

Volume 1

Scripture Readings & Devotions

BE
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Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

Over the first three years of these studies, we have taken a sweeping overview of the entire Bible with studies on the four Gospels (“Be with Jesus”), the rest of the New Testament (“Be on Mission”), the Old Testament (“Be God’s Light”). In 2025 we followed that overview by exploring New Testament books written for Jews who saw Jesus as the Messiah (“Be God’s Family”).

Our study in 2026 will be on the New Testament books that focus on books related to the Apostle John. We begin with the Gospel of John and end with the Epistles of John. In between we will explore John’s adopted home of Ephesus by looking at some sections of Acts, the book of Ephesians, and 1 & 2 Timothy which were letters written by Paul to the pastor of the Ephesian Church. As the Gospel was expanding, it was important for John, Paul, Timothy and others to remain connected to the Lord and each other. So, this year’s study is called, “Be Connected.”

Think about it. This theme of “Be Connected” is timeless. Modern believers need to know how to be connected to our God, our church community, our families, our neighborhoods, and our world. Particularly in this technological age, we are longing for deeper real-life connections.

Again this year several people from our church are joining me in writing the devotionals for this study. They will bring fresh insights and perspectives to our devotion time. Each of them is engaged in training by me, a small cohort with one another, and personal prayer as they produce what you will read and reflect on. Make sure to thank them throughout the year as you are impacted by their words.

There are several components to this year-long exploration:

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by others and me, and correlate with the daily Scripture to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
4. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, visit fishersumc.org/beconnected for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
5. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week’s readings, catch these at fishersumc.org/beconnected, in the church app, or access on your favorite podcast platform.

The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to embrace the fact that you are a child of God, called by Him to “Be Connected” with Him and others.

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor

Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

1/5/2026 - WEEK 1 DAY 1

Jesus, the Eternal Word of God: John 1:1-3

Devotional By: Dave Rizk

As a father of a teenage son navigating the storms of puberty, shifting moods, and the search for his own identity, I often struggle to know what to do. There are moments when his distance and frustration make me question if I'm failing as a parent, moments when I even consider sending him away to boarding school.

But as I read this chapter, God reminded me of a more profound truth: I need to trust in Jesus, the One who created me, saved me and sustains me every day. The same God who gave me the gift of fatherhood will also equip me to be the father my son needs. My success in raising him doesn't come from my strength, wisdom or control; it comes through Christ and His blessings.

John wrote his Gospel to believers everywhere, both Jews and Gentiles. As one of Jesus' closest disciples, he wrote with the credibility of an eyewitness. Unlike Luke, which provides a biographical account of Jesus' life, John's Gospel presents a thematic narrative to reveal who Jesus truly is: fully human, fully God and the eternal source of life. Many of John's readers came from Greek backgrounds, where mythological gods dominated culture. John boldly declared that Jesus is not merely another divine figure. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the eternal Word who became flesh, infinitely superior to all false gods.

Sometimes we may feel our lives are too complex, our problems too deep, or our pain too personal for God to understand. But the same God who created the universe is alive today and knows us intimately. Nothing is too complicated for Him. The God who formed the stars also formed you, and His love is greater than any problem you may face.

When God created, He made something out of nothing. You exist because of His creative power and divine purpose. You are valuable and unique because of God; apart from Him, you are nothing. Living without Him means missing the very purpose for which you were created.

Call to Action: Trust in Jesus as your Creator, Savior, and Sustainer. Believe in Him, walk with Him wholeheartedly, and let His light shine through you so others may know the truth of His love.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/6/2026 - WEEK 1 DAY 2

Jesus is the True Light: John 1:4-9

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

Fear of the Dark: It's a common fear. Children are often afraid of the dark. This fear of the dark carries over to adulthood, especially for women. My office had a women's lunch recently, and the question was, "what is something simple that you would do if fear was not an option." Several women said they would go outside at night without fear. We are taught in college not to take a walk or run at night. Never leave a party by yourself. Stay with your buddy. Anything can be lurking around in the dark.

The dark represents the unknown. The unknown is scary. As my parents got older, they began taking a night light with them to hotels and even to my house. The darkness in the middle of the night can be a scary place when looking for a restroom. They need night lights to guide them to the light switch.

John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it." This is a reminder that true light is greater than all darkness. We do not need to be fearful because the light will always shine.

John 1 continues talking about John the Baptist. This may not be the best analogy but maybe John is the night light. John is a witness to the light just as a night light leads the way to the light switch. John the Baptist led the way to Jesus.

Jesus is the true light. The true light that overcomes the darkness. Jesus can take away our fear of the unknown. Jesus can lead us into the light. This true light is the reason why we are born with any love or goodness. Jesus' true light is given to the world. True light always wins over darkness. What fear of darkness do you have that Jesus can lead you from?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/7/2026 - WEEK 1 DAY 3

Believers in Jesus are Children of God: John 1:10-13

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Last year our church theme was “Be God’s Family.” We learned that God has grafted us into His family through the grace of His Son Jesus. Ephesians 2:8 puts it well: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Today’s passage reinforces that truth about faith in Jesus. John 1:12 says, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Let’s get a few things straight.

First, being alive is not what makes someone a child of God. Verse 10 states, “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” Jesus was the co-creator of the entire world. Yet the world He created did not embrace Him. The false teaching of universalism (that every human will go to heaven) is exposed in this verse.

Second, being part of a Godly culture is not what makes someone a child of God. Israel had long before been declared the people of God. But verse 11 says, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Many people think they are in good standing with God simply because America has a Christian cultural bent, or because they were raised in a Christian family. That’s shaky at best.

So, we don’t become children of God by simply being alive, or by being alive in the right place. Rather, we are declared God’s children when we receive and believe. This means accepting, trusting, and following the person, works and words of Jesus.

Today the offer of Jesus is alive and well. Will you receive Him and believe in Him?

Notes

1/8/2026 - WEEK 1 DAY 4

The Word Became Flesh: John 1:14-18

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Two weeks ago today we celebrated Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ. We believe that God became a human to save us from our sins. This is called the Incarnation, which literally means “in the flesh.” Jesus, the very Word of God, the co-creator of the universe, became one of us. This truth is a key tenet of the faith for Christians down through the millennia.

Philippians 2:5-7 says, “Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God... made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

The Apostles’ Creed declares, “I believe...in Jesus Christ...who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...”

The Nicene Creed states: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God... For us and for our salvation... he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made a man.”

In today’s reading, John reminds us that Jesus was no ordinary human, saying, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

Throughout the years people have either tried to diminish the divinity of Jesus (he was only a good man), or wipe out the humanity of Jesus (he only appeared to be here). But clear Christian doctrine teaches us that Jesus was fully God AND fully human.

In a letter John wrote to believers, he once again addressed this concern: “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2-3).

Put your faith in Jesus! He is God. He is human. Indeed, “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.”

Notes

1/9/2026 - WEEK 1 DAY 5

John the Baptist Declares His Mission: John 1:19-28

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

I'm fresh from teaching a Sunday School lesson to our Senior High School students about integrity, with John the Baptist in Mark 6 provided one example. Due to John's integrity, he had a huge impact by preparing many for the coming Messiah, and his focus on Jesus led him to become a model for those trying to live the Christian life in the difficult places that we find in Acts and the Epistles.

In verses 19-21, John the author establishes who Jesus is by having John the Baptist introduce Him to us. But, before John can do that, we have to establish the credentials of this strange looking guy causing all the ruckus down by the Jordan River.

Is John credible? Is he worth listening to? Is John claiming to be the Messiah? Or is he claiming to be a prophet with a message from God about the Messiah? Those "who are you" questions are fair ones for the priests to ask.

After several "no" replies, you can almost hear John's sense of exasperation when they demand an answer to the question, "What do you say about yourself?"

John's response is classic, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" He quotes out of Isaiah effectively saying, "Who I am doesn't matter! Let me tell you what God has given me to do!"

Whenever we read a passage in Sunday school, I always ask, "What stood out to you?" Because my students are teenagers, the sound of crickets is the usual response. But the thing that stands out to me is the tremendous temptation that John refuses here.

Things have been going well. John is drawing large crowds, and influential people are coming to see him. How tempting must it have been to take credit? "Well just maybe I am the Messiah." Or, "people wouldn't be coming in droves if I didn't rank at least as high as a prophet, right?"

We all know people who accept credit for things they didn't do and how that really grates on us. I'm thinking of a certain boss in my past, and I bet you can name one too.

John refuses all that and stays true to his mission. In return, John will get to launch Jesus' ministry by baptizing Him. He will introduce us to Jesus by using seven titles like, "Lamb of God, Son of Man, and Messiah." And John will remain faithful before Herod, becoming a martyr. In so doing, he became a model for living the Christian life long after his time here was done.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/12/2026 - WEEK 2 DAY 1

John Proclaims Jesus the Messiah: John 1:29-34

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In this brief passage, John the Baptist declares many things about the identity of Jesus:

Jesus is the Lamb of God. This refers back to the book of Exodus, when the blood of a lamb was placed above the doors of God's people, protecting them from the death visiting all of Egypt.

Jesus takes away the sin of the world. Sin causes an eternal gap between us and a perfect God. No good deeds or religious practices can take that sin from us. But Jesus did just that!

Jesus existed before John. This is not a bit of confusion on John's part, who was actually six months older than Jesus. It is a recognition that Jesus existed at the creation of everything!

Jesus received the Spirit of God at His baptism. When this took place, God declared, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. When we surrender our lives to Jesus, He gives us the Spirit of God to guide and empower us for a life of service in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is God's Chosen One. He is God's anointed. He is the Messiah. He is the Christ. He is the Son of God!

Have you ever wondered if Jesus can handle all the worries and challenges of your life? Fret no more! He is Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who lived a perfect and sinless life, who died on the cross as your Savior, who rose from the dead as your Lord, who gives you the Holy Spirit for your walk with Him.

His name is Jesus!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/13/2026 - WEEK 2 DAY 2

What Do You Want?: John 1:35-39

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

When my children were young, they would follow me around the house - at or under my feet or right behind me all the time. I can remember looking down at them, slightly frustrated and saying, "What do you want?!" I thought of this as I read today's passage. Two of John's disciples had decided to follow Jesus, and scripture says in verse 38, *"Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'"* Jesus was probably not frustrated with them, but the question is the same. "What do you want?" Jesus was trying to get at their real motivation. Were they simply curious or did they truly desire to know Jesus in a more intimate way? I think it's important to note that these are Jesus' first recorded words in John's Gospel - *"What do you want?"* As followers of Jesus, this could be the most important question we ask ourselves. What am I looking for? Am I following Jesus for the right reasons? Am I simply curious or do I truly desire to know Jesus in an intimate way? What do I want?

We can also look at this passage another way. It's a wonderful picture of a discipleship journey. First, we **FOLLOW**. Then we want to **KNOW MORE**. And then we are inspired to **ACT**.

We first decide to **FOLLOW** Jesus. The two men were led to Jesus by John the Baptist. When they heard John describe Jesus as the *"Lamb of God"*, they understood who he was, and they immediately followed him. God is interested in our response. We can simply follow, or we can desire true fellowship. I also wondered - do we seek and find Jesus or does Jesus seek and find us? I was reminded of the Wesleyan concept of Prevenient Grace - God's grace that comes before our conscious decision to follow God. God is seeking and drawing us into fellowship before we even know it.

After we decide to follow Jesus, we want to **KNOW MORE**. The men asked Jesus where he was staying and he responded, *"Come and you will see"* - an invitation to an intimate relationship with him. An invitation to know him better. Spending time with Jesus is part of discipleship and as we do, we learn more about who he really is. We learn more about what it means to be a disciple.

And as disciples, we are then called to **ACT**. We are called to *"Go and make disciples of all nations."* The important word here is **"GO"**. Go out into the world and emulate John the Baptist. We should be pointing others toward Jesus.

Follow, Know, Act.

Notes

1/14/2026 - WEEK 2 DAY 3

The Evangelistic Nature of Jesus' Call: John 1:40-51

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Andrew and Philip were two of the twelve disciples of Jesus. They don't get as much recognition in the Gospels as key leaders like Peter and John. They sort of blended in with the rest.

But their contribution shouldn't be overlooked. Here we see that Andrew is the one who led his brother Peter to faith in Christ. On the heels of that, Philip brings skeptical Nathanael to Jesus. These guys were the first recorded evangelists for Christianity.

Today I received an email from my friend Steve Cordle. He is a pastor in the Pittsburgh area, and the director of the Overflow Network, an effort to spur Christian leaders and churches to win people to Christ and plant other churches. In this communication he states, "The United States has at least 175 million people living apart from Christ. That is the third largest number of any country in the world. It is highly likely that at least 50% of the people in your county are unchurched." We need more Andrews and Philips.

My oldest grandson is named Andrew. When he was a newborn, I held him in my arms and declared a prophetic word over his life, that he would live up to his name and win others to Jesus. I have done the same over my variously named other five grandchildren. And there are two more soon to arrive. A prophetic proclamation is coming their way!

Later in Jesus' ministry, Andrew and Philip are again involved in helping people meet Jesus. John 12:20-22 says, "Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.'" Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus."

My guess is that this was business as usual for Andrew and Philip. They were bringing people to Jesus at the beginning and end of his ministry. And after Jesus' ascended back to heaven, Andrew went to Greece and eastern Europe, while Philip ministered to people from Ethiopia, Syria, Turkey, and Greece.

What about you? Who lives on your street? Who do you bump into at school, work, the gym, or your favorite restaurants? Will you be like Andrew and Philip, introducing them to Jesus and inviting them to church? If you need someone to offer a prophetic prayer over you for evangelism, just let me know!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/15/2026 - WEEK 2 DAY 4

Jesus Turns Water to Wine: John 2:1-11

Devotional By: Sunni Waterman

This story of the transformation of water into wine has always amazed me. Life can be so busy, so full, even with an event where more people show up than we expect and we might need help. This seems to have been what has happened in Cana. Mary looks to her son to rectify having run out of wine for the wedding celebration. Jesus responds to her respectfully by calling Mary “woman.” This was culturally considered a formal and respectful way to address her, like we might use Ma’am. He points out that “My hour has not come yet,” indicating that he is working on a divine schedule, beyond human plans, and it just was not time for His first miracle YET. And then what does he do? He turns that water into wine, of course. Do you see why? God’s timing is perfect. In Jesus’ life and in our lives too.

Have you thought of being transformed for God’s amazing glory? Have you ever imagined yourself as a vessel of water – perhaps disappointing to wedding guests who were excited for delicious and “good wine,” not just the “poor wine” that was saved until everyone else had already drunk freely? You, my brothers and sisters in Christ, are to be transformed by God’s manifestation. Transformed to be pleasing as the good wine, poured out and drunk freely – showing the love of God as a lovely creation.

How have you allowed yourself to be poured out by God?

What parts of yourself are you holding back from God’s transformation into the good wine?

Notes

1/16/2026 - WEEK 2 DAY 5

Jesus Clears the Temple: John 2:12-25

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

Let's face it, this is a packed piece of scripture, one which is not just about the cleansing of the Temple. In my opinion, one must always approach scripture from the big picture. What is John trying to say and, specifically, what is this portion of scripture telling us? In broad strokes the book of John is about who Jesus is. It is written to prove He is the Son of God, the Messiah. Every story, every moment in this book is bent on showing exactly WHO Jesus is. Therefore, according to William Barclay, John is less concerned with timelines and specifics, but with underlining everything Jesus did or said that indicated he was the Messiah. According to Mr. Barclay, John uses the word "semeion" when he speaks of Jesus' miracles. This word means "sign". A sign tells people about the person who did it. Jesus' miracles were about WHO He is, and that is John's point.

Thus, his telling of the story of Jesus Clearing the Temple has this focus. Jesus is angry because there is no reverence in the Temple. Reverence is "deep respect for someone or something" (Oxford Language Dictionary). What with the selling of animals and the changing of money, it was a noisy, irreverent place. All of this occurred in the Court of the Gentiles. Jesus is telling the Jews that no sacrifice or money can put man right with God. And, if there were a visitor to the Temple, would they be able to find or worship God there? Was all this selling and buying reverent? Did it bring anyone closer to God?

The Jews response (and let's remember who profited from all of this) was to ask Jesus WHO gave him the authority? John underlines that Jesus is telling them that he has the authority Because He is the Messiah. His response, "Destroy this Temple and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19), is not talking about the actual Temple, though the Jews misunderstood. It is talking about Jesus and his resurrection. He is telling them that He has come to open true worship with God. Nothing man made, no sacrifice, no money, no beautiful windows, no comfy seats, no amazing music, NOTHING man has made, allows entrance to God. But He does, Anywhere, Anytime. There is much to talk about in the cleansing of the Temple, but at the root of it, John says, is the confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah and true worship is through him.

Are we guilty of missing the point? Are we too busy with how worship should be done rather than Who we are worshipping?

Notes

1/19/2026 - WEEK 3 DAY 1

Jesus and Nicodemus: John 3:1-8

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

Nicodemus is only mentioned in the gospel of John. I find this rather interesting. As you read through this devotional, see if you can find a reason why none of the other gospels talk about Nicodemus.

In John 3:3-4 Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me, unless a person is born from above, it not possible to see what I am pointing to--- to God's Kingdom." Nicodemus asked, "How can anyone be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't reenter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?" (MSG translation)

Jesus was surprised that Nicodemus, as a member of the Jewish Council, did not understand this whole idea. Jesus proceeded to explain that being born again is not from your mother's womb but that you are reborn spiritually by the Spirit, being like the wind which can come from anywhere, anyway and anytime. The wind, like the Holy Spirit, is unseen but its work is always noticeable and, like the Spirit, it has no human control.

The belief of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual rebirth from God to guide you into eternal life. I remember when I was confirmed, my sponsor placed her hand on my shoulder and I immediately felt this strange feeling. I never could understand or explain it, but after years of thinking about it and studying the Bible, I began to understand that it was the Holy Spirit taking me into adulthood and He would be with me forever, as I needed, to guide me through my spiritual life and into the eternal, hopefully.

It seems Nicodemus began to understand all that Jesus was telling him as it states in John 19:39-40, "He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of Myrrh, and aloes, about seventy-five pounds...." These verses show that he probably had begun to accept all that Jesus explained to him earlier about Jesus' death.

As I stated at the beginning, Nicodemus is only mentioned in John's gospel. I feel like John is trying to tell us that Nicodemus could be any of those unbelievers in the Bible days or from today. What are your thoughts about the Holy Spirit?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/20/2026 - WEEK 3 DAY 2

Lifted Up: John 3:9-15

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

At the end of the book of Genesis, the people of God relocated from Canaan (modern Israel) to Egypt because of a severe famine. There were seventy of them in all.

By the next page, at the beginning of the book of Exodus, it is four hundred years later. The Jews living in Egypt had become slaves, numbering in the millions. That book is about their “exodus” from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. The books of Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy is about their forty-year journey toward that promise.

But all was not well along the way. The freed Israelites grumbled against God, complained about Moses, and disobeyed the very commandments the Lord had given them. During one of their rebellious outbursts, God sent venomous snakes among them, causing fear and death. The people then acknowledged their sin and begged for a way out. God told Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live” (Numbers 21:8).

Notice the pattern. They sinned. They faced consequences (snakes). God provided rescue. They looked up and believed. They lived.

Referring to this part of their history, Jesus said, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

The pattern is repeated. We sin (everyone does). We face consequences (Hell). God provides rescue (Jesus). We look up (to the cross) and believe. We live (eternal life).

The chorus of Fanny Crosby’s great hymn says it well:

In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever,
Till my ransomed soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/21/2026 - WEEK 3 DAY 3

For God so Loved the World: John 3:16-21

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

God loved us so much that he gave us "the light." He brought us his powerful wisdom through his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

When I've always read this passage, in the past, I've always focused on the need to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. That is extremely important. This time, after including the rest of the passage, through verse 21, I'm seeing additional focus on the wisdom of God through Christ Jesus. When first reading John he writes "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." I believe The Word was, and is, God's wisdom in Christ, and is deeper that I can ever understand. I often pray for myself, or for others, that God blesses us with discernment. That discernment is more wise and beneficial than any understanding that I have or will ever have.

In the past I've been blessed to learn that God answers prayer in ways far better than for what was actually prayed. Once many of us met and prayed for healing with a friend of our church. We met with our pastors and prayed and laid hands on him as he lay in his hospital bed. A few weeks later he passed away. We couldn't understand why our prayers weren't answered. At his eulogy, a pastor that none of us knew, stood up and introduced himself as his brother. He told us that his brother had never accepted Christ and that on the day we all prayed over him, he accepted Christ and was saved. His body hadn't been healed but his soul was healed. That was a far better answer to our prayer than anything we could have imagined.

God blesses us with wisdom that is better than anything we can imagine.

Dear Loving Father, thank you for blessing us daily. We pray, Lord, that you help us understand when and how we've been blessed. Give us discernment, Lord, that we might see your power, your love, and your caring in each of our lives. Amen

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/22/2026 - WEEK 3 DAY 4

Getting Cleansed by Jesus: John 3:22-26

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

About thirty years ago I went to West Lafayette with some guys from my church to attend a Purdue football game. We walked past the 92,000 square foot football indoor practice facility. I asked the men from my church, "When are you going to build me one of these?" One of them piped up, "We you start drawing 50,000 people on a Sunday." Wise guys.

Their comments point to a flawed formula for humanity: achieve more, receive more. John's disciples seemed to be zeroing in on this concept. Jesus and His disciples were outpacing John and his disciples on the baptism head count. You can almost hear John's friends: "We're losing our people. We're losing our influence. We're losing our mojo."

Added to this, John's disciples were in an argument with somebody over ceremonial washing. These purification rites were important to the Pharisees and other religious leaders. Just recently Jesus had turned water into wine, using "six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing" (John 2:6). While Jesus was using the waters of purification rites for His first miracle, apparently John was being challenged for baptizing in a way that the religious leaders disapproved.

Perhaps to cover for this tension, John's disciples pointed out that Jesus' disciples were doing the same thing, even to a greater degree. Whether it was tension with a religious leader or jealousy toward Jesus' followers, the disciples of John missed the main point. It's all about Jesus!

By the way, Joel Osteen is the pastor of a church in Houston with 45,000 attendees. They bought him a sports complex.

Notes

1/23/2026 - WEEK 3 DAY 5

I Must Become Less: John 3:27-36

Devotional By: Dan Henke

"He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less." This verse was the theme of the 2010 High School Mission trip, which was called "More or Less." Yes, I still have the t-shirt.

This is a profound passage, revealing a great deal about John the Baptist, and what our relationship with Jesus should be like. John the Baptist had been preaching of the coming Good News. He had followers. He was drawing crowds and baptizing them. He was controversial. Back in the day, John the Baptist was what passed for being a "celebrity."

But John knew Jesus, and I mean he REALLY knew Jesus. It was more than that they were related. Even while in the womb, John leapt for joy when Mary came to stay with Elizabeth. In his calling, John the Baptist consistently preached that he was only the messenger preparing the way for Jesus, who was far greater than him. John the Baptist not only knew Jesus, but he also understood who Jesus was as Son of God.

So, when Jesus begins His ministry, John the Baptist's followers and the crowds begin to follow Jesus instead. John is good with that, which is so contrary to earthly human nature. So often this situation would lead to jealousy and resentment, not celebration. With the words, "I must become less" John showed the real core of Christian faith; it is humility.

John (the Apostle) follows John the Baptist's statement with the explanation why John the Baptist got it right: "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all." John the Baptist says not only must Jesus become more in the world, but He must also become more in our hearts.

If someone asks if your heart follows Jesus, the answer should not be "more or less." Jesus needs to be more.

Notes

1/26/2026 - WEEK 4 DAY 1

Jesus Meets the Woman at the Well: John 4:1-26

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

It was just an ordinary day for this woman of Samaria. Daily she would fetch water from Jacob's well. However, this special day would prove to be life changing. She would meet Jesus, the Son of God.

In today's passage, Jesus leaves Judea and stops in Sychar, "near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph" (v. 4). Resting at a well, Jesus meets this woman who approaches the well to draw water for her household. Jesus asks the woman for a drink of water, but she is startled that a Jewish man would talk to her. She asks Jesus, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (v. 9). Jesus answers her that if she knew the gift of God and who is talking to her, she would have asked Him for more than just this well water.

The woman doesn't understand she is talking to the Son of God. She is just focused on the water in the well. Jesus tells her, "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" (13-14; Rev. 21:6).

The woman tells Jesus, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (v. 15).

Jesus tells the woman to go home and bring back her husband. Jesus knows her needs and spiritual condition and reminds her that she already has had five husbands and now living with another man who is not her husband. Exposing her sin, Jesus tells her that "a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (v. 23). At the end of their conversation, Jesus tells her who he is. "I, the one speaking to you—I am he" (v. 26). Realizing Jesus is a prophet (the Christ, 6:14), she repents of her sins and acknowledges Jesus as her Messiah. Finally, her thirst for everlasting life has been quenched by her acceptance of Jesus as her Savior.

Like the woman at the well
I was seeking for things that could not satisfy.
And then I heard my Savior speaking
"Draw from My well that never shall run dry...."
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.
(Richard Blanchard)

Notes

1/27/2026 - WEEK 4 DAY 2

Jesus Talks about the Spiritual Harvest: John 4:27-38

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

Jesus is on a roll. In yesterday's passage (John 4:1-26) He not only spoke to an unmarried Samaritan woman (a cultural misstep for a Jewish man), He also told her that He was the Christ, and He had water for drinking that would cause her never to go thirsty again. Today, He tells His disciples, who are worried that Jesus hasn't eaten, that His food is completing the work for which God sent Him.

Modern crop farming requires tremendous discipline. The ground must be turned, seeds planted, fertilized, nourished by rain and sunlight, and harvest collected within specific time windows. If any of the steps are delayed, missed, or applied in excess or underabundance, the yield can be diminished or ruined. While completing this work, a sophisticated farmer also must figure out how much of the crop to sell and at what price on the futures market before the first seed is planted. Guess wrong, and come harvest time, the farmer may be purchasing a lot of grain at market prices and giving away most of the profit for the year. A lack of adequate crop insurance can be a disaster in the event of a severe flood. Too much insurance can erode profits in the event of a "normal" year in terms of rain, sun, insects, and disease.

In the previous paragraph, I describe the mentality of the disciples when Jesus admonishes them in verse 35 of today's passage. He says, "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." He is imploring them to think in terms of the spiritual and not the physical. This verse makes me think of another from Matthew 6:26 in which Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" By putting our faith in God, we are trusting Him to take care of both our physical and spiritual needs.

Verse 38 of today's passage gives me hope. While I haven't personally seen many people to whom I've witnessed come to Jesus, this verse reminds me that I can be both a sower and a reaper. If I work in the spiritual fields, I can either plant seeds in the sense that I introduce others to Christ, or I can reap the harvest in the sense of bringing them to conversion. Either way, work the fields!

Are there areas of your life that cause you to focus on the physical (or "worldly") fields at the expense of the spiritual ones?

Notes

1/28/2026 - WEEK 4 DAY 3

Many Samaritans Believe in Jesus: John 4:39-42

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

The Great Commission - *"Go and make disciples of all nations."* We're not told to make disciples of our town, our state, or our country but ALL NATIONS. In this passage, John is telling us of the worldwide mission of Jesus. He was not only the Savior of the Jews but of the Samaritans as well. Jesus said, *"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."* (John 10:16) Jesus is the Savior of all. He is not only Savior of Americans, but of Mexicans, Kenyans, Iranians and Palestinians. He's not only Savior of those who speak English but of those who speak Spanish, Swahili, Arabic, and Hebrew. As followers of Christ, we are to lead people to Jesus, no matter who they are. In this passage, John gives us two ways we can accomplish this.

First is personal testimony. This is so important that "witness" was added to the United Methodist membership vows in 2008. Verse 39 tells us that many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. Her experience with Jesus and her witness led many to believe. But why would they believe her? She was outcast from society because she was a woman. She was outcast from the Jews because she was a Samaritan. And she was outcast from her own Samaritan people because of her life choices. So, her testimony must have been extremely compelling. And the people believed her. The emotional testimony of this woman opened the door for Jesus to touch countless more people. What ways can you find to share your testimony with those around you?

Second, we are to guide people toward their own personal experience with Jesus. For some, the woman's testimony spurred their interest. So much so that they invited Jesus to stay with them. A Jew invited to stay with Samaritans was unheard of. But then their personal encounter with Jesus convinced them that he was *"the Savior of the world."* The Samaritans were moved from simply hearing about Jesus toward a profound faith built on their own experience of coming to know and experience Christ for themselves. Remember the Apostle Paul's personal experience with Jesus while on the road to Damascus? After his encounter, *"At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God."* (Acts 9:20) Have you had your own personal experience with Jesus along your own "Damascus Road"?

Jesus changes us! And those changes become evident to others. Then they become curious as to why we are different. Use those opportunities to point people to Christ.

Notes

1/29/2026 - WEEK 4 DAY 4

Jesus Preaches in Galilee: John 4:43-45

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In Jesus' time, the land we know as Israel had three territories. In the south was Judea, with the important Biblical cities of Jericho, Bethany, Bethlehem (His birthplace), and Jerusalem. Jesus had traveled to the holy city where he cleansed the temple (John 2) and spoke with Nicodemus (John 3).

In the north was the territory known as Galilee, which contained the cities of Nazareth (His hometown), Cana (His first miracle) and Capernaum (His ministry headquarters).

Between Galilee and Judea was the region known as Samaria, made up of a mixed-race of people with Jewish and foreign blood. They were considered impure people by the Jews from Galilee and Judea. But Jesus didn't see it that way. He took time to get to know a Samaritan woman and the residents of her village (John 4).

In today's reading, Jesus simply returns home to Galilee, where he is welcomed warmly. We know from the four Gospels that Jesus had some of His greatest successes (miracles, healings, teachings, recruiting disciples) and some of His greatest challenges (hometown rejection, conflicts with Pharisees, family confusion) in Galilee. He just kept going home.

It can be tempting to only attempt things that we are assured will bring positive results. Many people don't talk about their faith or invite friends to church or introduce people to Jesus because of fear. Indeed, our fears of failure, rejection, or ridicule outweigh the potential that our neighbors, friends, and family will get saved and become followers of Jesus.

Think about it. Jesus knew that He would have "no honor in his own country." Yet He returned anyway. Why?

If the Lord told you to pack your bags and move away to a new mission field, what would you say to Him? What about if He told you to swallow your pride and share your faith with somebody right where you live?

Galilee is wherever you live. It is filled with people who will surrender their lives to God if only you help them get there. It is also filled with people who will reject God and you in the process. What will you do about it?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

1/30/2026 - WEEK 4 DAY 5

Jesus Heals the Official's Son: John 4:46-54

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I love that the royal official had the faith to trust that Jesus' power was so strong that simply saying the words could cause healing to take place. The official had more faith than most of Jesus' followers had. The miracle wasn't Jesus' healing. The miracle was the faith shown by the gentile, the royal official, who was not Jewish and had no training in Scripture, but believed.

There are people we care for that we'd love to see accept Jesus Christ as God's Son. We try to show them the way. We try to help them see the true Jesus. No matter how hard we try, they don't always accept Him. It's been shared with me that we plant the seed, but God nourishes the seed, and it's God who brings them forward. When I look back on my spiritual life, I know of many individuals that planted the seed of understanding in my heart. What I also know, is that God grew that seed within me. My Spiritual life has grown because of other's influence, but it is God that gives me the hunger to learn more, recognize his love, and draw me closer to Him.

Holy God, I pray that you guide each of us in word and deed that we may be seed planters, in others, to allow you to grow your Spirit within them. If it is in your will, may we see them grow spiritually in you. Amen

Notes

2/2/2026 - WEEK 5 DAY 1

Jesus Heals a Lame Man by a Pool: John 5:1-15

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

I work for the state legislature, and my job is to support the computer needs of the legislators and staff of both parties. Yesterday, I was walking in a statehouse tunnel to do some work when I was politely but firmly advised by the Secret Service that I would be walking no closer to where the Vice President was meeting with other political leaders!

Today, I read this verse again and wondered what if the Vice President did not come to Indianapolis to go to the statehouse, but rather he went directly to Riley Children's Hospital? A hospital is not where we would expect to see the VP, and the Sheep Gate pool is not where we would expect Jesus.

Typically, we might think Jesus would be talking with the Priests and Rabbis, performing rituals or making sacrifices. But, there He was, doing what He had done throughout His ministry: hanging out with sinners, forgiving sins and healing people like this man at the Sheep Gate pool.

Jesus had been telling people the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matt3:2, Matt 4:17, Mark 1:15), and here He was creating a little pocket of heaven for a man who had suffered for thirty-eight years. That was certainly good news for this man.

The good news for us is Jesus was on His way to the cross to absorb our sins. He would become the temple so we could go into God's presence without going to Jerusalem and making an animal sacrifice.

The best news is this was all part of God's master plan to reunite us with Him by ending the present age of sin and death. Revelation tells us Jesus will redeem all of human history in a renewed creation where God's space and human space completely overlap again. (Tim Mackey).

Before the end of the age, you might find yourself in a place like I did yesterday wondering to yourself, "well, how did I get here?" Then ask yourself an even better question, "how can I follow the model of Jesus and change somebody's world?" I am not sure what that looks like exactly, but we can start imitating our Savior's example by placing ourselves with people who cannot return our generosity, making time and taking the energy to heal others with kindness and pointing them to the One who can forgive sins.

Notes

2/3/2026 - WEEK 5 DAY 2

Life's Most Important Question: John 5:16-23

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

Who is Jesus? Have you ever thought about it? As a child I knew Jesus loved me because of the song that we sang. As an adult He is my redeemer, friend, Savior, protector, and I could go on and on.

This is one of most frequently asked questions in human history. According to Tobin Perry (Word by Word) it is likely more books have been written on this topic than any other. It is more than just a popular topic. You literally cannot ask a more important question.

In our Scripture today, John is wanting to clarify the nature of who Jesus is and to clearly explain what he saw so that we can make our own decisions about Jesus. People commonly misunderstand Jesus. It happened back then and is still happening today because people either:

1. Underemphasize Jesus' divine nature assuming Jesus is just a mere human.
2. Overemphasize Jesus' divine nature, as the Jews are doing in this Scripture, proposing that Jesus is claiming that he is the replacement for God.

Jesus and God are in perfect harmony. The Son can do nothing that is inconsistent with the attributes of God the Father because he is ONE with God the Father. Jesus is given the authority to "Give Life". The Jewish leaders believed only God could do this. Jesus was also given the authority "to Judge".

Jesus clarifies his divinity. These are very important as they define the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son.

1. The Son serves the Father.
2. The Father reveals things like knowledge.
3. The Son has the power to give life.
4. The Son is given the right to judge.

Once we understand the joint relationship between the Father and the Son then we can appreciate their joint purpose. They came to communicate with humanity to bring us back into a divine relationship.

Jesus the Son and God the Father are One and those who believe His word have eternal life, while those who don't stand condemned. You can have all the right books, sing songs all day long, pray all day, say all the right things and attend all the meetings, but ultimately if you don't know Jesus you will be missing out on Heaven and eternal life. Do you know Jesus?

Notes

2/4/2026 - WEEK 5 DAY 3

Jesus Promises Eternal Life to Believers: John 5:24-30

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "verily" means "truly," "in truth," or "really." The repetition, "verily, verily," is a Biblical way of emphasizing importance and certainty. In this passage, Jesus is telling us to get ready to listen to His important message about eternal life and deliverance from condemnation by faith in Him. Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life" (v. 24).

When I was 21, I personally accepted Christ as my Savior. At that moment, I had an eternal home in Heaven. Hallelujah! I believe this new life in Christ is more than a future reward, "but a present reality experienced by a transformed quality of life and a relationship with God that continues into the afterlife" (Spurgeon).

Recently, I read a devotional about this new life in Christ. When we accept Christ as Savior, we become "two people on the inside." We have the mind, emotions, and will that we were physically born with, but we now also have the mind, emotions, and will of Christ within us. "We have a spiritual 'implant' of the life of Jesus Christ within our bodies, in the person of the Holy Spirit" (A. G. Lotz). This implanting of the life of Christ is a supernatural miracle. It is something God does in response to our humble confession and sincere repentance of sin coupled with our deliberate, personal faith in His Son (Lotz). Upon accepting Christ as Savior, we die to self. "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

This new life in Christ offers us a personal relationship with God. "Now this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). If you're a believer, you have eternal life right now. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new Creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). This doesn't take anything away from Heaven, but we are supposed to have "a close, intimate, personal relationship with God our Father and Jesus Christ His Son right now. It's not 'pie in the sky by and by' but rather 'steak on your plate while you wait'" (Spurgeon). Praise the Lord! This new and everlasting life is found only through faith in Him as our personal Savior.

Are you living in a close relationship now with Christ as though you were already in Heaven?

Notes

2/5/2026 - WEEK 5 DAY 4

Jesus' Testimony is from John: John 5:31-35

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

"Are you sure you're old enough to do this?"

When I became the pastor of my first church, I was only 24 years old. It was a fair question that I heard repeatedly. What they didn't know is that I would turn 25 just three weeks after my first day on the job. Maybe then I would be old enough.

"Did you really go to Duke?"

This was another fair question. My first church was a small one. They had recently had a series of short-term pastors. An attorney in the church quipped, "I assumed it was some tiny Duke Bible College nobody had ever heard of."

"Do you know what you are doing?"

I heard this one a lot too. The answer was no.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was questioned much more intensely than I ever was.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

"Don't you know you shouldn't do miracles on the Sabbath?"

"Are you really saying you are equal with God?"

"Where did you get your authority?" In other words, "Do you know what you are doing?"

His answer was yes. In part, His authority came from John the Baptist. John testified that Jesus existed before time, was God's anointed Messiah, and would baptize people with the power of the Holy Spirit. All those accusing Jesus were familiar with John's public proclamations about Jesus. If the skeptics wouldn't believe in the miraculous works of Jesus, certainly they should trust in the prophetic words of John.

They didn't.

Do you?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

2/6/2026 - WEEK 5 DAY 5

Jesus' Testimony is from God: John 5:36-47

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Yesterday we saw how John the Baptist gave testimony about the identity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Here Jesus adds several others to the witness stand backing up His claim to be equal with God.

The testimony of Jesus' works (v 36). Here's an idea: Get a highlighter and go through the four Gospels, marking every miracle of Jesus. You will be overwhelmed with the divine power of Jesus!

The testimony of God Himself (v. 37-38, 41-44). Now take a different color highlighter and mark the ways that God the Father promotes and proclaims the person, works and words of Jesus. Wow!

The testimony of Scripture (v. 39, 45-47). You guessed it. Grab a third highlighter. This time look at the cross-references to other Scriptures related to the Gospel verses about Jesus. Follow them to the Old Testament and other New Testament verses, and mark them up. Warning: this one will take you a very long time to complete. But if you do, you will be floored. There are hundreds of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. Those questioning Him knew those passages.

When I was in college, I read Josh McDowell's book, "Evidence that Demands a Verdict." His book laid out many of the core tenets of the Christian faith, providing Scriptural evidence for the veracity of those claims. It challenged my scientific, evidence-based brain!

If you were on a jury presented with evidence about who Jesus claimed to be, what would you say? Would you point to the rest of the Bible to find proof that His claims to be God are true? Would you look at the words and works of Jesus Himself? Or would you toss up your hands and say it's too hard to figure out?

Here's how Jesus put it: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

Notes

BE CONNECTED

2/9/2026 - WEEK 6 DAY 1

Jesus Feeds 5,000: John 6:1-15

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

Every one of Jesus's miracles is impossible to comprehend, but I find this one particularly fascinating. He started with two fish and five small barley loaves, fed 5,000, and had leftover pieces enough to fill twelve baskets. I don't know about the size of the baskets, but I'm pretty sure that filling twelve meant more food existed after eating than before.

From high school physics class, the law of conservation of mass says that mass can neither be created nor destroyed by chemical reactions or physical changes. This miraculous occurrence definitely did not adhere to that law. While incredible, God's initial "miracle" massively (pun intended) broke the same law. Genesis 1:1 reminds us that, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

5,000 is also an interesting number for consideration. The two largest cities near the Sea of Galilee (where this miracle took place) during Jesus's time were Capernaum (population of about 1,500) and Bethsaida (population of a few hundred). A literal number of 5,000 people probably represented the largest collection of humans the local residents had ever seen, and they were all gathered in one place. The fact that Jesus calmly took five loaves and two fish and fed everyone with food to spare would have been an awe-inspiring moment.

In times of trouble when something on our plate requires nothing short of a miracle, it is important to remember Philippians 4:13 which says, "I can do all this through Him who gives me strength." How true. John 1:1 reminds us that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If he can feed 5,000 with very little food, let alone create the entire universe out of the Word, imagine how He can help you navigate life.

Are you facing a particularly difficult challenge? Have you asked for God's guidance? Have you put your trust in Him knowing the outcome fits His plan?

Notes

2/10/2026 - WEEK 6 DAY 2

Jesus Walks on Water: John 6:16-21

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

Have you ever found yourself struggling? When I was a kid, I would often want to do something that I wasn't big enough or old enough to do. My father would stand by and watch and just about the time I thought I couldn't finish, there he would be, lending a helping hand and encouraging me to continue. I could do it - whatever it was. He loved me enough to watch me learn as I struggled and knew just when he was needed.

This story is just about that. It's not a story about Jesus walking on water, it's about what Jesus does and who He is. Remember that is John's focus. This story must have brought him comfort long after Jesus had risen. Just like my father's memories do for me. In this simple story John is telling us that Jesus watches over us. He was on the hillside, He had told them to go on ahead (Mark) and after disbursing the crowd of 5000 He walked toward the seashore.

While the NIV says, "walking on the water", William Barclay says that the Greek "epi tes thalases" means - "walking on the seashore". [It can also mean "walking on the sea"]. When the disciples saw Him, He was watching them, watching their struggle and when it almost became too much He called out "It is I, don't be afraid". Just like my father, Jesus was watching over those He loved and when needed he supported them. He helped them by encouraging them to continue until they reached the safe place. The place by His side.

This story is about how Jesus watches over us, comes to us when needed, helps us in our struggles and brings us into His safe place. I am a lucky person who had a father who mirrored this behavior for me. Because of my father I can understand just how Jesus loves us, watches over us, comes when needed (even when we don't ask), and helps us through His word until we reach the safe place. This may not be a physical place like the arms of my Dad, but a place where we can continue on, knowing that we are loved by our God and He has sent someone to watch over us .

When you struggle, do you know He is watching over you? That He will come and help and bring you into the safety of His Love? If so, who can you mirror this to? I am a very lucky person but so are you for we both have the gift of Jesus watching over us.

Notes

2/11/2026 - WEEK 6 DAY 3

Jesus is the True Bread from Heaven: John 6:22-40

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

Remember the sourdough craze of the 2020 quarantine. I am a few years late, but for me it's the sourdough craze of 2025. I love baking bread. Sandwich sourdough bread and cinnamon raisin sourdough bread are my favorites. When I want to make a treat, sourdough blueberry muffins or sourdough blueberry scones are my go-to recipes. I love baking bread for my family. They even know that if they want something, all they need to do is ask and in 2 -3 days, I'll have fresh bread or a treat for them. When I have a friend having a rough time, I love surprising them with muffins or bread.

Bread is considered a dietary staple. A person can live a long time on bread and water alone. Bread is enough to keep someone alive. But that is all. Deuteronomy 8:3 stays "It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. "Whoever comes to me will never go hungry". Jesus was not talking about bread. Jesus was talking of eternal life. He uses this analogy because just as bread sustains our life on earth, Jesus sustains our heavenly life. At the time, people remembered the story of Moses and manna, the bread from heaven. Jesus clarified that it was not Moses who provided the bread from heaven, but God who provided that manna. This was also not the bread to bring eternal life.

I know that my family needs the bread from Heaven. We need Jesus. This is what we believe. This is what we know to be true. Jesus is the bread of life, and all who believe in Him shall have eternal life.

Sourdough takes patience. Sourdough takes daily care. I feed my sourdough starter every day. If I do not, it takes several days to bring it back to "life." Just like the sourdough, we need to talk to and have time with Jesus every day. We need daily "feedings" of God's word to sustain us with the bread of life. As the Lord's Prayer reaffirms, "Give us this day our daily bread."

For bread to sustain my family, I will continue to bake bread. If anyone wants or needs bread, just call, I will bake you a loaf. But if you need more than life on earth, if you need eternal life, turn to Jesus.

Notes

2/12/2026 - WEEK 6 DAY 4

People Disagree that Jesus is from Heaven: John 6:41-59

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In Exodus 13-14, God led His people through the Red Sea on dry ground. In Exodus 20, God gave them the Ten Commandments. What did the people do between these two manifestations of God's power and presence? They grumbled.

In Exodus 16:3 they complained, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

So, God rained down bread from heaven called manna (meaning "What is it?"). The Bible says manna "was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey" (Exodus 16:31). This food sustained them for the next forty years, until they entered the Promised Land. It was an iconic part of Israel's history of receiving God's provision.

In today's passage, Jesus makes a sharp statement. He says that everyone who ate manna died. It was only temporary sustenance. Then Jesus said that His own flesh and blood were a different kind of bread from heaven, a sustenance that would result in eternal life.

When my dad was nearing the end of his life, his Alzheimer's disease progressively took away his memories. At first, he couldn't remember what he had said a few minutes before. Later, he couldn't remember that he had been a truck driver, or that we had tended a huge garden. Near the end, he often didn't know me or mom. Finally, he forgot how to swallow. Unable to eat, his life ebbed away.

But this I know. When my dad fell asleep for the last time on earth, he woke up in the blessings of heaven. The bread of earth could no longer sustain him. But the Bread of Life, Jesus, welcomed him with open arms. As Jesus promised, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day" (v. 44).

Notes

2/13/2026 - WEEK 6 DAY 5

Many Disciples Desert Jesus: John 6:60-71

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

In today's passage, Jesus had just informed his disciples that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood (which he declared to be true food and true drink). Today, we are accustomed to this sacred practice (John 6:54-56) that we call communion or the Lord's supper, but imagine hearing it for the first time and trying to understand what Jesus meant by saying that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching; who can accept it?'" (John 6:60) Jesus gives a very minimal explanation: "The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63).

"From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." (John 6:66) Instead of a lengthy explanation, Jesus asks a question to the remaining twelve- "You do not want to go too, do you?" (John 6:67) I love Peter's reply to Jesus. He simply says, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68)

The Bible doesn't say anything about Peter getting a satisfactory explanation about the drinking of blood and eating of flesh that was so offensive that others walked away. He had already committed to following Jesus, and that was that. He apparently didn't need an explanation or to understand everything. He knew that Jesus was who he said he was and he believed him. He would stick by him even when he didn't understand.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that understanding is not required for the sacrament to be effective. The command was "Take, eat"; not "Take, understand." Right after Jesus was born, he was wrapped in soft cloths laid in a cattle feed box. Could this small detail have symbolized the fact that he would be the believer's true food? I'm glad that when I come up against things in the Bible that puzzle me or are too difficult to understand, I come back to this verse and agree with Peter. Does anyone else have a better plan? (NO) Do I know and believe that Jesus IS the Holy One and I can trust him in all things? (YES). I am satisfied with Jesus' answer. This metaphor of feeding on Jesus is beautiful, mysterious and wonderful. I'll take, eat and stick by Jesus even when I don't fully understand.

Notes

2/16/2026 - WEEK 7 DAY 1

The Timing of Jesus: John 7:1-9

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

Isn't timing such an interesting thing in this world? This Sunday I was listening to Fishers UMC Bell Choir and thought everybody had to have the right timing to ring their bell[s] to make that song sound so beautiful. The same thing is true for our Fishers UMC choir when they sing. They need to be on the same part of the song to have it sound so elegant. I have been a Stephen Minister in the past and knowing how to say something that might be fragile for the client to hear very much depends on your timing. Sometimes that timing works and other times it does not.

In our Scripture today, Jesus tells his brothers it is not his time to go up to the feast. The brothers are misguided by their own desire to have Jesus reveal himself in their way and in their time. This is how some people feel today. They like the idea of Jesus, just Jesus on their terms, and not on his. They like a Jesus that doesn't testify that their works are evil. They like a Jesus who doesn't confront them in their sin.

Even as believers, we can feel this way at times in our flesh. "Jesus, I want to follow you and obey, but just not with this one thing, or in this one area, or just not this sin." As Christians it is our place to accept Jesus in his way, upon his terms. Jesus would not be manipulated by his brothers to deviate from doing the will of the Father. The lesson Jesus is teaching us here is that we ought not let anybody pressure us into doing what is wrong no matter how many there are, and no matter how close. Stay strong and obey God.

So why did the timing matter that much in this text? It mattered at least for one reason, that Jesus was sent to do the will of his Father who sent him. Jesus was on his mission of redemption. He came to save us and pay the price for our sin on the cross. Now is the time for salvation and to receive his sacrifice for sin. Now is the time to celebrate God's goodness and the many blessings he bestows upon us. There is much joy, laughing, dancing and freedom in Christ and what he provides for us. God's timing is perfect.

Notes

2/17/2026 - WEEK 7 DAY 2

Confusion Over the Identity of Jesus: John 7:10-20

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In the old game show, "To Tell the Truth," celebrity panelists questioned three contestants to determine which one of them is telling the truth about having an unusual occupation. In another old show, "What's My Line?" celebrity panelists questioned one contestant to figure out that person's occupation. You can tell how I spent my childhood.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus seems caught in a perpetual game show, with celebrity panelists (Jewish religious leaders) pummeling Him with questions and accusations about His true identity. A few of them are in today's passage.

Some said, "He is a good man." Others chided, "He is a deceiver."

But the most pointed accusation was aimed at Jesus directly, "You are demon-possessed" This indictment was leveled at Jesus again later, after He had healed a man born blind. Unimpressed, many of the celebrity panelists said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" (John 10:20).

How could people be so confused to mistake the Son of God who was filled with the Spirit for a raving lunatic who was possessed by demons? Something seems off here.

Or does it? When confronted with Jesus, there really is no middle ground. Either you believe He is God incarnate, or you don't. Either you see Him as the Savior of the world, or you don't. Either you follow Him as the Lord of your life, or you don't.

While it may seem kinder and gentler to call him a good man than a demonic man, both are a complete miss from seeing Him as the Son of God. While it may be less harsh to call him deceptive than raving mad, both are a far cry from acknowledging Him as the perfect Lamb of God.

Will the real Jesus please stand up?

Notes

2/18/2026 - WEEK 7 DAY 3

Confusion Over the Ministry of Jesus: John 7:21-31

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Yesterday we explored some of the confusion over the identity of Jesus. There was also dissension over the ministry of Jesus. Did He have the authority to do miracles? Did He have the right to do them on the Sabbath?

Their confusion was rooted in Jesus' origin story. They knew where Jesus was from, or at least they thought they did. He grew up in the backwater town of Nazareth and was raised by a carpenter. Hardly the credentials for a bona fide rabbi, much less a miracle worker.

What they couldn't grasp was that Jesus' origin story predated time itself. They couldn't fathom that He came from heaven, where "through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). They couldn't comprehend that He was God incarnate.

When you see Jesus as just a nobody from nowhere, then of course it is illogical that He could turn water into wine, heal all kinds of people, walk on water, or rise from the dead. But when you acknowledge Him as God who came down from heaven and became a human, then all these miracles are child's play.

Some people look at the miracles in Scripture and say, "Ah, that's why I can't believe the Bible." Others examine those same miracles and proclaim, "Yes, that's evidence that God's Word is true!"

In a sentence or two, answer these simple questions:

Who is Jesus?

What did Jesus do?

Why did Jesus do these things?

What does this mean for my life?

Notes

2/19/2026 - WEEK 7 DAY 4

Confusion Over Jesus' Message: John 7:32-36

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

There are times when reading scripture, I wonder how the people of Jesus' day could be so blind. How they, and even his disciples, couldn't understand his message. Can't they see it? It's so obvious! But then I remember: I've read the book! I know the ending. Hindsight is 20/20, right? So, let's take a step back.

In this passage, the Pharisees were confused. They didn't understand who Jesus was. As they were walking in and around the people, they were noticing conversations, and murmuring, and whispering about this man Jesus. There was growing interest and wonder in his teaching. Some were even calling him "Savior". Feeling threatened by this admiration, and afraid they might lose their power, they conspired with the chief priests and sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus. Knowing they could arrest anyone breaking any of the 613 laws imposed on the Jews or simply for causing a disturbance, it certainly wouldn't be hard to find something to arrest him for.

The chief priests and Pharisees apparently followed the guards to where Jesus was speaking. They heard him say, *"You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."* This confused them even more. Over-estimating their influence and power, they could not imagine there was anywhere Jesus could go that they could not exercise that authority and hunt him down.

And then they speculate that Jesus might be talking about leaving Israel. Could he *"go where our people live scattered among the Greeks?"* When the Jews were exiled in 722 and 586 BC, many did not return to their homeland. Some stayed in Babylon while others moved even further west into Greece. So, there were more Jews living outside of Judea and Galilee than inside. The Jews were spread among the Gentiles throughout their known world. For the Pharisees and chief priests, this was concerning. On the one hand, if he did this, Jesus would be gone, and their problem would be gone as well. But, if Jesus were to expand his influence to those outside of Israel, and even the Greeks, he could become even more significant and thus threaten their power even more.

But again, they just did not understand. Jesus was talking about something much more significant - something more "heavenly". Jesus' scope is much wider than Palestine or even the Roman world. Jesus was talking about returning to *"the one who sent (Him)."* He was talking about returning to his Father, a place that they could not go.

What do we not understand about Jesus? In what ways do we look for Jesus but not find him today? Are we looking in the wrong places?

Notes

2/20/2026 - WEEK 7 DAY 5

Confusion Over the Heritage of Jesus: John 7:37-52

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

So far in John 7 we have seen...

...confusion over the identity of Jesus ("He is a good man," "He is a deceiver," "He is demon-possessed," and here "He is the Prophet," and "He is the Messiah."),

...confusion over the ministry of Jesus (Did He have the authority to do miracles and the right to do them on the Sabbath?),

...and confusion over the message of Jesus ("What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come?'").

Now we see confusion over the heritage Jesus promised to His followers ("What did He mean when He said, 'Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them?'"). They just couldn't wrap their minds around what Jesus was saying. The Apostle John clears up the confusion in verse 39: "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."

A few days ago we looked at some questions about the person and works of Jesus. Now, think about these questions related to the words and promises of Jesus:

Who is Jesus?

Why did Jesus come?

What did Jesus say?

What did Jesus promise?

Which of these questions are you wrestling with most? Which brings you the greatest confusion? The biggest comfort? The most joy?

As a response to the identity and activity of Jesus, some wanted to worship Him and others wanted to seize Him. Some proclaimed Him the Messiah and others said He was demon-possessed. Still others took the middle ground and just said He was a good man. What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

2/23/2026 - WEEK 8 DAY 1

Jesus Forgives an Adulterous Woman: John 8:1-11

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I often pray for forgiveness. Sometimes, after I am forgiven, I still pray for forgiveness again, for the same sin. I guess the big question is "Why don't I feel forgiven, if I ask again?"

The adulterous woman had committed a sin that the Pharisees saw as unforgivable. They wanted her stoned to death. Jesus reached deep into their minds when he replied "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." I think we would be a lot like the people there if we tried to think of ourselves as without sin. As innocent as we'd like to be viewed, we've all sinned, and God knows it. When we really think about it, we know it as well.

The big question to consider is: can we really believe, in our hearts, that Jesus would forgive us and forget our sin? The bigger question is can we accept the fact that Jesus can forgive and forget our sin when we can't? God's grace and love for us is unlimited. When we view the big picture and think of our ETERNAL life in God's presence, we sure would like those memories erased and forgotten. I want to forget my forgiven sin as much as God forgets it. Gone forever!

Dear loving and forgiving God, please help me erase my sins that you've forgiven. Help each of us to block out memory of forgiven sins that we might strive to live a more Holy life in your presence. Prepare us, Lord, to live in your eternal glory. Amen

Notes

BE CONNECTED

2/24/2026 - WEEK 8 DAY 2

Jesus is the Light of the World: John 8:12-20

Devotional By: Sunni Waterman

In the midst of many huge life-altering changes right now, I sometimes find myself standing in the middle of my living room trying to remember which small daily task I was working on. Was I writing the grocery list? Did I have laundry to move to the dryer? I have started using breath prayers to help me focus. I close my eyes in confusion. Inhale: Lord, be near me. Exhale: Help me find clarity. And like a lightbulb, God answers, re-centers me, and I move forward.

What is the first thing you do when you get lost? Or when the power goes out? Do you reach for your phone? Do you light up a flashlight? Do you ever reach for a candle and a match to light it? Maybe that is too old-fashioned, but finding a way to light your path, yes? You need a guide to direct you to where you need to go. Jesus is the light. He will never misdirect you. His love for you means that no matter the hurt or alone-ness or loss you are feeling right now, He will light you and direct you and keep you in His love. When the road seems dark you are called to walk, call out for God, He is your light.

We have already read how John has beautifully painted a picture of Jesus as our light in John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." Now pay attention to what is coming, as Jesus brings light into the darkness both in physical and spiritual ways in upcoming readings.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

2/25/2026 - WEEK 8 DAY 3

God Sent, Jesus Went: John 8:21-30

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

God Sent, Jesus Went, Trinity omnipotent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Their binding agreement
God Sent, Jesus Went, Everlasting remnant
God Sent, Jesus Went, Heaven's original descent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Unwavering commitment
God Sent, Jesus Went, Old and New Testament
God Sent, Jesus Went, Embarking Advent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Promised fulfillment
God Sent, Jesus Went, Fully man, fully God is now present
God Sent, Jesus Went, Truth spoken, time spent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Love evident
God Sent, Jesus Went, Proclaiming Father's judgement
God Sent, Jesus Went, Parables so eloquent
God Sent, Jesus Went, "Hosanna" praise adornment
God Sent, Jesus Went, Grieved with lament
God Sent, Jesus Went, Sinless and innocent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Healing anointing ointment
God Sent, Jesus Went, 33 years of earth's rent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Redemptive atonement
God Sent, Jesus Went, Grace's embodiment
God Sent, Jesus Went, We must repent
God Sent, Jesus Went, We must relent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Our benevolent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Love all sufficient
God Sent, Jesus Went, Arose magnificent
God Sent, Jesus Went, Our eternal contentment
God Sent, Jesus Went, My enjoyment
God Sent, Jesus Went, World's Greatest Event

*²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ The **One who sent Me is with Me**; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what pleases Him." John 8:28-29*

Notes

2/26/2026 - WEEK 8 DAY 4

Jesus Speaks about God's True Children: John 8:31-47

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

Reading this chapter made me think again about what is a true disciple. Jesus discusses what it means to be a disciple to the Jews (**John 8: 31-33**) "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 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?"

Pastor Mark has given a few sermons on what he thinks is needed to be a disciple, and they all made sense to me. Now it is my turn to attempt to create my own definition of a disciple. Jesus tries to make the Jews, who consider themselves disciples, understand why He considers them slaves instead of disciples.

(**John 8: 39-42**) "Abraham is our father..." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me.

Jesus says one must act as Abraham. Abraham wasn't always a believer but found his way to being a believer and following the word of God. Showing his **love** in his **actions** and **prophesying** everywhere he traveled. Is this all there is to being a disciple? Absolutely not, but we don't want to be slaves to the devil. We must learn to show our **love for God** through prayer and being a good human to others. This overlaps **actions** as we can show our belief by serving the church, community and each other in our **prophesying** of our belief to others.

When the devil gets into our lives and begins to steer us into inappropriate actions and words we then become slaves of the devil. This makes it easier to understand how the Jews could not understand the idea of being a slave, as was defined by Jesus. Putting this all together as John is attempting to teach us discipleship, here goes-my personal definition of a disciple, for today.

1. Showing your love for Jesus
2. Living your life through His teachings
3. Faith living through actions
4. Calling others to be disciples

This is NOT everyone's idea of a disciple. What is yours?

Notes

2/27/2026 - WEEK 8 DAY 5

Jesus Says He is Eternal: John 8:48-59

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

"Timid" would not be a word frequently used to describe Jesus's interaction with the Pharisees. In yesterday's passage (John 8:31-47) He accused them of not hearing what God says because they don't belong to God. The Pharisees countered in today's passage by accusing Jesus of being demon-possessed. So much for a pleasant, philosophical discussion about Jewish law.

In verse 57 of today's passage, the Pharisees exclaim that since Jesus is not yet fifty, his claims of seeing Abraham were preposterous. To mere mortals, they are. Jesus lived as a human on earth approximately 2,000 years after Abraham or about the same amount of time that I am removed from Jesus' physical time on this planet.

If I started reminiscing about my time walking around with Jesus during his ministry, people would rightly think I was nuts. However, I never claimed to be divine as Jesus did. He further twisted the knife on the Pharisees by stating in verse 58, "before Abraham was born, I AM!" This quote mirrors Exodus 3:14, which the Pharisees would have known well as it says, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is what you say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

With this declaration, Jesus very clearly stated to the Pharisees that he is eternal and on par with God. Needless to say, this statement enraged the law-minded leaders and led them to wanting to stone Jesus. Their obsession with following the law prevented them from appreciating Jesus's divinity.

In hindsight it easy to look at the Pharisees with derision, but here's the thing: I've always tried to be a law-abiding citizen by following both God's commandments and man's laws. Some days I do better than others. I am so grateful for the blood of Jesus to wash me from my sins. However, had I been living in Jesus's time, I suspect my mindset could have caused me to also miss the forest through the trees when it came to Jesus' divinity, so to speak. In my eagerness to be a good person, I sometimes fail to appreciate the enormity of Jesus' gift to mankind.

We must always make sure our actions are in service to and appreciation for what Jesus did for us and not to gain God's favor.

Jesus is God. Jesus is eternal. Are you prepared to spend eternity with Him?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/2/2026 - WEEK 9 DAY 1

Jesus Heals a Man Blind from Birth: John 9:1-12

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

We have lived with a loved one that doesn't have the same abilities that most of us possess. At more than one time, we have had someone ask to come and pray over her for healing. If Jesus can heal a man blind from birth, wouldn't he "cure" her? Jesus could make her walk. How strong is our faith in Christ?

What we've learned, over the years, is that our eyes have been opened. Christ has given us light. Even though she doesn't have the same abilities as you and I, God has gifted her with different abilities that bless all of us. The light that God has given her is precious and powerful.

We've learned that politics, race and ethnicity don't exist in her life. She holds no prejudice. She loves people for who they are. We've seen people's lives changed because they know her. We've seen many friends, from early in her life, grow up to follow careers in special education. We seen people tackle opportunities in church because she's inspired them.

When our church history booklet was published, there was a picture of grade-school kids leaning on her wheelchair tray. They didn't see a disabled friend, they only saw a friend.

The gift that she shares with us is Agape love. She helps each of us see the unbridled love that Jesus Christ shares with us and that he proved with his ultimate sacrifice of death overcome by resurrection. God, help us to love like you love us. Thank you for your light in our lives. Amen

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/3/2026 - WEEK 9 DAY 2

Religious Leaders Question the Healed Man: John 9:13-17

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Therefore.

Jesus had miraculously healed a man who had been blind all his life. But Jesus did the miracle on the Sabbath.

Therefore.

Now able to see, the man explained how Jesus healed him using mud from His saliva and water from a pool of water called "Sent." But Jesus did the miracle on the Sabbath.

Therefore.

Some people claimed that Jesus must be from God. The healed man called Jesus a prophet. But Jesus did the miracle on the Sabbath.

Therefore.

Therefore, the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

The Gospels clearly reveal Jesus to the world.

The Person of Christ: He is the great "I AM," the creator God.

The Presence of Christ: He is "Immanuel," God with us.

The Power of Christ: He is the "Lamb of God," uniquely able to forgive sins through His death and resurrection.

But Jesus did miracles on the Sabbath, something a God-fearing Jew would never do. Jesus was the son of a carpenter from Nazareth, hardly God in the flesh. And Jesus died a criminal's death on a Roman cross, not exactly the victorious life and death of a messianic figure.

Therefore.

Therefore, who do you say Jesus is?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/4/2026 - WEEK 9 DAY 3

Religious Leaders Question the Parents: John 9:18-23

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Sometimes when Lisa and I are talking about some problem in the world, in politics, or even in the church, I say, "NMP." Not My Problem. Another staff member will take care of the issue in their ministry. Our elected politicians will address the state or national problems. And I'll leave it up to God to handle the world's troubles. NMP.

Sometimes, however, NMP can be a copout. That seems to be the case in today's part of the story. The healed man's parents didn't want to lose their place in the synagogue, and therefore their standing in society. Their need for cultural acceptance outweighed their family loyalty.

There are times when NMP should be EMP. Exactly My Problem.

Would you say NMP or EMP in the following situations?

You know that a coworker is not a Christian.

You see a homeless person on the sidewalk in downtown Indy.

You become aware of somebody in your neighborhood who is being hassled by another neighbor.

You learn that half the world lives on less than \$5 per day.

You have a family member who becomes a real Jesus freak.

You see someone come to church you don't know.

You are in a group when somebody is gossiping.

You... (create your own example)

Sometimes NMP is healthy. Don't inject yourself into issues that are not yours. Sometimes EMP is healthy. Don't hide yourself from issues that are.

What do you learn from the parents' response to being questioned about their healed son?

Notes

3/5/2026 - WEEK 9 DAY 4

Was Blind but Now I See!: John 9:24-34

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

This is one of my favorite hymns and one of the most beloved hymns of all time. And the last line of this verse is taken directly from vs. 25 of today's passage. Amazing Grace was written by John Newton in 1772. Newton grew up with no religious belief and, through various life choices, became heavily involved in the Atlantic slave trade in England. He was known as one of the most disrespectful and vulgar men at sea. But God and God's grace saved John Newton. He had a conversion experience, became an Anglican clergy and eventually worked with William Wilberforce to abolish the slave trade in Britain. Amazing Grace is his spiritual autobiography. He had been born blind to the injustice with which he was involved but was healed of his blindness and experienced the truth.

In this passage, the Jewish leaders were adamant that Jesus was a sinner. After all, the Law explicitly forbids working on the Sabbath and Jesus had healed this man of his blindness on the Sabbath. The man, then, is being badgered by the religious authorities. They are desperate to get him to admit that Jesus is a sinner. They knew the prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures. ***"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."*** (Isa. 35:5) But this man Jesus just could not be ***"from God."*** He was a sinner!

But the healed man - this uneducated and forgotten man - displays exceptional wisdom as he speaks to the authorities with extraordinary boldness. He admits that he does not understand it all but does know one thing - he now can see. That is the undeniable truth of his situation. And if God rejects sinners, why has his sight been restored? Fearless against the authorities, he declares, ***"If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*** We can see clearly the contrast between the blindness and conceit of the Pharisees with the vision and humility of the man healed of his blindness.

Who truly is the blind one in this story? The religious leaders were blind to who Jesus really was. They just could not see. Their pride and jealousy prevented them from the truth. But the blind man from birth was now healed and is a testament to the power of a transformed life. He experienced the truth of Jesus and is the model of Christian witness.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound..... Was blind but now I see."

Notes

3/6/2026 - WEEK 9 DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about Spiritual Blindness: John 9:35-41

Devotional By: Dan Henke

Jesus's interactions with people have so many facets to them, none more than the story of the blind man in John 9. In these passages about healing the blind man, we get to the end of the story. The blind man was given sight. Jesus could have settled for that. He could have checked another healing miracle off His list for the day and moved on to the next miracle.

Jesus was not satisfied with that; He goes further. Jesus wanted to heal his spiritual sight as well, so He returns to the man and reveals Himself as "the Son of Man." The man embraces and worships Jesus as his Messiah and Savior. And even then, Jesus is not satisfied with that. This man was not only healed, but he has also suffered an injustice at the hands of the religious leaders. The man testified about the miracle and the Pharisees threw him out of his synagogue as a result. The man expressed little regret over being kicked out of his synagogue; having the gift of sight is a much better deal. But Jesus cannot allow the injustice to go unnoticed.

It is the perfect opportunity to get a dig on the Pharisees, which is an opportunity Jesus never passed up. Jesus challenged them for their lack of spiritual sight, and the Pharisees objected, saying they were not blind. Perhaps they were confused about which sight Jesus was talking about. They had certainly forgotten the scripture they were taught in Jeremiah 5:21,
"Hear this, you foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes but do not see,
who have ears but do not hear."

The biggest issue with the Pharisees was not that they were blind. It was that they could not see past the point of their noses. In their self-righteousness, their self-centeredness, they could not see the Messiah standing in front of them. Instead of celebrating the miracle of sight granted to this man, they were jealous that they had not performed the miracle themselves. Instead of embracing the arrival of the Messiah, they recoiled at the threat to their privileged positions. In yet another facet to this story, Jesus goes even farther. Through John 9 we see that Jesus came to give all of us spiritual sight; that we should not be blind Pharisees. Spiritual sight is not only directed outward to see and accept Jesus as Savior, but also to look within ourselves to see where our lives do not align with his teaching.

Look around at your life. Where do you see Jesus? Are there areas you do not but where you should?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/9/2026 - WEEK 10 DAY 1

Jesus the Good Shepherd: John 10:1-21

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

John 10 is just an extension of John 9. Same setting. Same people. Same encounter. In John 9, some Pharisees said there was no way that Jesus is from God, while others wondered if a sinner could heal a man born blind.

Jesus untangles the knotted debate. He stretches a tight rope between good and evil. Those swaying in the middle were challenged to choose which side they would walk to. Take a look.

Jesus is the gatekeeper. He opens the way to the sheep, who listen to His voice and follow Him.

But Satan is the wall climber. He slips in like an uninvited stranger, and the sheep just run away from him.

Jesus the gate. He opens the way to God's security and salvation, providing green pastures to God's sheep.

But Satan is the back door. He sneaks in as a thief and robber, with a goal to steal, kill, and destroy God's sheep.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He literally lays down His life to protect His flock.

But Satan is the hired hand. He abandons and runs away from God's sheep, because he doesn't care about them at all.

After Jesus' clear contrast here in John 10, the detractors doubled down, saying Jesus is demon-possessed and raving mad. But His uncertain wonderers pondered whether a demon can open the eyes of the blind.

Nobody is convinced, except those who oppose Jesus.

Notes

3/10/2026 - WEEK 10 DAY 2

Jesus Claims to be God: John 10:22-42

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Often, I run into people who say that Jesus was a good man, a prophet, and even a wonderful religious teacher. But they refuse to believe Jesus was God. The problem with their theory is that Jesus Himself disagrees with them.

The religious leaders were ready to stone Him to death “for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

Jesus could have said, “No, you misunderstand. I just represent God.”

He could have shouted, “Drop your stones. I’m merely a prophet of God.”

He could have wildly waved His arms and said, “I’m a good man, not the God-Man.”

But He didn’t.

Jesus said, “Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?”

Here are our choices about how to see Jesus in this passage.

Jesus was confused. He mistakenly thought of Himself as God in the flesh when He wasn’t.

Jesus was delusional. He really believed He was the Son of God, not out of mere confusion, but out of insanity.

Jesus was deceptive. He understood He wasn’t the God-Man, but knew admitting that would make His disciples stop following Him.

Jesus was correct. He was indeed fully God and fully man.

Who do you say Jesus is? Why?

Notes

3/11/2026 - WEEK 10 DAY 3

Jesus Hears about Lazarus' Death: John 11:1-16

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Bethany was a small town close to Jerusalem. Jesus spent quite a bit of time there in His ministry. Here are some examples.

He spent several days and nights there, such as after he cleansed the temple, before and after he rode into Jerusalem, and other times.

In fact, He was near Bethany when He instructed His disciples to go into Jerusalem and bring back a donkey for His triumphal entry.

On another occasion, Jesus saw an out-of-season fig tree in Bethany. Because it didn't have any fruit, Jesus cursed it so that it withered from the roots. Jesus used this to teach His disciples about the power of faith.

Another time when Jesus was in Bethany, He was having dinner at the home of a man named Simon who had leprosy. A woman came into the room, broke open a jar of outrageously expensive perfume, and poured it on His head and feet to anoint Him for burial. That woman was the Mary in today's story.

It makes sense that Jesus knew the people of this small town very well. That included a man named Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Once, when Jesus was at their house, Martha was running around doing meal prep, while her sister Mary was sitting around doing nothing but listening to Him. Jesus lauded the do-nothing sister.

Jesus loved the people of Bethany. Most powerfully, it was in the vicinity of Bethany where the resurrected Jesus lifted up His hands, blessed His followers, and ascended into heaven.

Do you have an affection for someplace where you do not live? What would it look like for you to be given a heart of compassion for the people there? Where is your Bethany?

Notes

3/12/2026 - WEEK 10 DAY 4

Why Did Jesus Weep?: John 11:17-44

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

Today's scripture focuses on death and life. Jesus proclaims, "I AM the Resurrection and the Life" and then demonstrates the power of God by raising three-day dead Lazarus from the tomb. Life after death is amazing, but also included in the text is the shortest scripture in the Bible. John 11:35 states "Jesus wept." This bids me to ask, "Why did Jesus weep?"

Why did Jesus weep?

Was Jesus shocked that Lazarus died? **NO!** Jesus said to the disciples, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (11:4)

Why did Jesus weep?

Did Jesus regret being late to Lazarus' burial? **NO!** "When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick, he stayed where He was two more days." (11:6)

Why did Jesus weep?

Was Jesus limited in power when it came to death? **NO!** "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." (11:14-15)

Why did Jesus weep?

Did Martha guilt Jesus by saying, "If you had been here my brother would not have died"? **NO!** Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again." (11:23)

Why did Jesus weep?

Jesus was sent to earth by God with the mission of the cross. He taught, engaged in our lives, felt human emotions and spoke truth, but suffering was the road ahead. He realized His death would be severe for those whom He loved. He understood death comes with loss, regret, pain, mourning, questions, and fear of eternal darkness. Jesus wept.

He watched the mourning of Lazarus' friends with full knowledge they would mourn again at the foot of the cross watching Him suffer and die. It causes me to weep with this truthful message of salvation: Jesus lived a sinless, spotless life yet bore each of our sins on the cross. Lazarus' death platforms the famous I AM saying we process before our death. Jesus says, "I AM the Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (11:25-26).

Truth is revealed as Jesus looks up to heaven with tears in His eyes and proclaims, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me... I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that You sent Me" (11:41-42). **YES!** Of course, Jesus wept! But from His sacrifice of love, we as believers reap, not weep. Our dead-sin clothes are removed, and we are set free with God's gift of eternal Life.

Notes

3/13/2026 - WEEK 10 DAY 5

The Plot to Kill Jesus: John 11:45-57

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

I have often wondered why the Christians in Germany didn't oppose Hitler when he came to power. At that time nearly everyone in Germany was either a Protestant or a Catholic. Certainly, they should have feared God more than a dictator.

In today's reading, we see that the Jewish high priest and the Sanhedrin had one main concern about Jesus. They were worried that the Roman rulers would take away their power and influence in the Jerusalem temple and the Jewish nation. If Jesus and His miracle road show got any more popular, they would be displaced.

It's easy to look at German Christians in the 20th century and Jewish religious leaders in the 1st century with disdain. Perhaps we should point a finger at them while holding up a mirror.

When I was a teenager, I was fairly open about my faith, with a focus on the word "fairly." I wore a cross to school sometimes and didn't participate in some of the activities that my classmates or teammates did. But I didn't really share my faith about Jesus that much. And I don't remember inviting too many of my friends to church or youth group.

Before you are too hard on me, think about your own life. Are you reluctant to share your faith at work out of fear of losing your job? Are you unwilling to talk about Jesus at the gym, figuring that physical health should be separated from spiritual health? Are you afraid (yes, afraid) to invite people to church, just because they might ridicule or reject you?

The high priest and his buddies were so paranoid about losing their authority that they decided killing Jesus was the only answer. Pretty harsh.

Is it just as harsh when we turn our back on Jesus because we are so dependent on money, friends, and our reputation?

If you had been in the Sanhedrin, what would you have done?

What will you do now?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/16/2026 - WEEK 11 DAY 1

A Woman Anoints Jesus: John 12:1-11

Devotional By: Carlye Frye

In this passage, we learn of a profound moment of devotion, controversy, and faith. Mary's act of anointing Jesus with expensive perfume demonstrates her deep love and recognition of who Jesus is. Her act was sacrificial, costly, and filled with love. It was a moment of pure worship, preparing Jesus for His upcoming death and burial.

Judas' reaction reveals a common human tendency: so many times, we focus on material value and practical concerns rather than spiritual devotion. Jesus gently rebukes Judas, stating that Mary's act was an appropriate gesture of love and foreshadowed His burial.

This passage highlights how Jesus' presence and sacrifice can inspire faith in all of us. The large crowd's desire to see Jesus and Lazarus shows that Jesus' miracles and acts of love draw people toward faith, even prompting disapproval from those threatened by His power.

Jesus' sacrifice is a reminder that he is worth every sacrifice. Our acts of love and worship prepare the way for others to come to faith.

When we reflect on this passage, are we as followers willing to give our best to Jesus, even if it seems costly or impractical in the moment? Like Mary, are we called to offer our love and commitment wholeheartedly?

Notes

3/17/2026 - WEEK 11 DAY 2

Jesus Rides a Donkey into Jerusalem: John 12:12-19

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

I'm sure most people expected Jesus to strut into town on a powerful white steed, sword in one hand, reigns in the other, but lo...he chose to enter the Feast on a young donkey, a humble donkey, perfect for a humble king, palm branches and a peaceful ride.

The crowd came expecting a triumphant king. Shouting "Hosanna!" and "Blessed is the King of Israel!" many in the crowd came because they had heard that he raised Lazarus from the dead and wanted to see the miracle worker. They were primed not only for a triumphant king but someone who could do miracles. It must have been disappointing to see this king riding on a young donkey—hardly regal or stately. I've often wondered if it were more like a modern king riding in on a tricycle.

Meekness, humility and lowliness always accompany Jesus. The Bible had predicted (Zechariah 9:9) that he would be humble and even that he would choose to make his grand entrance at the Passover Feast on a donkey. "Do not be afraid, oh daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming seated on a donkey's colt." (John 12:15). The disciples were not thinking of that verse at the time. It was not until after his resurrection that they realized these things had been written about him in the scriptures. They probably were a little embarrassed or at least confused about this underwhelming choice.

Jesus' point in choosing a donkey instead of a powerful horse was to signal peace, not war.

I'm thankful our Messiah is a peaceful humble servant. And I have a much greater appreciation for donkeys than ever before!

Notes

3/18/2026 - WEEK 11 DAY 3

Jesus Explains Why He Must Die: John 12:20-50

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

When I was growing up, our family had a huge garden on the banks of Buck Creek. The rich, dark soil was perfect for growing almost anything. So, my dad planted everything. Whenever we dropped corn and bean seeds into a furrow or plunged melon and cucumber seeds into a hill, it was with full expectation that we would have a bountiful harvest.

To give abundant life to His followers, Jesus knew that He must die. He says it plainly: "It was for this very reason I came to this hour." He would be lifted up on a cross, put to death, and buried in the earth. His enemies wiped the dirt off their hands and considered their job complete. But they didn't know what was coming.

In our family garden, nothing was visible just after planting. The furrows full of seeds were covered over. The mounded hills were smoothed over. All the seeds were buried away. A city slicker might have shown up and said, "Aren't you going to do anything with this soil?" To them it might appear empty, even dead. A few months later the harvest would be eaten, shared, frozen and canned for the winter.

Do you believe Jesus died on a cross? Do you believe He rose from the grave? Are you willing to follow Him at all costs? Answer carefully. Here's what He demands:

"Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

"Whoever serves me must follow me."

"Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you."

"There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day."

Notes

3/19/2026 - WEEK 11 DAY 4

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet: John 13:1-18

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Have you ever thought about the people whose feet Jesus washed?

There was Peter, Jesus' right hand man.

And John, Jesus' beloved friend.

And Andrew and James, brothers of the aforementioned Peter and John. The four of them had been fishing partners when Jesus recruited them.

And there was Matthew, the pro-Roman tax collector.

And Simon, the anti-Roman zealot.

And Thomas, filled with so many questions.

And Philip, always introducing people to Jesus.

And then there was Judas. The one who would betray Him. The one who would sell Him out. The one who would give Him the kiss of death.

"So (Jesus) got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash (Judas') feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

This was the last day of Jesus' ministry among them. Here is what He said on one of the first days:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44).

Have you ever thought about the people whose feet Jesus wants you to wash?

Notes

3/20/2026 - WEEK 11 DAY 5

Jesus Shares the Last Supper: John 13:19-38

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

Enjoying a meal with His disciples, Jesus is having His last conversation with all of His beloved followers. The disciples do not understand that this is the last meal they will have with Jesus, so they are just seeming to have normal conversations. Jesus begins to tell them in John 13:18-19 "He who shares my bread has turned against me. I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am." They are surprised by this comment and begin to speak saying it will not be them.

Peter asks who it will be and says he would like to go where Jesus is going. But Jesus says from John 13:36-38 "you cannot follow now, but you will follow laterbefore the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

Reading these verses makes me think of having a strong and dedicated group of friends. In my mind, these people would do anything for me and support me whenever it was needed. Can you imagine knowing that one of them will betray you but still treating them as you always do, even doing as far as washing their feet prior to visiting with them? Jesus makes it look so easy to love them all and still acknowledge who will betray Him before he dies.

He gives this command to all reading John 13:34 "Love one another, as I have loved you." He loves us all with no judgement. No matter our past, present or what is to come, He loves us unconditionally. We must all continually remember that verse, even when we are at our lowest and worst point of our life—Jesus is always with us, guiding us to the right path.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/23/2026 - WEEK 12 DAY 1

Jesus is the Way, Truth, Life: John 14:1-14

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

Let's set the context before we dive into what Jesus is saying here in John 14. Preceding this gathering in the Upper Room, there had been a series of unsettling events outlined in Chapter 13. Jesus, the Master, had washed His disciple's feet. Then, He predicted one of them would betray Him, and even the "super disciple," Peter, would deny Him. It must have felt like the world was turning upside down.

In our passage today, Jesus has gathered the disciples together with Him one last time to eat and drink and share His final instructions. He spoke urgently and passionately about what was going to happen when He went away.

I'm sure the more he talked that way, the more confused and frightened the disciples became. They may not have said it in so many words, but they had to be wondering if they had made a mistake by following Him.

In their confusion, the disciples start grasping for straws. Thomas asks for a place to go where he can be with Jesus, and it would all be alright. Thomas wants a roadmap back to "normal." Whereas Philip's request of Jesus to "show them the Father" is really an ask for certainty. Isn't that what we naturally want in our troubling circumstances: either a return to stability or certainty in our move forward?

Jesus offers neither. He offers something altogether better when He answers Thomas, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus knew the greatest comfort in any adversity and in every crisis can only be found in Him. Only Jesus Himself could supply the disciples the resources to weather the coming storm.

This is the sixth of seven, "I AM" statements in the book of John. Collectively, they declare the divinity of Jesus. And yet, somehow, they simultaneously answer our biggest questions in life. The "I am" statements serve as answers to questions about our identity, purpose and potential. For example, to those who were hungry or worried about provision, Jesus declared that He was the bread of life. And to those in spiritual darkness, He declared that He was the light of the world.

In this case, Jesus' "I AM the way, the truth and the life," answers how the disciples can make it through the crucifixion and loss of their Rabbi. The answer they received is the same for us and the storms coming our way. Only a life in relationship with Jesus can ground, guide and comfort us when we feel like our world is turning upside down.

How are you depending on Jesus today?

Notes

3/24/2026 - WEEK 12 DAY 2

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit: John 14:15-31

Devotional By: Susan Pressler

The Holy Spirit is an amazing blessing given to us by God! Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples, “¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - ¹⁷the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16,17). In these beautiful words, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would always help the disciples. We, too, are filled with the Holy Spirit when we repent and accept Jesus as our Savior. The Holy Spirit lives in us to guide, teach, and comfort us.

The importance, power, and work of the Holy Spirit are given throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

-The Holy Spirit is first mentioned in Genesis: “²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1:2).

-David prayed to God to have mercy on him and “¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.” (Psalm 51:11).

-Seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit: “¹A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him-the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord-³and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:1-3).

-Ezekiel prophesied the new covenant: “²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

-Joel prophesied Pentecost, the pouring out of the Spirit, on the people of Israel. “²⁸And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” (Joel 2:28-29). These same words were repeated by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-18).

-“¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” (Revelation 22:17).

How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Take a few moments now and pray to the Holy Spirit to work in your life.

Notes

3/25/2026 - WEEK 12 DAY 3

Jesus Teaches about the Vine and Branches: John 15:1-17

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

The vine and branches.

A few years ago, I bought a raspberry plant. I had no idea how raspberries grew. I learned that raspberries are not easy. My husband worked on the raspberry plant for years. He built a trellis. He pruned the branches. He watered. After a couple of years, we saw some fruit. But the birds usually found the fruit first! Finally, after 4 years, we had raspberries! Delicious, slightly small, wonderful raspberries.

Jesus gave the analogy of the vine and the branches. Just as my husband cut the branches that did not bear fruit, God cuts the branches in us that do not bear fruit. God cuts away the pieces of us that do not share his good in the world. By doing this the remaining branches are more fruitful. Just as our raspberry vines produced more fruit, our lives with the “bad branches” cut have more ability to share and spread God’s love. But in pruning, the fruitful branches must remain in the vine. Just as the branches need the vine to bear fruit, we need God, the ultimate gardener to bear fruit. He knows our “good branches.”

Jesus continues, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.” Being the branch in the vine connects us to Jesus and his love. We must remain in His love. As we are loved by Jesus, we can then love one other. This continues to his greatest command to Love each other.

John 15 solidifies that we must remain in Jesus so that we can review his love and joy and bear his fruit by loving each other. How can we help each other grow in God’s love and prune away our bad branches? How can we depend on him every day, in every way, to take care of us?

Notes

3/26/2026 - WEEK 12 DAY 4

Jesus Warns about the World's Hatred: John 15:18-16:4

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

As I read through these passages I was reminded of when I was a teen and experienced rejection for being different. I wasn't different because of how I looked or dressed. I was different because I chose to be "good". By this I mean, I liked to do what I thought God wanted me to (Trust me I'm not perfect). I'm a preacher's kid, but my parents made it clear that I was not good because my dad was a preacher, but because God asked me to be good. This made sense to me, and I grew up knowing God loved me. I always knew I had my family and Jesus on my side.

When my friends began to smoke, drink, date and explore their sexuality. I didn't. I believed that God didn't want me to. And all this made me different. It also made me someone parents held up as an example. And what kid wants to be AN example, and who wants to hear about it. The result, I was ostracized, not in quiet ways, but in "in your face" ways. Others made fun of me and made untrue accusations in public and left me out of outings. It was a lonely time, but it strengthened me. Thankfully we attended a church with a strong youth group, and this group of people supported me through this time.

John & Jesus are saying just that. Being a Christian makes us different than the rest of the World, and the World hates different. Just watch TV ads, look at social media and "influencers". What is it they all want from us? To be the same as them.

If you watch the news on TV, you will see the hatred of the world. You will be told that you need to be afraid of others, of people who are "different" from you. 'Doing so will mean you believe what they do and then you will be ok. Otherwise, you need to "hate" those who disagree with you, who look different than you, who act different than you.

But why? What does hate bring us but fear? John is telling us that we need to accept up front that being Christian is about being different. Others will persecute and hate us. However, the gain is greater than the loss. While the world may hate you, now and eternity with God are the prize. You will find other Christians who support you. Do you hide your faith from those outside the church to avoid persecution? Ask God for the strength to be different, it is its own reward.

Notes

3/27/2026 - WEEK 12 DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about the Holy Spirit and Prayer: John 16:5-33

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

I remember my mother reading her Bible and praying early in the morning and late at night when the house was quiet; it was her time with the Lord. There are other memorable strong prayer warriors, too: our Master Teacher Jesus taught us how to pray; Biblical saints like Abraham, Esther, and Paul exemplified strong prayer lives; and historic figures such as George Muller, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Susanna Wesley demonstrated their reliance upon the Holy Spirit to direct their prayers. Did you ever wonder why they were such strong prayer warriors?

In this passage today, Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit and prayer. One of my favorite theologians viewed prayer as “the most powerful force in the universe and a fundamental necessity for spiritual life” (Charles H. Spurgeon). He wrote that prayer is a lifeline to God, a source of comfort and strength. And in times of our weakness, the Holy Spirit helps us pray.

Life is complicated, and if you are like I am, sometimes I don’t even know what to pray. Paul wrote that “we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). Paul explains we need the Holy Spirit’s help to pray because we are weak and proud. The Spirit helps us in our weakness and guides us to pray according to God’s will. We can pray to Him and ask for strength (Eph. 3:16, Luke 11:13).

The Bible teaches us to rely upon the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers. He is like the wind that fills our sail and propels us in the right direction. Without the Holy Spirit, we might have prayers that are beautiful to hear but no power to move forward. Our prayers would just be in our own strength, but with the Holy Spirit our prayers become powerful. The Holy Spirit leads our thoughts and words: Jesus teaches, “...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (13). “Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete...” (24).

How is your prayer life? Is your prayer focused on a deeper relationship with God? Do you pray according to God’s will and align your prayers with God’s desire for your life?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/30/2026 - WEEK 13 DAY 1

Jesus Prays for Himself and His Disciples: John 17:1-26

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In this beautiful prayer, Jesus prayed for Himself (v. 1-5), His closest friends (v. 6-19), and for future believers (v. 20-26). Let's take a few moments to consider what Jesus prayed in that last portion for future believers, people like us.

Jesus prays for believers to have unity with God and with one another. Some things in life portray deep unity: a strong marriage, a close parent-child relationship, oxygen in the lungs. Our unity with God and other followers of Jesus goes beyond even that. He calls us to be one, like a bucket-full of water poured into the ocean.

Jesus also prays for us to daily experience the presence of Jesus. He wants us to be with him. There is nothing quite like an invitation to someone's home. There we encounter the sights, sounds, and smells of that person's life. Jesus invites us to be in His presence. In Revelation 3:20 He said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

And Jesus prays for us to truly know God. He told the Father, "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known." There is nothing more precious than to know and be known by God, to love and be loved by God.

What would happen if all followers of Jesus lived in the unity, presence, and relationship in this passage? Jesus gives us the answer!

Jesus wants this for us so that "the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

The more we live like Jesus, the more the world takes notice.

Take a few moments to thank Jesus for praying this prayer for you.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

3/31/2026 - WEEK 13 DAY 2

Betrayal and Denial: John 18:1-27

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

ACT 1 - GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

As Jesus and his disciples leave the city walls of Jerusalem, they cross the large Kidron Valley and enter a garden - the Garden of Gethsemane. This beautiful garden sits at the bottom of the Mount of Olives. Some of the olive trees are old enough to have been around at the time of Jesus! How amazing! But it's here, in this serene garden, that Jesus is betrayed and arrested. As Jesus predicted, his disciples have all fallen away and left him in the garden to face his arrest alone. All except for Peter. In Chapter 13, during their last meal together, we learned that Peter declared that he would give up his life for Jesus. And here in the garden, Peter displayed his brashness once again as he raised his sword to attack the high priest's servant. I wondered why he had brought a sword at all! But instead of praising him, Jesus scolded Peter, saying, *"Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"* What Peter simply does not understand is that violence has no place in Jesus' mission and that Jesus is fulfilling God's plan.

ACT 2 - PALACE OF THE HIGH PRIEST

Trekking all the way across the Kidron Valley once again, Jesus was brought to the Palace of the High Priest. As Jesus was being harshly interrogated inside the palace, close by in the courtyard Peter was experiencing his own kind of interrogation. Three times he was accused of being one of Jesus' disciples, and three times he denied it. Boldly denied it! Emphatically denied it! Swearing in fact! All the confidence and conviction he displayed earlier was now disintegrating into fear and cowardice. So much for his saying, *"I will lay down my life for you."* He couldn't even admit that he knew Jesus! What a contrast - Jesus, standing strong and resolute before the authorities, and Peter, crumbling before his insignificant questioners. But Jesus had predicted it and Peter realized what he had done when the rooster began to crow.

ACT 3 - TODAY

On my recent trip to Israel, two of the most emotional locations for me were the Garden of Gethsemane and the Palace of the High Priest. Being in the very same garden where Jesus knelt and prayed is something I will never forget. I was also truly moved by being in the courtyard where Peter's denials took place. Standing before an amazing statue in that courtyard depicting Peter and his three questioners, I asked myself, "What would I have done? Would I have denied Jesus?"

What would you have done?

Notes

4/1/2026 - WEEK 13 DAY 3

What is Truth?: John 18:28-40

Devotional By: Dan Henke

What is Truth? Pilate asked a particularly good question; the answer to which every judge and jury want to know.

Truth and truthfulness are important to God. He enshrined the duty to be truthful in the Ninth Commandment in Exodus 20:16: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." This commandment was echoed throughout the Old Testament:

Proverbs 14:25: A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.

Zechariah 8:16-17: These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely.

We have heard that there are two sides to every story, two "truths" if you will. In court, however, there are actually four "truths." There is the prosecution's truth, the defendant's truth, and somewhere out there is the "what really happened" truth. In Court, those three truths do not matter. Only the fourth truth matters: it is what the judge says it is. Often the judge gets it right, sometimes not.

In the trial of Jesus, the religious leaders presented their "truth" to Pilate that Jesus had claimed to be the King of the Jews. However, they hypocritically ignored their own law and commandments by bringing false witnesses against Jesus. (Matthew 26:60).

Pilate as judge had the Truth standing right in front of him. Even though Pilate heard Jesus, Pilate did not fully accept or understand what Jesus told him. Yet there was still something about this Jewish carpenter's son that compelled Pilate; he found no basis for the charges against Jesus. But under pressure, Pilate's "fourth truth" seems to have gotten it wrong as he allowed a man he knew to be innocent to be condemned to death. Here is where the greatest irony was played out; Pilate's verdict was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross, and through His death and resurrection God pronounced His greater verdict of "Not Guilty" for all humanity.

During this Holy Week, reflect on the one truth that matters: Jesus submitted to an injustice for Himself to save all of us.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

4/2/2026 - WEEK 13 DAY 4

The Cross is a Display: John 19:1-27

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

At the Cross by Chris Tomlin is a favorite song of mine. The chorus goes like this:
At the Cross, At the Cross
I surrender my life
I'm in awe of you, I'm in awe of you
Where your love ran red, and my sin washed white
I owe all to you, I owe all to you

What do you see at the cross? I mean really see.
Here is a story some of us have heard many times.
We are so familiar with it that maybe, just maybe we really don't see everything.

The cross is a display of the evil of humanity. There is the crown of thorns smashed on Jesus' head. A purple robe is thrown on him and there is mockery of royalty. Jesus is made to carry his own cross after he had been flogged so that his skin had been ripped open. People are yelling 'Crucify Him'. Quite a cruel sight to see and hear.

The cross is also a display of our sovereign God. Through Jesus' suffering and all the betrayal, God was/is on the throne. Divvying up Jesus's clothing was all a part of the plan to fulfill the scripture. No matter what was being done to Jesus, he was still "King of the Jews" and the "King of all Kings". Our God is sovereign. There is no such thing as luck and there are no accidents. Jesus didn't suffer by accident.

Can you see where the cross is a display of the love of Jesus? Jesus endured excruciating pain for you and for me. He carried his own cross and experienced anguish, agony, shame and was stripped of his dignity. Jesus died for us when we were still sinners to show us his love. With all he had to suffer, he still loves you.

Lastly the cross display is a choice for us. Will you choose to be angry like the crowd, neutral like Pilate, or stand by the cross? When you stand at the cross you look to Jesus and receive his love and protection. He is the true King of the Jew. Who/what rules your life?

Notes

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4/3/2026 - WEEK 13 DAY 5

Jesus Dies and is Buried in the Tomb: John 19:28-42

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Today is Good Friday. It is one of the holiest days of the year. On this day Christians commemorate the death and burial of Jesus. Look at these passages from Scripture and discern what they say about Christ's death.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)

Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many (Hebrews 9:27-28)

"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (1 John 3:16)

Notes

4/6/2026 - WEEK 14 DAY 1

Jesus Rises and Appears to Mary: John 20:1-18

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

There is a lot of running in today's scripture reading. When Mary Magdalene gets to the tomb early that morning and discovers the stone has been removed, she runs straight to Peter and John (that other disciple that Jesus loved) to tell them the news. Then Peter starts off first running to the tomb, but that other disciple that Jesus loved outran him (interesting that he felt it important enough to include it in his Gospel account). After all that running, the other disciple bent down to look but did not go in. Peter went straight in (as soon as he trailed along after John). Again, when John mentions himself entering the tomb, he reminds us that he got there first. (John 20:8, NIV)

I think it's worth mentioning that Mary, a woman, was the first to see the empty tomb, the first to run to tell the news and the first one to whom Jesus appeared after he rose from the dead. She also was the only one who stayed there. We don't really know if Peter and John left in despair or gave up hope, but we do know that Mary wasn't going to leave until she got some more information. She was rewarded with two angels seated in the tomb asking her why she was crying (this time her tears were running). Then she turned around and there was Jesus asking her the same question (although she didn't recognize him just yet). When he said her name, "Mary"—that's all it took! She recognized the shepherd's voice!

I hope Peter and John were proud of Mary for sticking around and bringing this earth-shattering news to them; for taking the time to grieve, cry and then see the Master's face and hear his voice! John was the fastest and Peter was the bravest, but Mary was tenacious! She got to talk to Jesus and be the first to see and know that all they had been told was TRUE!

Another resurrection story was told by Jesus and also included some running. But this time it was the Father who ran in the parable of the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:24) The father ran with great emotion to embrace his returning son. "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate."

God runs to embrace us when we return to him. I pray that we "run" to tell others the good news that Jesus is alive and longs to embrace them too. Let's celebrate!

Notes

4/7/2026 - WEEK 14 DAY 2

Jesus Appears to His Disciples: John 20:19-31

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Nicknames can be hard to shake. When I was in high school, some of the other kids called me Alka-Seltzer instead of Ellcessor. That is when the “plop, plop, fizz, fizz” commercials were all over the TV. The nickname stuck. The irony is that I’ve never used an Alka-Seltzer.

The disciple Thomas has the same problem. Because of this one moment in his life, he is known as Doubting Thomas to this day. It probably irritated him. Maybe he should have taken an Alka-Seltzer.

The irony for him is that he wasn’t the only doubter, nor the first. In today’s reading, we see that Thomas was out of the room when Jesus first appeared. John gives a rendition of that encounter with the rest of the disciples. But Luke gives a more thorough account of that first meeting with the risen Jesus.

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? (Luke 24:36-38)

Doubting Thomas? How about Doubting Andrew. Doubting Matthew. Doubting Peter. Doubting John. In fact, even after appearing to the disciples multiple times, just before Jesus ascended to heaven Matthew 28:16-17 says, “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” How about Doubting Disciples.

What became of these doubters after Jesus left them? They went throughout the known world to share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Doubting Andrew went to Greece.

Doubting Matthew went to Ethiopia

Doubting Peter went to Rome.

Doubting John went to Ephesus.

And Doubting Thomas went all the way to India.

Do you have any doubts? You’re in good company. Be prepared. God uses doubters for great purposes!

Notes

4/8/2026 - WEEK 14 DAY 3

Jesus Appears to His Disciples Again: John 21:1-14

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Jesus already had fish. After the disciples dragged their netful of fish to shore, Jesus was there, cooking some fish he already had. Where did He get the fish? Did he cast a net out from the shore? Get a boat of his own? Walk out on the water and pluck a few out of the depth? Purchase them from some fishermen who were more successful?

It's hard to say. But what we know is that he already had fish. Three years earlier, Jesus called these fishermen to leave their boats and follow Him. He would teach them to fish for people. They didn't have to worry about which people. Jesus already had people. They didn't have to concern themselves with where they would go. Jesus already had communities. They didn't have to dwell on their anxiety related to public speaking or personal discipling. Jesus already had all they needed.

It's the same for us. Jesus calls us to minister to people where we live, work, learn, and play.

Is there somebody in your neighborhood who needs you? Is there a coworker who needs faith? Is there a classmate who needs Jesus? Is there somebody at the gym who needs spiritual fitness? Jesus already has this. He is asking you to step out in faithfulness and be used by Him to fulfill His purpose.

The same is true for you. The next time you feel like you are lacking something, needing something, hurting in some way, or struggling in another, remember this: Jesus already has this taken care of.

This is not a trite promise that everything in life will work out like you wish. Of these disciples in the boat, all of them were martyred except for one. And he was incarcerated on a prison island at an old age. But all the disciples did remarkable ministry. They didn't have to have all the answers. They didn't have to know all the languages where they went. They didn't have to have all the cultural differences mastered. They only needed to know one thing.

Jesus has this.

Notes

4/9/2026 - WEEK 14 DAY 4

The Restoration Of Peter: John 21:15-19

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

"Never once did Jesus scan the room for the best example of holy living and send that person out to tell others about him. He always sent stumblers and sinners. I find that comforting." - Nadia Bolz-Weber

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the Sea of Galilee that day, we wonder how Peter felt about being in the presence of the man he had denied three times just a few days before. But luckily, life with Jesus is not a baseball game - it's not "three strikes, yer out!" We are always given second chances.

In this passage, Jesus sits down and has a conversation with his wounded, ashamed disciple. The first thing we notice is that Jesus addresses him as "Simon son of John". This was Peter's name when he was first called. Is that because Jesus wanted him to think back to that earlier time? To remember all he heard Jesus say and recall all the miracles Jesus performed? Was it because Jesus wanted Peter to experience a change in his life before he would call him *Petros*, or the Rock, again?

Jesus then asked Peter three times if he loved him and each time Peter responded that he did. Three times he affirmed his love for Jesus corresponding to the three times he denied him in the courtyard. Three denials, three chances for restoration. And three times, Jesus tells him to tend to his sheep. Jesus wanted him to transform from Simon, son of John, the fisherman, to Peter, the Rock who would build Christ's Church. On the surface, this conversation seems to be about making sure Peter loved Jesus. But I believe it's more about letting Peter know that Jesus still loved HIM and that Jesus had a plan for his life.

The last command Jesus gives to Peter in this passage is **"Follow me!"** This command has a double meaning. First, Peter is to follow Jesus and spread the Gospel to those who don't know him. And scripture and church tradition show that he did. Peter became a leader of the early church, founding the church at Antioch and being named the 1st Bishop there. But second, Peter would follow Jesus to death on a cross. Church tradition also tells us that he was martyred in Rome, crucified upside down under Emperor Nero.

Through Peter's story, we learn about God's restorative power. Peter made mistakes. He was one of those "stumblers and sinners". But God used him - forgave and restored him. And, like the quote at the beginning, I find that comforting. Even though you and I fail miserably, God understands our human condition. God uses imperfect people to spread God's perfect love to the ends of the earth.

Notes

4/10/2026 - WEEK 14 DAY 5

John's Gospel and the Life of Jesus: John 21:20-25

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

John finishes his gospel with Jesus talking about John! His gospel was written 25-30 years after Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote theirs, and as many as 60 years after Jesus ascended to heaven. By the time he wrote down his "Life of Jesus" account, all the other disciples had been martyred in far away countries. Christianity was spreading. Persecution of Christians was increasing. The need for clarity about Jesus was critical.

At the end of chapter 20, John wrote, "But these [miracles and signs of Jesus] 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." The Gospels are not just a story. They are life-changing and life-giving!

And here, at the end of chapter 21, John wrote, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." The Gospels are only the tip of the iceberg. So much more took place in His own life. Most of the New Testament is about what took place after He ascended into heaven. And Jesus is still working in the world today through His people!

Take a few moments to reflect on the Gospel of John. What is a takeaway from these episodes?

John 1 - The call of Jesus' disciples
John 2 - Jesus turned water into wine
John 3 - Jesus met with Nicodemus at night
John 4 - Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the well
John 6 - Jesus fed 5000 and walked on water
John 8 - Jesus forgave an adulterous woman
John 9 - Jesus healed a man born blind
John 11 - Jesus raised Lazarus
John 13 - Jesus washed his disciples' feet
John 15 - Jesus taught about the vine and branches
John 19 - Jesus was crucified
John 20 - Jesus rose from the dead

Notes



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