives Him glory. If our character improves...it's because of Jesus. If we do good works...it's for Jesus. That's the "fruit" of our lives.

9. Where have you seen the fruit of the spirit growing in your life? (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.)

10. What do you feel is your "work of the ministry" in this season of your life? Is God leading you to something new? Is He pruning your life in any way to be "more fruitful" for Him?

Of all things, Jesus used the illustration of a vineyard to communicate this message to them. John 15 is a beautiful message by Jesus using the imagery and life of a vineyard to describe the relationship we are to have with Him, the Father, and each other. Anyone Jesus was speaking to back then would have been familiar with a vineyard, and some quite knowledgeable about their structure and needs for maintenance and care. Most of us understand that imagery too.

With all the opportunities, distractions, lures, and temptations of the world today, we can easily become disconnected from the true vine – Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus and His people – our church family – can so quickly take a back seat to all of that becoming unimportant to us. Let's take great care to stay connected to Jesus! Let's remain in Him and in His truth and continue to grow in godly character! Let's stay connected to other believers. John 15:5 says "...you are the branches". This implies that we are to remain in Jesus with others who are also remaining in Him. Let's be sure that we are, in some way, doing the work of the ministry, making strong disciples, and bearing much fruit. Fruit that will last!

DAY THREE: LESSONS ABOUT THE WORLD

Jesus was also very clear in His explanation of the world and the people of the world. He was careful to warn His disciples of how the world would treat them or more accurately – how the world would mistreat them. Jesus must have known this information would be valuable to the disciples and even helpful to them as they would experience the difficulties to come.

We should also take note of what Jesus was saying here so that we will not be utterly discouraged or allow the world to trample us or overwhelm us. It shouldn't surprise us when we are mistreated by those who do not know Christ. It will happen. How can we best prepare for that? How will we respond? Let's take a look at a few things Jesus pointed out about the world at the end of John 15 through John 16 that can help us with that.

Lesson #1: The world hates Jesus.

John 15:18 says:

¹⁸ If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first

The world hates Jesus because it does not know Jesus or the Father. In fact, the world stands in judgement by them because of their unbelief and sin...sounds miserable, right? We can't expect people who don't know Jesus, or believe in Him, to act like they do.

11. Why is this so important to remember when we witness "the world" and all of its evil and cruelty?

Lesson #2: We are not of this world, so it hates us too.

Read John 15:19-21:

¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me

I don't know about you, but sometimes I find myself really frustrated that I can't seem to get myself truly settled in and settled down in life. It seems like there is always this agitation or restlessness or feeling like something is missing. This second lesson reminds me why...I am not of this world. It's not even possible for a believer to feel completely satisfied in this life, here on

earth. We need to learn to be ok with a little of this kind of tension. It's simply a sign that we are not home yet.

It's kind of like when you go on vacation or are away from home for a while. Although your vacation or trip can be fun and wonderful...there is nothing like getting back "home". Right? Home to your own bed, your family, church, work, and all that is familiar. Heaven will be like that someday, only exponentially greater, because we will be in the presence of our Savior!

12. What are some ways that you feel the tension or agitation of not being of this world?

Lesson #3: The world cannot take our joy away!

John 16:22 says:

22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Jesus was comforting the disciples that what they held within them could not be taken away. The Holy Spirit in them and all that they had in Him was something that the world could not steal from them. This is the precious promise we have too! No matter what we are going through – even in the most difficult of circumstances – we can still experience God's joy! The inner knowing that He is God, He is good, He is in control, and that He is our constant help and provider. That constant confidence that our faith in Him will not disappoint us, but if we remain in Him, our eternal rewards will be great!

13. How have you experienced this kind of joy in the face of adversity or hard times?

Romans 15:13 is so good! Let's trust in Him and experience all of His peace and joy!

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson #4: Jesus has overcome the world!

In John 16:33, Jesus again stated that He was telling His disciples all of this to prepare them. If they continued to believe, and remembered what He was telling them, they too would have peace and overcome the world – just like He was about to do!

33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

So, it's not about doing everything we can to avoid the world or trouble or persecution. It's really about how we will live "in" this world and how we will handle everything that comes our way. Even Jesus had His enemies, those who hated Him, mistreated Him, rejected Him, criticized Him, and plotted evil against Him. BUT – Jesus walked through it all and was victorious! The world thought they had won by crucifying Him on the cross. Many didn't believe that He really rose from the dead. But – He – did!!!

To us that believe in Him, the verse above is one of the most inspiring, encouraging and motivating! It gives us reason to keep the faith and keep living despite all that comes against us! Sure, in this world we will have trouble, but we don't need to let it overwhelm us!

14. Are there any situations in your life right now that seem overwhelming? How can you let this verse and Jesus's encouragement help you to be victorious through it?

The first verse of John 16 says:

"All this I have told you so that you will not fall away."

In other words...stay connected!!! Connected to Jesus and connected to other believers. In John 15:5 Jesus said you are the branches...plural. We are in this together. Both are a vital part of remaining in the vine! Our faith in Him and our fellowship with each other will carry us through.

From the start of His last meal with His disciples in John 13, through chapters 14 and 15, all that Jesus shared with them was to make final preparations for His death and return to His Father in heaven. All that He emphasized in these chapters were meant to reaffirm His love for them, reassure them of the Father's love for them, and to give them final instructions on how to stay in close relationship with Him, as they continued on without Him. He truly did not want to lose any of them (or us) to doubt, unbelief, to the world, or to anything!

Prayer:

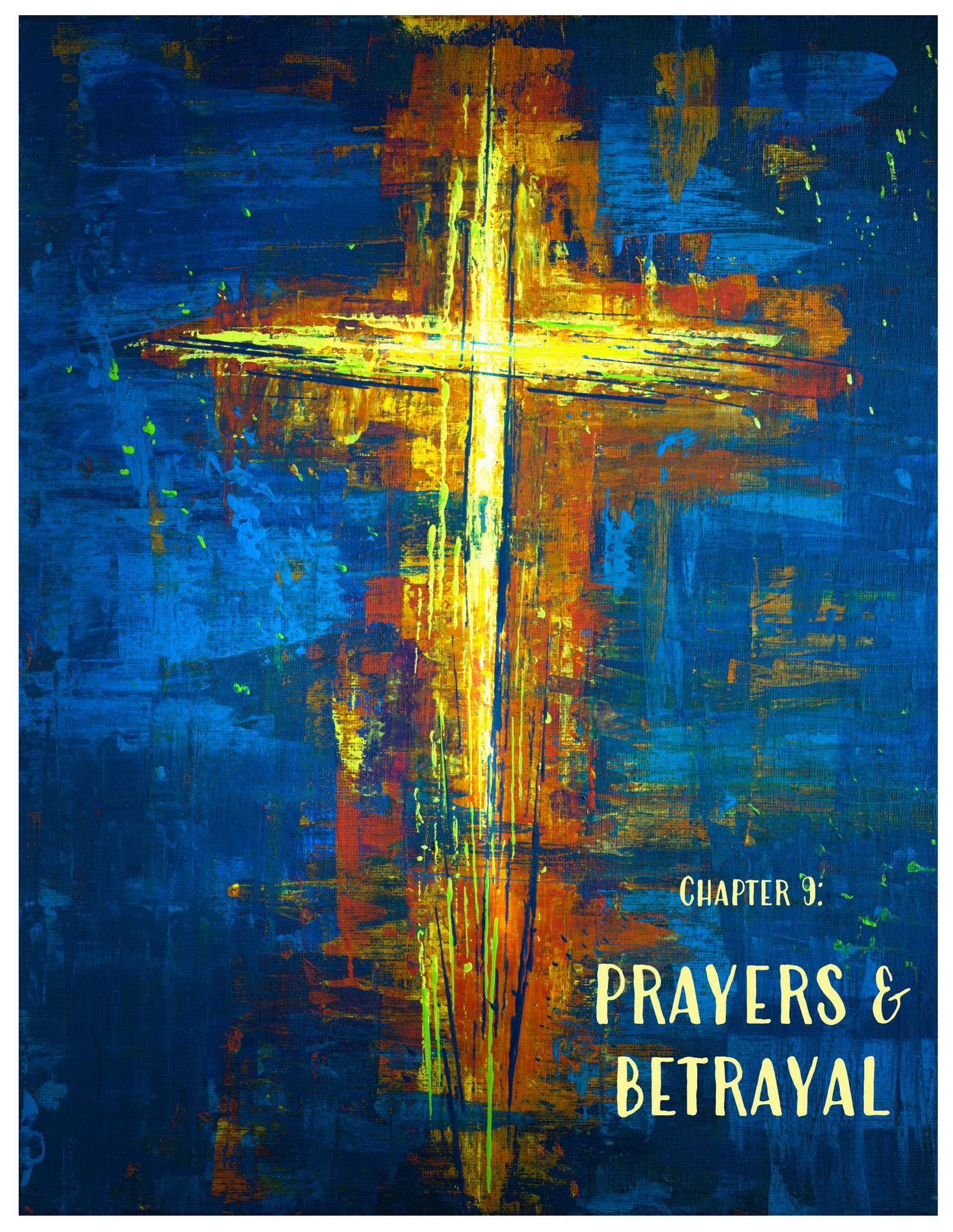
- Write a prayer asking God to draw you closer to Him. Ask Him to show you any way that you are not connected or even drifting away from Him, then respond to what you hear.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 15 & 16
- Ask God to show you someone who is not connected anymore either in relationship with God or with your church. Reach out to them this week and encourage them.
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

- John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.



CHAPTER 9:

PRAYERS &
BETRAYAL

John 17:20-23

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

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DAY TWO: JESUS PRAYS

It's pretty awesome to think that Jesus prayed for us! In fact, He is still praying for us. Romans 8:34 says:

³⁴Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

The Son of God, the Savior of the world, the One who sits at the right hand of God – is praying for us! Wow! This is something that Jesus will do until we are all in heaven with Him some day. That thought brings several emotional responses to my heart and mind.

1. What kind of response do you have to the fact that right now, Jesus is praying for you?

For me, this truth brings comfort. It makes me feel safe – knowing He is contending for me to the Father. I am motivated to be more devoted to Him – He deserves my best – all the time! It brings me sorrow for the ways that I slip and fall and make mistakes that more than likely disappoint Him. It also makes me love Him even more. His devotion to pray for us is inspiring! I hope that I will grow in my prayer life that I contend for others in prayer to the Father like He does.

As Jesus begins His prayer in John 17, He looks to the Father and asks to be glorified, that the Father would also be glorified through Him. The word glorify means to give praise and worship, to make glorious, to describe as admirable. Jesus wanted to represent the Father in the most accurate way to the world. He brought the Father glory just by coming to earth and living life here. He made the Father known through who He was and how He lived. He showed the world God's magnificence and beauty. John 17:1-5 says:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. (John 17:1-5)

If we are to do as Jesus does, if we are his followers – His disciples, then we too are called to make the Father known and declare His glory. We are to tell others about Him and live in a way that gives Him glory and shows the world who He is. There is a Christian worship song with the following lyrics: "More of your glory, more of your power, more of your spirit in me. Speak to my heart and change my life. Manifest yourself in me." (*More of Your Glory by Lindell Cooley*). The word manifest means to display, show, exhibit, reveal, or make plain.

2. What do you think this looks like in the life of a believer? What are some ways that you can bring glory to, reveal or show, the Father to those around you?

3. How do you see that, in the world, this message is being hindered? How is the enemy trying to keep people from knowing God?

I think that we can probably do a better job of showing the world who God is, don't you?

Jesus goes on to pray for His disciples. He truly has a loving Shepherd's heart! He did not want to lose any one of them, so He prayed for them once more before leaving them! In this section of John 17 Jesus asks the Father to protect the disciples. They would remain in the world when He was gone. These disciples had heard the truth and believed it. They had accepted who Jesus said He was and who the Father was. This set them apart from the world. They would need the help of the Father to continue. Read John 17:13-19.

¹³ "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

4. What did Jesus specifically pray for His disciples in these verses? How does that encourage you today? How does it challenge you?

Jesus also prayed for future believers. Can you believe that over 2000 years ago you were on Jesus' mind? That's just mind boggling, isn't it? And we can see – on paper – the words He used to pray for us and what was on His heart for us even back then. Let's take a look at John 17: 20-23:

²⁰ My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Did you notice that the main theme that Jesus was praying for here is unity between us? The Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in perfect unity, and Jesus was praying that it would be the same for us. That we at least do our best to live in unity with each other. Why? The end of verse 23 says so that the world will know through us about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

5. What are some ways that you see division and strife in the body of Christ?

6. How have you seen that division and strife hurt our testimony about Jesus?

7. What are some ways that you struggle with being in unity with others? What can you do about this?

8. How can your church family do a better job being in unity with each other?

It seems like we have some work to do in this area, right? It's easy to let our differences, preferences, opinions, and expectations cause division. Our flesh sometimes gets the best of us, and we hurt and offend one another. Worse yet, sometimes we choose to avoid reconciliation, or having that courageous conversation. Unfortunately, that can lead us to quitting on each other all together, and maybe even leaving the church. We need to understand that when we do that, we are causing division, and creating disunity. Hard to hear, but true.

Jesus didn't mention anything that would justify our excuses for not contending for peace and unity with each other. We must work harder to be one. We don't always have to agree. Our differences make us more complete. So, we need to have more grace and love for each other and make more of an effort to be the answer to Jesus' prayers – that we are in complete unity!

Can I get an "Amen!" to that?

Jesus ends His prayer for us by saying that He wanted us to be with Him in heaven some day and that He would continue to make the Father known to us. He is still working in our lives to show us the Father. Every new experience, challenge or circumstance could be an opportunity for us to know the Father in a new or deeper way.

9. Have you experienced anything like this recently? Explain below.

We have an amazing Savior and Friend in Jesus! He is praying for us constantly in the throne room of heaven. He still wants us to be in unity with each other. He still wants us to glorify the Father through our lives to the world. Let's work for this more and more! Let's conquer any strife or division with forgiveness, love, and grace. With lots and lots of love!!! (Considering what is in the best interest of others.) And with lots and lots of grace!!! (Giving someone what they don't deserve.) In doing that, we will be a testimony of the Father, to the world.

Let's be the answer to Jesus' prayers!

DAY THREE: PETER BETRAYS

What would you do if someone told you ahead of time, that you would hurt or betray them? Would you believe them? Would you be angry, upset or hurt that they said that? Would you act any differently around them to prevent that from happening? Would you avoid them?

10. How would you respond to someone telling you ahead of time, that sometime in the future, you would hurt or betray them?

We read back in John 13:38 Jesus did this very thing. He told Peter that he would betray Him.

³⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

Do you wonder why Jesus did that? Why did he tell Peter this? Especially if telling him wouldn't affect the outcome. Peter was a strong and passionate believer. It is interesting that Jesus allowed this situation in Peter's life. There must have been a reason. There is always a reason. God is always at work, using our situations, behavior, or attitudes to do more work in us. He is always working to make us more like Him – to have more of His character.

Peter sounded shocked by what Jesus told him. His response to Jesus reflected his disgust in the idea of betraying Jesus. He even became defensive of himself declaring his devotion to Jesus – even to death! Maybe Peter thought that he was stronger than he really was?

11. How do you respond when someone genuinely points out a weakness of yours?

12. Have you ever made a claim like Peter did, only to fail, just like he did? Explain below.

You would think that by knowing something in advance that we would be at an advantage. You would think that Peter could have changed the outcome of Jesus prediction because He was warned ahead of time. But he didn't. Jesus' prediction came true. Peter denied Jesus – He betrayed Him just as Jesus said He would.

We can be quick to criticize Peter's behavior. We can tend to be hard on him for doing this to Jesus – especially after being warned that it would happen. But we aren't so different than Peter in our own behavior. We may act like this more than we want to admit. Here are some definitions of betrayal:

- Break one's promise to
- Be disloyal to
- Be unfaithful to
- Break faith with
- Let down
- Deceive
- Cheat
- Stab someone in the back
- Blow the whistle on or rat out
- Fail

13. Write down the phrases that apply to you in some way, or the ones that you have struggled with.

14. What were the circumstances that brought about this behavior? Was this between you and God or people or both?

We don't have to hang our head in shame because of these things. Godly sorrow can lead us to repentance! Jesus is quick to forgive us. We should forgive ourselves too and move on. The good news about Peter's story is that he had the chance to be redeemed. We will read about that in John 21 and talk about it in the next chapter. There is always hope for another chance when we look to Jesus with a sincere heart!

Prayer:

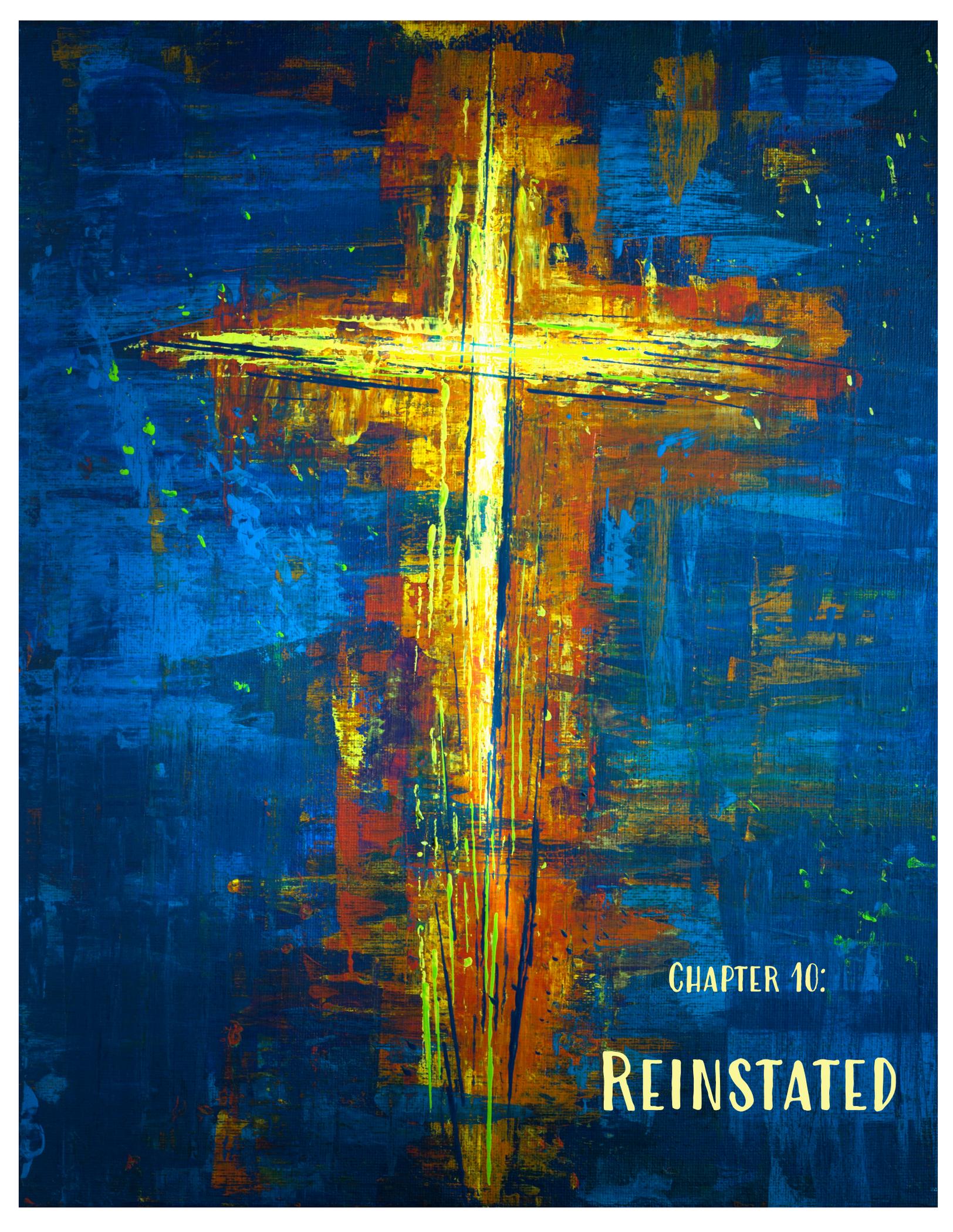
- Write a prayer asking God to remind you to pray for other believers more often. Pray for more unity and that we continue to make God's greatness known to the world. Pray that He would glorify Himself through you!

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 17 & 18
- Get with 2-3 other believers and pray for our church family and the church worldwide.

Memory Verse:

- John 17:23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

An abstract painting featuring a central cross shape. The cross is rendered in warm, golden-yellow and orange tones, with visible brushstrokes and texture. It is set against a dark, deep blue background that also has some lighter blue and greenish-yellow accents. The overall style is expressive and textured.

CHAPTER 10:

REINSTATED

John 21:3-14

³“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. ⁶He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. ⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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DAY TWO: MIRACULOUS CATCH

Don't you just love how Jesus knew where to find His disciples? I think it's awesome! Whether they were in a tomb, in a locked room, or in a boat on the sea...they could be anywhere...and He would find them. He knows where you are too! He knows what you are doing and experiencing. And He knows what you need every moment of every day. That is so comforting and encouraging! Amen?

In John 21, John tells the story of when the disciples went fishing and their encounter with Jesus. One of the study Bibles that I use titles this story "Breakfast by the Sea". Now, that's my kind of breakfast...on the beach!!! ☺ What would seem like an ordinary day for these disciples turned out to be another incredibly meaningful conversation with the risen Jesus.

Jesus knew what they needed on that day! I mean, think about it. They had experienced so much in the previous several days: their last meal with Jesus where He washed all their feet, His arrest and crucifixion, being scattered and separated from their friends, His resurrection, and being visited by Jesus after He rose to life again! I can't imagine how their world must have been "rocked and shaken" during that time.

1. What do you think the disciples were thinking and feeling after experiencing all that they had before, during, and after Jesus' death and resurrection?

And what about that day fishing on the Sea of Galilee? Wow, probably another thing that they just did not expect, right? I could imagine that they were thinking that day, "Well, now what?" or "What will we do, how will we do it, and who will lead us?" Peter, however, seems to be the focus of this chapter. It seems like Jesus had planned to give him some special attention, that day by the sea. What must have been going through Peter's mind? Remember, he had denied any connection with Jesus three times during Jesus' arrest and trial! Even though Peter had already seen Jesus twice since his resurrection, Jesus had not said anything to him about the betrayal.

2. Why do you think Peter wanted to go fishing that day?

I know a few people who love to fish. I mean, they love to fish - a lot! I would call them “modern day fishermen”. I asked a few of them the following questions:

1. How hard is it for you when you go out to fish, but don't catch as much as you would like?
2. What do you do on a day when you aren't catching anything?
3. How would you respond to or what would you think if you caught 153 fish (or any miraculous number) in one day?

Here are their responses:

Terry Thomas: 1. Our goal when we head out onto the lake is to always limit out, which is a boat limit of 6 fish (walleye) per person, daily. There are days when the fishing can be great. These days are exciting and so much fun, especially when you're one of the first boats back to the dock in the late morning. On other days when the fish are biting slow, when we catch less than our limit or only a few, it's a whole different story. Maybe the fish moved to a different area of the lake. Or maybe the weather took a turn for the worse and you're battling 6' waves 15-20 miles offshore. Or maybe they're just not hungry due to a recent bug hatch and their bellies are full. These days can be long days out on the lake and somewhat frustrating. Certainly not as much fun as those days when we fill the cooler quickly. When you return to the dock there always seems to be less excitement, too.

2. Every once in a while, though, there is a special day that we experience out on the water. It usually begins with a beautiful sunrise, light winds, the water temperature is just right, you received a report as to where the fish were caught the day before, you have a great crew, everything seems to be lining up for success. The next few hours the fish seem to be jumping into the boat. They are, on occasion, hooked up on all the rods at once! What a blast! On these special days I am always thoughtful and thankful of how great and generous our God is. I truly believe that he blesses us beyond our understanding when we remain faithful to Him.

Ken Esper: When I chartered it was not a good day if we didn't catch near a limit. If just for pleasure a few would be good. Before limits on perch, it was common to get 153 fish. Now this year the numbers were way down.

Ben Puls:

1. For me, most often, I'm not bothered by catching small amounts of fish, but in certain situations it can be incredibly disappointing to come home empty handed. As a recreational fisherman, I don't normally have a lot riding on whether or not I catch any fish, but Peter and the other disciples weren't fishing for fun. Their livelihood and hunger were dependent on catching fish that day, so for them, catching was of the upmost importance.

2. On a day where I'm not catching anything I'll either quit and go home early, or paddle/wander around aimlessly through the lake or stream I'm fishing.

3. I have a fly-fishing pal that likes to say, “you fish, therefore you lie”, in response to all big fish/lots of fish stories. On some of my best fishing days that I reported back to him I was met with the same line. The expectation when you catch an abnormal amount or miraculous number is that you aren't going to be believed by those you tell which is frustrating when you actually did make that miraculous catch!

3. What do you think your response/reaction would have been to such a huge catch of fish?

4. Why do you think Jesus did this incredible miracle for them?

I am sure that God has all kinds of reasons for how He works in our lives. Many of those reasons we may not know until heaven. When we experience the miraculous, I wonder if it happens for any of the following reasons:

- To get our attention
- To lead us to Jesus
- To increase our faith
- To bless us
- To communicate something to us
- To create an opportunity for us to share God's marvelous works with others

I think a couple of things are interesting in this story. One is that the disciples did not realize it was Jesus on the shore...even though He called them "friends". Even though they had seen Him a few times after His resurrection. Yet, they still followed His suggestion to recast the net. It wasn't until after the miraculous catch, that they knew it was Him. But shouldn't they have recognized Him before that? Was He purposely disguising Himself from them? Was it still too dark for them to see Him? Were they still trying to decide if they truly believed He had risen?

5. What do you think God is doing when He performs miracles, signs, and wonders around you?

Another thing I think is interesting, is that Jesus asked them if they had caught anything. Wouldn't He have known the answer to that question? Was it to help them realize their shortcomings and that they could do nothing without Him?

6. Why does God reveal to us our shortcomings? Has He done that for you recently? If so, why do you think He did that?

The apostle Paul states this in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

7. What do these verses mean to you? What is God speaking to you through them?

Although we talked about miracles in chapter three, I believe that in this section of our study, God is reminding us that He is always working in and around us. He often uses supernatural things for His purposes.

We should take the time to remember the miracles God has done in our lives and in the lives of those around us. It builds our faith. It adds to our testimony about Him. It encourages and strengthens us! Let's be on the lookout for the "miraculous catches" all around us. Let's rejoice in them. Let's share them with others that it might lead them to God and give Him the glory!

DAY TWO: REINSTATED

And...splash!!! There goes Peter jumping into the water and making His way toward Jesus, again! Again? Do I mean that this was not the first time that Peter threw himself in water? Oh yeah...it is true! He had done this once before. Let's read about it in Matthew 14:25-29:

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

There you have it. Peter, in the experience described above actually jumped out of a boat and walked on water! Wow!!! Even though the story goes on to say that he did falter a little...imagine it...Peter really walked on water! What an incredible and miraculous event that must have been!

8. What do you think made Peter do those spontaneous, crazy things?

Now going back to our story in John 21, let's read verse 7:

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

This verse states that the disciple whom Jesus loved claimed it was the Lord who stood on the shore, yet Peter is the one who jumped out of the boat. There was something different about Peter and his relationship with Jesus. What was it?

9. What do you think was motivating Peter in both of these stories? Do you think he did it for different reasons in the story in John 21?

It's interesting that Peter put his outer garment back on. The NIV Study Bible narration of this verse explains:

It is curious that he put on this garment (the word appears only here in the NT) preparatory to jumping into the water. But Jews regarded a greeting as a religious act that could be done only when one was clothed Peter may have been preparing himself to greet the Lord.

Even though Peter had denied Jesus three times, like Jesus had warned him, there was still something about his character that he would want to treat Jesus with honor and respect in greeting him. We can see here how Peter was not past redemption or restoration. There was still hope for him!

Restoration means to bring back, to repair or renovate so as to return it to its original condition, to reinstate. Many versions of the Bible title this section of John 21 as "Jesus Reinstates Peter", (and because it's the title of this section of our studyguide 😊), let's define that word too.

Reinstate means to restore someone or something to their former position or condition.

10. What condition did Jesus want to restore back to Peter? For what purpose did He reinstate him?

If there is a need for restoration, it means something has been lost. It could be because of something out of our control, something we laid down or quit or gave up on. It could be because of sin. In the chaos of life, we can lose our hope, dreams, joy, peace, skill or talent, relationships, fellowship with others, good attitude, health, finances, passion for Jesus, or we may lose our calling or sense of purpose.

What about you? What used to be in your life that is not anymore? Is there anything you have been sensing, feeling, desiring, missing, or wondering about? Is there anything you feel like you have lost or that has been taken from you? Is there anything you are waiting for or long for? Is there anything that you have simply walked away from or quit because it was too hard, you don't enjoy anymore, there were no results, you are too busy, you are too afraid, you got hurt, or your expectations were not met?

11. Reflect on the above questions for a few minutes. Ask the Lord to speak to you. Is there any area of your life that needs restoration?

God is a God of second chances! If you were able to answer question 11 in any way, I want to encourage you that, just like Peter, there is hope for you too! There are so many stories of redemption in the Bible. I challenge you to look those up some time. God allows us to experience failure, challenges and suffering for a reason, but He always has a plan to restore us – to reinstate us when we are willing to surrender to Him and to His process. The following verse in 1 Peter 5:10 (NLT) is so encouraging:

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

I have had many needs for restoration in my life. One season in particular, I had failed and sinned miserably. Yet God, in His incredible love for me reached out and offered me His forgiveness and healing. That season was long and hard. He set me aside from ministry to allow me to rest and recover and regain my confidence in who I was and what I was called to do. In time, He reinstated me back to what I was called to do. I am so very grateful to the Lord for that and will never take my life or calling for granted!!! Maybe you have had a similar experience. Aren't you grateful?

John 21:9-10 is interesting to me, and I believe that it has everything to do with Jesus' plan to reinstate Peter. It says:

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

12. If Jesus had fish and bread already prepared, why did He ask for some of the fish they had just caught?

Jesus didn't make a fuss over how many fish were caught, but He did put it to use right away. I wonder if Jesus was communicating that, no matter what the condition of our heart and life, He will always love us and, in the process of restoration, we will still have something valuable to contribute. I think that helps to build our confidence. I know that in my restoration process years ago, and sometimes even now, it is a challenge to believe that I have anything important, valuable, or useful to offer. I have learned to trust God with the "fruit" of my life! ☺

Which brings us to the exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15-17. Jesus knows how to bring us back to Him. Three times Peter denied Him and three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Coincidence? I don't think so. Three infractions and three opportunities for Peter to retract or renounce what he said. Three opportunities to repent. Three opportunities to declare his love for Jesus. Jesus gave Peter the chance for complete forgiveness and closure. And, by the way, Jesus did this publicly, in front of the other disciples. Maybe this was in order to give Peter the confidence to move forward in the public ministry he would have, working for God's kingdom. Peter had been reinstated! Jesus knew that this must be done before He returned to the Father, in heaven. He always knows the perfect way and has perfect timing!

13. Is there any place, position, ministry or work that God wants to reinstate you to right now?

14. If so, what will be your greatest challenge?

15. How would you answer Jesus' question "Do you love me?"

Finally, in John 21:18-23, Jesus talks to Peter about his future. Peter asked Jesus to tell him about another disciple too. Jesus responded basically by telling Peter not to concern himself with that. What was important for Peter was his own transformation and obedience to his calling.

As we are walking through life, we should be concerned about how we live and not compare our life, relationship with Jesus, restoration process, or calling to anyone else's. What's most important is our faith, our walk, and our response to Jesus every day. Take courage, my friend! The eyes of the Lord are on you!

The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. (2 Chronicles 16:9 NLT)

Jeremiah 29:11 says:

For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Don't lose hope! God is no respecter of persons. What He did for Peter, He will do for you – just when you need it! Let us not be overwhelmed by guilt or shame when we fail or sin but let us be overcome with the love of God! Let us not worry when something has been stolen or lost from our lives. Instead, let us grow stronger in our faith in who He is, and what He can and will do for us!

If you need restoration. If you are waiting to be reinstated. Know this...God already has a plan. He has already set things in motion. His ways and timing are perfect. He knows what you are going through. He is for you. He still believes in you and chooses you to help accomplish His purposes. You have something to offer even now that is significant...AND...He will finish the work that He started in you!

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6)

Prayer:

→ Write a prayer to God responding to this chapter.

Weekly Challenge:

- Read John Chapters 19, 20 & 21
- Find one person this week that you can share with about what you learned in this study.
- Journal about your experience here:

Memory Verse:

→ John 20:30-31 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

CONCLUSION NOTE:

Well, friend, our study in the Gospel of John is completed! Well done!!! I trust that you have had an amazing time learning and growing in the Lord! I hope that you have enjoyed spending time studying the life of Jesus through this book of the Bible.

I am truly proud of you for taking the time to study, learn, heal and grow! So...I have one more question for you:

What is your biggest "take away" from this study? What is the most significant thing you learned or experienced?

The purpose of John's Gospel is stated so clearly in John 20:30-31:

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

If verse 31 is true for you, especially after doing this study, then this has been time well spent. Verse 30 tells us that there are so many more things to be told about Jesus. But John was selective in the stories He wrote. We could say that we don't know all the stories, but we know enough. The NIV Study Bible says it like this:

"Our historical knowledge of Jesus is partial at best,
but we have been given all we need to know."

We have all we need to know! Now go and love God and people deeply! Go tell the world about Jesus and make disciples that follow Him with all their heart!

I am so blessed by you, and by the privilege of sharing this study with you! Take care and God bless!

In love,





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