

John: The Gospel of Light and Life



Lenten Devotional 2025

The United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay

WEEK 1

March 9, 2025 John – The Gospel of Light and Life

Scripture: John 1:1, 14

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

“The life was the light for all people”

MONDAY 3.10.25 John 1:1-5

John's prelude was like a great musical overture. The first three words—“In the beginning”—were the first of many allusions in the gospel to Genesis 1-2. John wanted us to see that Jesus the creator was creating anew. The “life” and “light” images were also from those “beginning” stories, with the added insight that since the beginning the world had grown dark. Into this dark world, Jesus brought inextinguishable life and light for all who trusted in him.

- “In the beginning” reaches back to mysteries that even today's science can barely scratch the surface of. But John said Jesus, the Word, was already here “in the beginning”—that Jesus “was” BEFORE the beginning! In other words, John believed Jesus is eternal; Jesus is God. Can you believe, with John, that Jesus is more than just a good man? John believed that because he knew Jesus. In what ways can you deepen your personal connection with Jesus?
- “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light” (verse 5). So many kinds of darkness try to put out the light in our lives—the death of someone we love, a broken relationship, facing unfair or abusive treatment, financial uncertainty and fear, and many more. What does it mean to you that Jesus' light keeps shining even at those times? How can you keep your spiritual eyes open to receive Jesus' light?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me “eyes to see” the light of how much you love and value me as I read your story again in John's gospel this Lenten season. Amen.

“The Word became flesh”

TUESDAY 3.11.25 John 1:6-18

The Greek and Roman gods usually showed little interest in human beings' day-to-day concerns. John said “the Word” was utterly different. He gave all who believed in him the right to become children of God. “The Word became flesh and made his home among us”—neither Greeks nor Jews believed God could bridge a gap that wide. But John said the light wasn't just about God—the light was God himself, one of us yet so much more than just one of us.

- Being born is the way each one of us enters into the world to begin a new life. John, taking his cue from Jesus (cf. John 3:3-8), said the quality of life Jesus brought is so fresh and filled with divine energy it's like being born anew as a child of God. When did your spiritual journey start? In what ways has walking with Jesus given you a whole new life? The poetry of Genesis said “in the beginning” God made the world, and declared it good (Genesis 1:31). But many prominent, widely accepted philosophies in John's time, such as Philo's, said the physical world (“flesh”) was so corrupt and evil that a truly good God could have no contact with it. In what ways does Jesus, the Word who “became flesh,” cast light on what it means for you to be fully human?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for becoming flesh, and for giving me the authority and power to be born anew as a child of God. Thank you for my new life. Amen.

“A voice crying out in the wilderness”

WEDNESDAY 3.12.25 John 1:19-28

John the gospel writer introduced Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist (or “Baptizer”). This fiery prophet came from the Judean desert to the Jordan River, and his preaching of repentance moved the authorities to send messengers to ask him if he claimed to be the Messiah. John humbly said he claimed only to be carrying out the message of Isaiah 40:3. He was here, he said, to direct people to “someone greater.”

- The book of 1 Maccabees, written about 100 years before Christ, told of heroic brothers who fought for Israel’s freedom. At one point, it noted wistfully: “There was distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time prophets ceased to appear among them” (1 Maccabees 9:27). How does this background help you understand why John’s (and then Jesus’) powerful, prophetic preaching triggered great excitement and hope?
- John said, in relation to the “someone greater” coming after him, that “I’m not worthy to untie his sandal straps.” Do you believe John’s comment reflected an unhealthy lack of self worth and confidence in himself? Or do you see it as a reflection of the kind of reverence and devotion that Jesus’ followers believed was only appropriate in the presence of the Word who became flesh?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you still seek a path into every human heart. Help me, like John the Baptist, to be “a voice crying out in the wilderness, Make the Lord’s path straight.” Amen.

“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

THURSDAY 3.13.25 John 1:29-34

In this remarkable passage, John the Baptist first recognized and identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” That title was a clear signal that Jesus’ self-giving life and death would fulfill all the symbolism of Israel’s sacrificial system of worship. But John had even more to say: “I have seen and testified that this one is God’s Son.”

- In the Temple, a worshipper confessed his or her sin over an innocent lamb. Then a priest sacrificed the lamb and placed its blood symbolically on the altar to clear the sinner from guilt. What does the image of Jesus as “the Lamb of God” tell you about one key reason he came (cf. also Matthew 1:21)? How can you prepare your heart this Lenten season to fully accept forgiveness from “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”?
- The way Mark chose to tell the gospel story, Jesus was not called God’s Son until a Roman centurion who had watched him die on the cross said, “This man was certainly God’s Son” (Mark 15:39). But 20 or 30 years later, John’s gospel wove that crucial statement of faith throughout his very first chapter. On what basis did John the Baptist reach that belief? What leads you to believe and testify that Jesus “is God’s Son”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the boldness of John the Baptist to step into the adventure you began 2000 years ago, to risk bearing witness to all the divine love and forgiveness I believe you embodied. Amen.

“We have found the Messiah”

FRIDAY 3.14.25 John 1:35-42

One of the most remarkable ways John the Baptist showed his humility was to point everyone, even his own close followers, toward Jesus, “the Lamb of God.” Two of John’s followers (we learn that one of them was Andrew) were so intrigued when they heard John describe Jesus that way that they followed Jesus on the spot.

- When John’s two disciples followed “the Lamb of God,” they asked, “Where are you staying?” and Jesus set us a model—he said simply, “Come and see.” Verse 39 said “they remained with him that day.” When, and in what ways, has your desire to follow Jesus meant spending time with him, listening and learning? How might you do more of that, during this Lenten season and beyond?
- Enter Simon Peter, perhaps the most colorful, outspoken, and brashly human of all Jesus’ first disciples. When we get to the end of the gospel (spoiler alert!), we’ll find him figuring in a powerful story of restoration after shattering failure. Yet Jesus immediately gave him a name that meant “Rock,” promising much future growth. In what ways have you grown since you started to follow Jesus? What growth do you look forward to in the future?

Prayer: Lord, you extend your invitation to “come and see” to me during this Lenten season. Draw my heart closer to yours, and teach me to live into your vision of a transformed world. Amen.

“You will see greater things than these!”

SATURDAY 3.15.25 John 1:43-51

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a tiny village. It lay about an hour’s walk from Galilee’s district capital, Sepphoris, a prosperous city which built a Roman theater during the time of Herod the Great. This description from *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* shows Nazareth’s obscurity: “As it expanded, Nazareth may have grown to a settlement of some 200 persons.”¹ So when Phillip told Nathanael that “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph’s son, from Nazareth,” Nathanael responded as any of us might have: “Can anything from Nazareth be good?” But Nathanael was quickly convinced Phillip was right once he met Jesus.

- In verse 51, Jesus reminded Nathanael of the story of “Jacob’s ladder” in Genesis 28:12, and said Nathanael would see something similar as he spent time with Jesus. The message was that Jesus truly linked heaven and earth in a way Jacob’s famous dream only symbolized. How open is your heart to perceiving the often unseen spiritual realities of God’s world? In what ways can reading, studying and meditating on the story of Jesus, as told in John’s gospel, help to make that connection stronger for you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, John wrote that in you heaven came to earth. But many days this dark world doesn’t look much like heaven to me. Please connect me more closely to God, to the source of all life and goodness. Amen.

¹ Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 37.

Family Activity: Jesus is God’s greatest expression of His love for all people! This week, discover verses on love in Scripture and find Bible stories about God’s love. Share God’s love with your wider community using your words and actions. Remember—you don’t have to practice growing love in big, fancy ways. Find small, yet meaningful ways to share God’s love with others. Consider serving a meal to, or enjoying fellowship with, people unfamiliar to you. Holding a door, smiling, and waving can all express God’s love to someone. When we are open to God growing us through the Holy Spirit, everyday acts will help produce love for everyone. Pray daily, asking God to grow love in your heart and lives for all people.

WEEK 2

**February 21, 2016 *John – The Gospel of Light and Life*
“The Miraculous Signs of Jesus”**

“He revealed his glory”

MONDAY 2.22.16 John 2:1-25

About the first story in today’s reading, Pastor Hamilton wrote, “Why does John tell us the jars were used for Jewish rites of purification? He could have said simply, ‘There were six stone jars’... John’s story is not just about Jesus changing water into wine, but it is instead about how life in Christ is richer and more joyful than the ritualistic religion of first-century Judaism.”¹ John linked that to the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple. He meant that Jesus knew many rituals had become more obstacle than signpost, and that Jesus was truly the way to God.

- John pointedly noted that Jesus changed water in jars used for ritual purification (verse 6) into “good wine” (verse 10). It was a sign that he offered a better way than his day’s rigid, repressive ritual system. Did you, in your growing up years or later, ever experience faith as rigid and repressive, draining life of joy and satisfaction? When has Jesus changed “water into wine” in your spiritual walk?
- What did verses 24-25 say about Jesus? (He clearly was not anti-social—the wedding feast story showed that.) In what ways have you learned to put your deepest trust in God’s love for you, instead of in people? How can a realistic view of human nature help you love others more and better, avoiding both letting the wishes and opinions of others drive you and the pain of being excessively hurt by their limitations?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I’m awed to realize that the same power that changed water into wine is transforming my life. Fill me to the brim with the high-quality life you came to give your people. Amen.

¹ Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 35.

“God so loved the world”

TUESDAY 2.23.16 John 3:1-36

In chapter 3, John’s story introduced Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and returned to John the Baptizer, the great prophet. Nicodemus’ authority came from religious status attained through strict outward piety. John the Baptizer’s authority grew from the way his God-given message pointed to the coming Messiah’s greatness, not to himself. His humble joy at Jesus’ “increase” (verse 30) was an example of the inner rebirth Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus.

- John said Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night” (verse 2). When he cleansed the Temple, Jesus challenged the Pharisees’ power and authority. Nicodemus may have

needed the darkness to keep other Pharisees from seeing him with Jesus. That night, Jesus invited Nicodemus to live in the light of God's kingdom. Their talk changed Nicodemus (cf. John 7:45-52; John 19:38-42). In what kinds of darkness did you come to Jesus? How has God brought you from the darkness into the light?

- When John the Baptizer's followers saw Jesus' growing ministry as a "threat," the prophet said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven...[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (verses 27-30). Where do you find your source of "joy" and "greatness"? Does John's counter-cultural model of what matters most in life challenge you to rethink any of your attitudes or actions?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to remember that my "greatness" and "joy" come from you. Give me more of your willingness to connect even with people like Nicodemus who might at first seem like "enemies." Amen.

"The fields are already ripe for the harvest"

WEDNESDAY 2.24.16 John 4:1-42

John said Jesus "had to go through Samaria" (verse 4). That wasn't a geographic requirement—most Jews chose a route that bypassed Samaria. John was describing a spiritual necessity. Jesus had a "divine appointment" to meet a woman even the Samaritans no doubt shunned. He offered her "living water," and her response made her the first witness to Jesus in John's story. (Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y2GImTxpkM> to see a moving 5-minute contemporary rendering of the story from John 4.)

- Jesus offered "living water" (in common usage, the term meant fresh, clean water, not stagnant water that had stood in a cistern). He said, "The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life" (verse 14). What choices have helped make your walk with Jesus one that "bubbles up into eternal life"? In what ways are you able to let that joyous, bubbling quality show as you live your life?
- The woman expressed the vague hope that someday the Messiah could answer her questions. "'I am he,' said Jesus. 'You don't have to wait any longer or look any further'" (verse 26, *The Message*). How would you express the biggest questions or issues in your life? In what ways has trusting Jesus helped you come to peace about some or all of those issues?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you aren't willing to settle for just my head and hands. You seek my heart, too—and, sometimes with fear and trembling, I offer it. I offer all of me to you again today. Amen.

"The second miraculous sign"

THURSDAY 2.25.16 John 4:43-54

Right after the story of reaching the Samaritans, John underscored Jesus' inclusive caring by telling of his "long-distance" healing of a royal official's ill son. The man probably worked either for Herod and/or the Romans, but that didn't bother Jesus. But for John this wasn't just a random "healing" story. This, he said, was "the second miraculous sign Jesus did" (verse 54).

- The crux of this story came in verse 50: "Jesus replied, 'Go home. Your son lives.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and set out for his home." How did this royal official find enough confidence in Jesus to believe and set out for his home? Are

there areas of life in which it's a challenge for you to trust Jesus' love and caring for you and your needs?

- In his prologue, John said, "The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him" (John 1:11). Jesus told Nicodemus, "God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes" (John 3:8). When you have welcomed Jesus and the light he brings to your life, how have you seen God work in unexpected ways in your life? In the lives of others, including people you might not think would be open to that?

Prayer: Jesus, you touched and changed Nicodemus in his righteous robes, the outcast woman at the well, the royal official in his courtly garb. Wherever I fall in that spectrum, I trust you to touch and renew me—and through me, others who are thirsty for you. Amen.

"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk"

FRIDAY 2.26.16 John 5:1-18

Many people in Jesus' day thought the pool of Bethesda (or Bethsaida) had healing power. It hadn't worked for the man Jesus met—he'd been there for 38 years! Jesus asked him, "Do you WANT to get well?" He told the Pharisees, busy enforcing their understanding of the Sabbath command as forbidding even trivial "work," that godly acts of blessing and healing were fully compatible with the Sabbath rest. God's healing, sustaining work goes on full-time.

- In what ways did the question "Do you WANT to get well?" and the command "Get up" both invite and empower the man to open himself to God's power to make his healing possible? Is there any part of your life in which Jesus is asking you, "Do you want to get well?" In what ways have you been healed and freed as you take part in Jesus' new creation?
- Jesus' intention in this story was not to deny the importance of the work-rest rhythm the Sabbath commandment taught. It was to create a clearer sense that the rest to which God calls us is not always total inaction. God's rest may involve taking part in God's renewing, refreshing work. When have you been involved in an activity to bless others that left you rejuvenated and recharged for your regular routine?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to "get well." Please keep on creating in me the whole new quality of life John called "eternal life." Empower me to daily choose you and your kingdom. Amen.

"Whoever hears my word and believes... has passed from death into life"

SATURDAY 2.27.16 John 5:19-47

This extended discourse (typical in John's gospel) almost sounds as though Jesus was on trial—and, in one sense, he was. He said he had many witnesses to show that he was who he said: his works, John the Baptist, his Father, and the words of Scripture. In verses 24-25, we find an important part of John's message. He quoted Jesus using the present tense: "I assure you that whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me HAS eternal life... HAS passed from death into life." Eternal life was not someday—for John, it began now.

- Jesus told his critics that they had been reading the right book, but reading it in the wrong way (John 5:39-40). Read rightly, he said, the Scriptures testified of him. How, when, where and for what purpose(s) do you read the Bible? (To learn more about how to read the Bible well, see Pastor Hamilton's book *Making Sense of the Bible*.) John's gospel regularly put "eternal life" in the present tense (cf. John 3:36, 6:47, 54, 10:28, as well as today's reading). How have you "passed from death into life"? What is one area

of life in which you are sensing the presence of eternal life right now?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I choose to pass from death into life right now. Thank you for assuring me that I do not need to wait for the end of my earthly life before I can begin living as your transformed child. Amen.

Family Activity: Buy two cake mixes and the ingredients with which to make them. As a family, prepare the treats by following the instructions with one box, and making up the directions for the other box. (Add too much or too little milk or oil, forget the eggs, etc.) Bake both cakes. When the cakes come out of the oven, use your senses of sight, smell and taste to explore the differences between the cakes. Which one turned out better? Why? Compare this outcome to our life with God by discussing the importance of following God's directions for us. How and why is it best for us to choose God's guidance and will? Pray and ask God to help you know God's direction and follow it.

WEEK 3

February 28, 2016 John – The Gospel of Light and Life

“I AM the Good Shepherd”

Scripture: John 10:7-12, 14-15

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... [He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.] The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.”

“I AM the Bread of Life”

MONDAY 2.29.16 John 6:1-71

In John 6:35, 48 and 51, Jesus used the words “I AM.” This was loaded language—the Greek equivalent of YHWH, the divine name by which God identified himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14. In the rest of John, Jesus made six other major “I Am” claims. Pastor Hamilton wrote, “In his words, ‘I am the bread of life,’ Jesus draws from the Passover *seder* and the manna by which God sustained the Israelites in the wilderness. He does so to point to the deliverance he will bring by his death, and the way ongoing belief in him sustains his disciples.”¹

- Jesus invited his listeners to consider what kind of “food” they valued most: “Don’t work for the food that doesn’t last but for the food that endures for eternal life” (verse 27). Physical food wasn’t bad—he’d just fed the hungry crowd with bread and fish—but it didn’t give lasting life. How clear is your sense of the two kinds of food, the two “worlds” Jesus spoke of? Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” In what ways are you consistently nourishing yourself spiritually on him?
- Feeding the huge crowd seemed impossible to the disciples. Andrew brought a lad’s

small lunch saying, “But what good is that for a crowd like this?” Consider what Jesus did with that small lunch. What talents and resources do you have that you might offer to Jesus, trusting him to creatively multiply your gift(s) and bless others through what you offer? **Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for offering yourself as the bread of life. I trust you to satisfy my inner hunger—to fill the God-shaped hole inside me. Amen.

¹ Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 67.) For a more detailed study of John 6, see pp. 64-68.

“All who are thirsty should come to me!”

TUESDAY 3.1.16 John 7:1-52

Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe in him (verse 5). The crowds had mixed views (verse 12). Jewish leaders wanted to kill him (verse 1, 25). Yet Jesus steadily chose his own course under God. He spoke firmly of his heavenly origin and life-giving mission: “I haven’t come on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don’t know him. I know him because I am from him and he sent me” (verse 28, 29). Nicodemus, who visited with Jesus at night in John 3, asked his colleagues on the council to at least give Jesus a fair hearing.

- John was a master at pointing out denial (what we today call “cognitive dissonance”). Verses 1 and 25 recognized that the leaders wanted to kill Jesus. Yet when he spoke of it openly, they denied it heatedly: “You have a demon. Who wants to kill you?” (verse 20) When have you been in settings where you or others tried to deny “the elephant in the room”? How can you and Jesus face any issues in your life more honestly?
- Jesus’ brothers used “world” to mean the physical planet Earth and all who live in it (verse 4). But Jesus used it to mean an inner spiritual orientation that turns away from God and tries to live without God and God’s values (verse 7). In what ways does “the world” (in that second sense) try to draw you into its values and way of life today? How is your life better when you live in Jesus’ world, rather than in “the world” that hates him?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to be a citizen of your world, to know you and the one who sent you. Guide me as day-by-day I submit my heart to your kingship. Amen.

“I AM the light of the world”—“before Abraham was, I AM”

WEDNESDAY 3.2.16 John 7:53 - 8:59

In the first story, the Pharisees were fine with shaming or killing a woman they had probably lured into the act of adultery. (Why did they let her partner escape? She couldn’t commit adultery alone.) Jesus gave her a new start. Then he said, “I Am the light of the world” (verse 12) and later added, “Before Abraham was, I Am” (verse 58), twin claims to God’s name from Exodus 3:14. He said he was “from above,” his foes “from below” (verse 23). His self-righteous enemies were furious, ready to stone Jesus for blasphemy.

- Jesus’ opponents asked, “Who do you make yourself out to be?” (verse 53). They shortly had their answer: “I assure you,” Jesus replied, “before Abraham was, I Am” (verse 58). They rejected and mocked Jesus’ claim. Do you believe it? What difference does your answer make to the way you live your life?
- Jesus said, “The truth will set you free” (verse 32). His foes replied, “We’ve never been anyone’s slaves. How can you say that we will be set free?” They were in political denial—one historian called Israel’s life under Rome a “semi-slavery.” Worse, they were

in the dark about their own pride. Pastor Hamilton wrote, “John wants us to understand that Jesus came to guide those who believe in him through the darkness.”¹ Have you ever felt, “I don’t need what Christ offers”? Is there any area now where you particularly need Christ’s light to set you free?

Prayer: Lord God, you showed your eternity and power to Moses in the Hebrew name “I Am.” When you became flesh in Jesus, you again identified yourself with that name. You assured me that I can be your child, and I’m thankful that I am. Amen.

¹ Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 69.) For a more detailed study of John 8, see pp. 68-71.

“I was blind and now I see”

THURSDAY 3.3.16 John 9:1-41

John evoked the creation story (Genesis 2:7), as Jesus used mud made from dust to give a blind man sight (verse 6). The story’s deeper meaning was to point to the tragedy of spiritual blindness. Rather than admit anything good about Jesus, the religious leaders scrambled to deny the plain fact that a man born blind could now see! In his beautiful confession of faith in verse 25, the man showed that he could “see” more clearly than the religious leaders.

- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “The sixth miraculous sign ends by offering a powerful contrast between the blind beggar who listened to Jesus’ voice, trusted him, obeyed his commands, washed, and thus came to see; and the religious leaders who refused to listen to Jesus and condemned him as a sinner.... In describing the man’s story, this miraculous sign, John asks us, in effect, ‘Are you blind, or can you see?’”¹
- Jesus repeated his claim to be “the light of the world.” At what age or stage did Christ’s light first shine into your life? What were some of the first things that you remember seeing more clearly in the light of Jesus’ love and grace? What are one or two ways that Christ’s light has helped to clear your sight in the recent days and weeks of your walk with him?

Prayer: Lord, continue your spiritual “eye surgery” in me. Make it ever more true in all parts of my life that “I was blind, but now I see.” Amen.

¹ Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 43.) For a more detailed study of John 9, see pp. 38-45.

“I AM the gate—I AM the good shepherd”

FRIDAY 3.4.16 John 10:1-42

Jesus said the spiritual blindness of Israel’s leaders didn’t just hurt them. It left the human “flock” God had entrusted to their care in spiritual danger. (He strongly echoed the message of the prophet Ezekiel—cf. Ezekiel 34:1-16.) But God had promised Israel that he would shepherd them himself if their human shepherds failed. Jesus was the promised “good shepherd” who would safely guide and protect all who trusted him.

- When Jesus said “I Am the gate,” he referred to a physical reality for those who watched over flocks of sheep. Scholar N. T. Wright noted, “In many Eastern sheepfolds, the shepherd lies down at night in the gateway, to stop the sheep getting out and to stop predators getting in. Here Jesus seems to indicate the way in which the shepherd keeps the sheep safe, and, like God himself in Psalm 121:8, watches over their going out and their coming in.”¹ In what ways has Jesus been “the gate” who

offers you spiritual safety?

- “I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest,” Jesus said in John 10:10. In what ways have you seen ads for everything from banks to automobiles, from alcoholic beverages to hair-care products, hold out a similar promise? How easy or hard do you find it to trust, in your day-to-day life, that Jesus’ way truly offers you the fullest, most satisfying life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to “live life to the fullest”—the way YOU define that phrase. Plant the seed of your word in my heart, and grow it into a life that nourishes life in others. Amen.

¹ N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, part 1*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004, p. 150.)

“I AM the resurrection and the life”

SATURDAY 3.5.16 John 11:1-53

Jesus’ seventh miraculous sign was his mightiest: he restored Lazarus, dead for four days, to life. Going to Bethany, just a few miles from Jerusalem, could expose Jesus to his enemies’ malice again (verse 8, 16). He intentionally waited before going to where his friend lay deathly ill (verse 15). When he reached Bethany, Lazarus had died. Grieving her brother, Martha told Jesus, “If you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.” Yet the darkness hated the light more than ever—Jesus’ enemies increased their efforts to kill the one who gave life.

- Jesus’ words to Martha are probably the most cherished of his “I Am” statements: “I am the resurrection and the life... everyone who believes in me will never die.” Martha and her sister Mary had “if-only” questions for Jesus—“if only” he had done things differently, they thought, things would be better. But Jesus has many ways of bringing good news, hope, and new possibilities into the mess and grief of life. He asks us for trust, as he did Martha and Mary, because our “if-only” questions, like theirs, may simply reflect our time-limited, earth-bound understanding. We face the question Jesus asked Martha: “Do you believe this?” How easy or hard do you find it to trust that Jesus is working for your good, even when what you wish would happen doesn’t?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes it is hard for me to trust you in the midst of my “if-only” questions. Thank you for offering me an eternal hope. Help me to trust your eternal ways. Amen.

Family Activity: Gather your family into the darkest space of your home. A closet or a dark bathroom would be good options. When you are all together, say, “Jesus is the light of the world!” Describe how just as life can be dark at times, so are our hearts, lives and the world without the light of Jesus. Discuss how when we follow Jesus, his light lives within us and he wants us to share it with the world with our words and actions. Open the door of the room and celebrate the light of Jesus together! Give thanks to God for Jesus and the light he brings to our lives. Commit to sharing the light of Jesus with all people.

WEEK 4

March 6, 2016 *John – The Gospel of Light and Life*

“An Example, a Command and a Promise”

Scripture:

During supper Jesus... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. *John 13:3-5*

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. *John 13:34-35*

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” *John 14:1-3*

“In preparation for my burial”—“Hosanna!”

MONDAY 3.7.16 John 11:54-12:19

John devoted a third or more of his story to the crucifixion week. He said Mary, Lazarus' sister, anointed Jesus with very expensive perfume. Some criticized her extravagant act of gratitude. Jesus, knowing the cross waited at the end of the week, said Mary had anointed him in advance of his burial. Jesus rode into Jerusalem, praised by a crowd (including some who saw him raise Lazarus). His ride used symbols from Israel's royal history (cf. 1 Kings 1:38-40, Psalm 118:19-29) and from a Hebrew prophet (see Zachariah 9:9-17).

- Imagine the profound inner love and gratitude that led Mary to give Jesus this extravagant gift. What does Jesus' response tell you about how much her fervent love meant to him as he faced death? How can you show your love for Jesus with Mary's beautiful spontaneity and urgency, both in your inner “sacred space” and outwardly?
- Jesus' entry as a king coming in peace brought the religious leaders no joy, only despair and frustration. Their vision was limited to human credentials and contacts. Before too glibly condemning them, ask yourself: if Jesus came today, from a small town, with no formal degree or denominational credentials, would you be open to listen to his message? We know that the Holy Spirit often works through other believers. But what does it take to let the Spirit be the final authority and guide for your heart?

Prayer: O Lord, grow in me a heart like Mary's, pouring out devotion and gratitude to you. Replace any critical, selfish corners in my spirit. I thank you for the gift of new life in you. Amen.

“When I am lifted up from the earth”

TUESDAY 3.8.16 John 12:20-36

Some Greeks asked to see Jesus. In response, Jesus began to describe how he was about to be “glorified.” But note: Jesus used the word “glorify” about crucifixion, which the Romans considered the most humiliating type of death they could invent! As scholar William Barclay put it, “Jesus says: ‘The hour has come when the Son of Man must be glorified’.... Jesus did not

mean by *glorified* what they understood. They meant that the subjected kingdoms of the earth would grovel before the conqueror's feet; by *glorified* he meant *crucified*.”¹

- Moses asked, “Please show me your glorious presence” (Exodus 33:18), and God “passed in front of him and proclaimed: ‘The Lord! The Lord! A God who is compassionate and merciful, very patient, full of great loyalty and faithfulness’” (Exodus 34:6). In our world, “glory” generally means power or wealth. In what ways do you see God’s mercy, love, patience and loyalty as a greater kind of “glory”?
- The apostle Paul said Christ’s followers “even take pride in our problems” (Romans 5:3). Does your view of “glory” for your own life lie mainly in strength and accomplishments that others admire? What has to happen inwardly for you to let God’s power transform your struggles or pain into “glory”? How can you learn, at times of struggle, to say like Jesus in John 12:28, “Father, glorify your name!”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said that when you were lifted up (on the cross), you would draw all people to you. Implant in me your heavenly definition of “glory,” and use me to shine YOUR glory to all in my world. Amen.

¹William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of John—Volume 2*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, revised edition 1976, p. 123.)

“I have come as a light into the world”

WEDNESDAY 3.9.16 John 12:37-50

John returned to the sad question of why many did not accept Jesus (cf. John 1:10-11). He echoed Isaiah 6:10, a verse that meant, not that God kept people from faith, but that the way they chose to respond to God’s light in Jesus hardened rather than softened their hearts. Then he said Jesus summarized his ministry and his message by saying, “I have come as a light into the world so that everyone who believes in me won’t live in darkness” (verse 46).

- In John 8:12, Jesus had already said, “I am the light of the world.” Pastor Hamilton wrote, “Darkness represents spiritual blindness, lost-ness, and also evil. In John, when we believe in Jesus our eyes are opened, and suddenly we see ourselves and the world in his light.”¹ Today’s news reports and political arguments mostly make our world seem very, very dark indeed. In what ways do you see the world differently because you see it in Christ’s light?
- *The Message* caught the meaning of John’s Isaiah 6:10 quotation well: “First they wouldn’t believe, then they couldn’t.” Those who refused to believe in Jesus saw the same signs as those who believed, but responded differently. Some compare it to the way one type of clay softens in the sunlight, while another kind of clay bakes into bricks. What helps you to keep your heart open and pliable to the signs of love and grace God sends your way?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep my heart, my spirit, open and pliable to the sunlight of your love, grace and goodness. Keep “this little light of mine” shining to brighten the darkness. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 70.)

“I have given you an example”

THURSDAY 3.10.16 John 13:1-20

Typically a slave had the job of washing tired, dirty feet that had walked on dusty or muddy roads all day, clad only in sandals. That’s why the disciples, acutely conscious of their relative rank in the group, all shied away from washing the feet of the others. But Jesus unblushingly did the slave’s work. Then he pointedly told his status-conscious disciples, “I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do.”

- Living and travel conditions today are vastly differently today. Much of the time today (though not always!) washing someone else’s feet is mainly symbolic, and does little to actually make that person’s life better and more pleasant. Given that, what are some real life ways you can meaningfully “wash the feet” of family members, neighbors, co-workers or other church members?
- Pastor Hamilton honed in on the underlying spiritual question this story asks each of us: “Jesus wanted to make sure his disciples got it. The story in John 13 encourages us to ask this question: Are you—am I—worried about who appears to be the greatest, or are we focused on humbly serving others?”¹ What’s your answer? How has it changed over time?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this is a hard prayer to pray. But I mean it: teach me how to find my greatest glory in serving you and others in the ways you have equipped me to serve. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 96.)

“This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples”

FRIDAY 3.11.16 John 13:21-38

John wanted his readers to know that Jesus didn’t accidentally stumble into his saving death, but chose that course (cf. John 10:17-18). So here he made a point of showing that Jesus knew who would betray him. His spiritual symbolism was clear: when Judas left to betray Jesus, “it was night” (verse 30). But instead of bemoaning the darkness all around him, Jesus gave his followers a new commandment that radiated heaven’s light: “As I have loved you, so you must love each other. This is how everyone will know you are my disciples.”

- The command to love one another was not new. However, saying “as I have loved you” took love to a whole new level. In what ways did Jesus’ model of love expand love’s reach, and deepen its intensity? After Jesus taught, but before John wrote his gospel, the apostle Paul identified love as the first and greatest fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22). Ask the Spirit to guide you in shaping your view of yourself in the light of Jesus’ love, so that you in turn can love the people in your life well.
- Right after Judas left on his dark errand, Jesus returned to the idea of “glory.” He said that now he had been glorified, and God had been glorified in him. From a human standpoint, there was no glory on that dark night. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Swords don’t glorify the creator-God. Love does. Self-giving love, best of all.”¹ When, or through whom, have you gotten at least a glimpse of the glory of being a “champion” in living out self-giving love?

Prayer: Lord God, let the light of your love increasingly shine out from me into the hurting, darkened world around me. Give me the courage to live that way even when others do not

seem to see the value of it. Amen.

¹N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, part 2.* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004, p. 34.)

“Trust in God; trust also in me”

SATURDAY 3.12.16 John 14:1-31

Jesus’ talk of going away puzzled his disciples. But he promised that he would return, and when he did his followers could always be with him. He gave them a vivid picture of God’s house as a spacious place with plenty of room for everyone. He told them that in him, they’d seen the Father. Then, in a further glimpse into the mysteries of God, he promised not to leave them orphans, but to both send and come to them in the person of the “*paraclete*” (a Greek word that meant companion, helper, advocate and comforter)—the Holy Spirit.

- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “I ask you a simple question: What do you trust in? When you strip away everything else, what is it—at the bedrock in your life—that you trust in?... Christ calls us to trust in him, to count on him.”¹ How do you answer that “trust” question? At the end of this chapter, Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid” (verse 27). Have you ever found the “peace” the world gives ultimately empty and meaningless? How can trusting in Jesus, truly counting on him, give you the greater, deeper peace Jesus promised?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you promised, “I won’t leave you as orphans, I will come to you.” Thank you for always being my Companion and Comforter, even when my circumstances seem the hardest. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 97.)

Family Activity: Knowing the Holy Spirit is one way we know God more fully. Explain to your family that the Holy Spirit is like the wind. They are both always with us, we can’t see them, but we can see and feel what they are doing. Go outside for a walk together. Talk about what sounds and movements the wind is causing. Spend some time in prayer as you experience the wind. Remind everyone that the Holy Spirit is God’s presence with us and will only move in ways that are good, helpful and beneficial. Encourage your family members to remember God the Holy Spirit whenever they feel the wind. Thank God for the Holy Spirit and for the ways it brings God’s goodness to the world.

WEEK 5

March 13, 2016 Sermons on the Gospel of John “A Pair of Cleats?” Scripture:

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. *John 15:12-17 selected verses*

‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.’ *John 16:12-13a*

“I am the vine; you are the branches”

MONDAY 3.14.16 John 15:1-17

Historically, Israelites often saw themselves as part of a vineyard God tended (cf. Psalm 80:8-18, Isaiah 5:1-7). Jesus adapted that image. When his followers stayed united to him like branches to a vine, Jesus said, their lives would bear the fruit of love. Pastor Hamilton wrote, “The measure of spiritual maturity is love.... Whenever you’re trying to decide the right thing to do, you will never go wrong by asking, ‘What is the most loving thing I can do?’”¹

- You don’t have to be a great gardener to understand that any branch from a vine or tree that decided to “go it alone” would soon dry out and wither up. One key question Jesus’ image triggers is: what does it look like in practical, day-to-day terms for you to “remain” in Jesus? In what ways do your fellow believers help keep you “in Jesus”? How does your private devotional life deepen your links with Jesus?
- Jesus described the highest form of love: “No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends” (verse 13). That was exactly what he did the next day on the cross. But what does it mean, again in practical, day-to-day terms, for you to love others as sacrificially as Jesus loved us? How can healthy self-care be a key part of equipping yourself to love sacrificially?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep me connected to you today. Let me be a branch through which your divine love can flow freely to bless the lives of other people around me. Amen. ¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, pp. 103-104.)

“When the Companion comes...he will testify about me”

TUESDAY 3.15.16 John 15:18-16:3

Jesus never sugar-coated things for his disciples. Here he plainly said “the world” (those who rejected Jesus) would hate them. When John wrote, we believe that many synagogues were expelling any members who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. This cut people off from family connections and all the support structures and patterns they had depended on. But Jesus also said that, even in the face of hatred, the Companion, the Holy Spirit, would keep his followers anchored in the reality of belonging to heaven’s family.

- When Jesus warned his disciples about the hardships to come because they followed him, he urged them not to give up their faith (John 16:1). As Jesus’ followers, we have the Holy Spirit’s presence to strengthen us in our life of faith. What are the times that most test your faith? How do you remind yourself of Jesus’ living presence through the Holy Spirit during those times?
- Herod executed John’s brother James (cf. Acts 12:1-3), and the religious leaders were pleased. Jesus’ prediction had come true in John’s personal life: “The time is coming when those who kill you will think that they are doing a service to God.” Have you ever faced unfair, hurtful treatment from people who think “they are doing a service to God”? How can you stand for God’s truth without becoming a person who does harm in God’s name?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in the shadow of the cross, you promised that you would always be with me in the Holy Spirit. Help me to live my life, not consumed by fear, but energized by your promise! Amen.

“When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth”

WEDNESDAY 3.16.16 John 16:4-16

Jesus had only hours left to live. He had told his disciples that he would give his life for them and the whole world. He loved them, and tried to prepare them before he left them. Yet he knew that when things like the crucifixion happen, we grieve. Jesus had felt it himself (cf. John 11:35). So, instead of telling them not to feel what they were feeling (“you are filled with sorrow”—verse 6), he told them the Holy Spirit would be with them, not just for a brief time, but every day, guiding and helping them as they grew in him.

- Jesus provided for an active Companion to be with us until the end of time and space as we know it. Jesus has not forgotten or deserted us—he is constantly with us through the Holy Spirit. What word or phrase in today’s passage about the Holy Spirit speaks most to your heart? When have you most sensed Jesus’ presence with you?
- Jesus was direct with the disciples: “I have much more to say to you, but you can’t handle it now.” However, the Holy Spirit would continue his work of teaching them (John 16:13). Have you gone through times when you weren’t ready to handle the full truth of a medical, relational or spiritual situation? What is the value of realizing that God doesn’t insist on “cramming” the whole truth down our throat when we’re not ready, but continues to work patiently with us as we adjust?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me by your Spirit each day. I ask for a teachable spirit to know more about you and your will for me. Thank you for being patient with me. Amen.

“Be encouraged! I have conquered the world”

THURSDAY 3.17.16 John 16:17-33

Jesus was sure God’s Kingdom will win out in the end, but he offered no glib promises of an easy life. Near the end of this section of teaching, he said, “In the world you have distress.” That’s one reason the Holy Spirit’s presence mattered so much. But then he added, “Be encouraged!” The disciples might have wondered, “Why should we be encouraged, in this dark world full of distress?” Because, Jesus said, “I have conquered the world.”

- John reported that, with his arrest and execution imminent, Jesus said, “I have conquered the world.” Not “I will conquer the world,” but “I HAVE conquered the world.” How could he have such confidence, in the face of what lay just ahead of him? How can you allow Jesus to give you the same confidence in the face of whatever problems and challenges the world throws at you?
- In verse 18, John wrote that Jesus’ teaching (he was going away, hardship would come, but the Holy Spirit would be with them, and in the end he would overcome) confused the disciples. When have you found problems and painful times in life confusing? Has your connection with Jesus given you greater ability to endure? Find a way to memorize verse 33, so that you can always carry Jesus’ hope-filled promise with you into any situation.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for promising to be with me always, especially in the hard times. Thank you for the awareness I can have that you have conquered the world. Help me to live in this truth. Amen.

“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son”

FRIDAY 3.18.16 John 17:1-19

“Father, the time has come,” Jesus prayed. His teaching and healing ministry was over; the cross was just ahead. He told the Father that he had done his God-given work by making God known to our world. He returned to the theme we saw in John 12, asking God to “glorify” him— through the cross! Then his prayer focused not on his own well-being but on his followers. He asked God to guard the disciples as they faced a hostile world.

- In verse 14, Jesus said, a bit surprisingly, that his followers “don’t belong to this world” any more than he did. In what ways are you most interested in, and attentive to, this world? In what areas of life do you most sense your energy and focus shifting to God’s Kingdom, both in God’s mission in this world and in the hope of eternity beyond this world that God offers?
- Jesus prayed, “I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” Do you have a sense of what work God has given you to do during your time on this earth? If so, in what ways does that shape your priorities, the ways you spend your time and energy? If not, what are some ways that God and other Christians could help you to discover the work God’s given you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, fill my heart with a desire to know the work you have given me to do. Then fill my life with your power, to actually do the work you have for me. Amen.

“I pray they will be one, Father”

SATURDAY 3.19.16 John 17:20-26

As Jesus ended his prayer, he asked God to empower “those who believe in me because of their word” to live united in love. In other words, he prayed for Christians through the ages, including you. He didn’t pray for unity based on human “niceness,” but on a truly cosmic reality he invited all to take part in: “I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (verse 21).

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “Imagine some great figure of the past...who you respect and admire. Imagine that historians have just found...a letter from the great man. And imagine that it was talking about—you! How would you feel? That is how you should feel as you read verse 20. Jesus is talking about you. And me.”¹ Just hours before he went to the cross, King Jesus was confident his kingdom would endure, prevail over the world’s hatred, and in time reach you. How does your heart respond when you realize that Jesus prayed for you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make me a living, breathing answer to your prayer. I open my heart to the work of your Holy Spirit. Guide me as I seek to share your love and grace with everyone I meet. Amen.

¹N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, part 2*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004, p. 99.)

Family Activity: Read John 15:1-5. As a family, discuss what Jesus might mean when he says he is the vine and we are the branches. Take a trip to a grocery store, a farmer’s market or a garden. Explore different fruits and vegetables that grow on vines (watermelon, grapes, cucumbers, pumpkins). Ask questions such as, “Could the fruit grow without the vine?” or “How would the vegetables grow if the branches weren’t connected to the vine?” If possible,

ask a gardener or a farmer for information on how important the vine and branches are to the growth of the fruit. Also explore the roles of the vine and branches and the importance of their connection. (If the weather doesn't allow an outing, explore websites showing vines and branches.) Pray and ask God to help you stay connected to Jesus and to bear His fruit.

WEEK 6

March 20, 2016 Sermons on the Gospel of John "The Power of a Suffering King"

Scripture:

Jesus went out with his disciples and crossed over to the other side of the Kidron Valley. He and his disciples entered a garden there... Judas brought a company of soldiers and some guards from the chief priests and Pharisees. They came there carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus knew everything that was to happen to him, so he went out and asked, "Who are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I Am." (Judas, his betrayer, was standing with them.) When he said, "I Am," they shrank back and fell to the ground... *John 18:1-7*

It was about noon on the Preparation Day for the Passover... Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. The soldiers took Jesus prisoner. Carrying his cross by himself, he went out to a place called Skull Place (in Aramaic, Golgotha). That's where they crucified him—and two others with him, one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a public notice written and posted on the cross. It read "Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. *John 19:16-20*

Jesus: "I AM"; Peter: "I'm not"

MONDAY 3.21.16 John 18:1-27

The authorities arrested Jesus. Peter, who said, "I'll give up my life for you" (John 13:37), bravely drew his sword to defend Jesus. Had he kept fighting, he'd likely have died. But living for Jesus proved harder. Questioned by possibly hostile people, he three times denied that he knew Jesus—just as Jesus had warned he would (cf. John 13:38). The Gospel of John gives the most complete record of Jesus' "trial" before Pilate. John 18:15-16 probably shows why—the gospel writer "was known to the high priest," and so went in and heard the proceedings.

- As we've read John's gospel, we've studied Jesus' "I Am" statements (claiming God's name from Exodus 3:14). Facing armed soldiers hunting "Jesus the Nazarene," Jesus again said, "I Am." Conversely, asked if he was a disciple of Jesus, Peter desperately said, "I'm not" (verses 17, 25). How do you self-identify in relation to Jesus, if at all? How can you allow God to empower you to live beyond the fear that paralyzed Peter?
- The soldiers took Jesus, not to a public court, but to the powerful high priest's lavish home. (See a model of what Caiaphas' house may have been like by clicking [here](#).) Peter, a simple fisherman from Galilee, probably found even the physical setting overpowering. What things intimidate you or cause you fear? In what ways are you building a stronger, more resilient sense of your true identity, based on Jesus' lordship?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I don't like looking odd, facing ridicule, or standing alone. Keep me connected to your presence today, so that I can draw on your strength if I'm called to take an uncomfortable stand. Amen.

“My kingdom doesn’t originate from this world”

TUESDAY 3.22.16 John 18:28-40

The religious leaders carefully stayed ritually “clean” as they schemed to kill their God (in the person of Jesus). When Pilate, the Roman procurator, asked why they’d come, they exposed the “kangaroo court” nature of Jesus’ “trial” by saying, “The Law doesn’t allow us to kill anyone.” Jesus refused to grovel or plead, as most prisoners would have, but simply declared his heavenly origin to Pilate. Pilate tried to find a politically palatable way to free a clearly innocent man.

- Who would dare answer Pilate as Jesus did: “My kingdom doesn’t originate from this world.... I came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth”? C. S. Lewis wrote that a mere man who made such claims “would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell.”¹ Pilate focused on his political career; the religious leaders reviled Jesus for blasphemy. How does your heart respond to Jesus’ claims: lunatic, liar, or Lord and God?
- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “John’s account depicts Jesus as a King whose Kingdom is not like those of this world. It is a Kingdom that transcends geographic boundaries and even time. It is a Kingdom made up of all who believe in him, and seek to love God and neighbor. It is a Kingdom of truth, light and life.”² What appeals to you about belonging to that kind of Kingdom? Do any of the qualities of Jesus’ Kingdom challenge you in any way?

Prayer: Lord of all, you came to testify to the truth, including the truth about who you are and where you came from. I believe the truth to which you testified, and I worship and follow you. Amen.

¹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (New York: Scribner, 1952, p. 41.)

²Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 125-126.)

Pilate asked Jesus, “Where are you from?”

WEDNESDAY 3.23.16 John 19:1-12

The religious leaders insisted—“we have a Law, and according to this Law he ought to die because he made himself out to be God’s Son.” Jesus had suffered much, flogged and abused by the Roman soldiers (cf. John 19:1-5). But the enemies who hated and feared him wanted more. Even Pilate, a jaded Roman politician, thought perhaps something otherworldly was at work, and asked Jesus, “Where do you come from?” (John 19:9) Locked in their earth-bound outlook, the religious leaders never asked themselves if Jesus’ claim might be credible.

- Pilate avoided a riot, kept local rulers happy, upheld Roman power—all at the “small” cost of torturing and killing one innocent peasant rabbi. How did Jesus and Pilate’s dialogue in 19:7-11 show the contrast between external power and inner moral strength? When might you have to choose between pleasing a human power (even if it’s “just” social or family pressure) and doing what’s right? How do you nurture the God-given sensitivity and moral strength to do what’s right?
- “When Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here’s the man’” (John 19:5). John seems to have planted a double meaning in this scene. On the one hand, we’ve mocked and hurt this man—won’t you pity him? Yet

there was also a note of grudging admiration—somehow this man’s dignity and self-possession show us what it means to be human. How can Jesus, “the man,” help to sustain and strengthen you when you face relational or physical pain?

Prayer: Loving Lord, Pilate said, “Here’s the man,” and the religious leaders snarled “Crucify him.” You’re still “the man,” and I want to follow you, not crucify you. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Pilate: “Here’s your king.” Jewish leaders: “Crucify him!”

THURSDAY 3.24.16 John 19:13-22

Pilate asked, “Do you want me to crucify your king?” Turning their backs on not just their nation but their God, the religious leaders said, “We have no king except the emperor.” Pastor Hamilton wrote, “In a very real sense, this wasn’t Jesus’ trial at all; it was the trial of Pontius Pilate and the religious leaders.... because of Pilate’s concern for himself, he sent Christ to die. He may have helped his political career, but he failed the test.”¹ Pilate sentenced Jesus to the cross. God in the flesh, without sin or fault, was condemned to die a brutal death.

- The sign on Jesus’ cross read “Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews.” Wavering in executing a guiltless man, Pilate now (too late) took a firm stand about the sign’s wording. But John saw more—written in Latin, Greek and Aramaic, the sign proclaimed Jesus as king in the three great languages of the ancient world. What kind of a king reigns from a cross? What has to happen in your heart to allow you to serve that kind of king?
- At almost any other time, the religious leaders in Jerusalem would have said they hated Rome’s control, and the claim of Rome’s emperors to be divine. Yet in their fervor to see Jesus condemned, they shockingly declared, “We have no king except the emperor.” Are there earthly “emperors” to whom you are tempted to give your loyalty today, above your loyalty to God? What can help you to always hold God as the supreme ruler in your heart?

Prayer: Loving Jesus, I pledge allegiance—first, above all else—to you and your kingdom. Deliver me from the urge to seek earthly power or influence by compromising that allegiance. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 126-127.)

Jesus said, “It is completed,” and “he gave up his life”

FRIDAY 3.25.16 John 19:23-30

With Jesus on the cross, Roman soldiers gambled for his clothes (cf. Psalm 22:18). To them, crucifying criminals was routine. Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of “the disciple whom he loved.” He, the source of “living water” (cf. John 4:14) said he thirsted. John underlined Jesus’ identity as “our Passover lamb” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7) by specifying a hyssop branch (cf. Exodus 12:22). Then Jesus said, “It is completed” and died. At infinite cost, God’s great saving work for humanity was completed.

- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “In John, the final words of Jesus were ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30 NRSV). I had often interpreted those words to mean that Christ was exhausted and defeated. But then I learned that in Greek the phrase is expressed in just one word: *tetelestai*. That word is a shout of victory announcing that a battle has been won,

a mission accomplished.”¹ What kind of victory had Jesus won on the cross? In what ways has that victory changed your life for the better?

- “Good Friday,” we call this day—not because humans crucifying Jesus was in any way “good,” but because God’s transforming love brought eternal good out of that awful act. Let focused time with God make this a truly good Friday for you. Join today’s prayer vigil at Resurrection’s Leawood or West campuses, or the Good Friday service at Resurrection Downtown. For detailed information, go to www.cor.org/Easter.

Prayer: Loving Lord, on this Good Friday, I bow at the foot of your cross, and I commit myself anew to Jesus the Nazarene, the king of my life. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 136.)

“In the garden was a new tomb”

SATURDAY 3.26.16 John 19:31-42

In the Genesis 2 story, human life began in a garden. In John 18:1 John alluded to Genesis by saying Jesus went into a garden. (People often speak of the Garden of Gethsemane, but none of the other three gospels used the word “garden.”) After Jesus’ death, John recorded that two secret, wealthy followers of Jesus provided for his burial. Again he noted that there was a garden where Jesus’ body was laid to rest. As Pastor Hamilton wrote, “Perhaps God the gardener, who took on flesh in Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection, has gone about setting the world aright. He has come to repair the garden.”¹

- Note how final Jesus’ burial felt. No one said, “Let’s not waste the spices—he’ll be alive again on Sunday.” To Jesus’ followers it felt as though evil won, good lost, and death (as always) triumphed over life. What have been your darkest times, moments when hope seemed gone and despair held you in its grip? Are you facing an awful situation or problems that seem insoluble right now? On this Saturday, join Jesus’ first followers in feeling deeply how dark this world can be. But do so in the trust that, in God’s world, despair and darkness NEVER have the last word. Tomorrow is Easter.

Prayer: O God, for light in the darkness, for hope in the face of despair, for eternal life now and beyond death, I thank you and praise you. Create your new life in me. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 156-157.)

Family Activity: Jesus came to show God’s love to all people. Create a “Love one another” collage. Gather a piece of poster board, magazines, scissors, glue and markers. Invite one family member to write the title “Love one another” on the poster board. Ask each person to cut out pictures of various people, or draw pictures of them, and fasten them to the poster. When your family has completed the poster, take a moment to wonder aloud what the lives of these different people are like. Say, “Often in everyday life we make assumptions or judgments about people we know and people we don’t know. God calls us to love all people with his love. How can we each do a better job of following the example of Jesus and sharing God’s love with the world? Ask God to help you do this.”

WEEK 7 (Easter)

Easter! March 27, 2016 Sermons on the Gospel of John "I Am Sending You"

Scripture: John 19:41-20:1, 20:19-22

There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified, and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish Preparation Day and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus in it. Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

"Early in the morning," a puzzling discovery

MONDAY 3.28.16 John 20:1-10

Early Sunday, Mary, Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" found the tomb empty. Had the authorities, or grave robbers, taken Jesus' body? The disciples saw an unexpected sight. Scholar Craig Keener noted, "The face cloth separate from the linen is 'folded up'... which could be an indication of neatness, or that it was still rolled the way it had been when it was wrapped around Jesus' head—that his body had risen straight out of the wrappings and cloth."¹

- When Jesus raised Lazarus, "The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Untie him'" (John 11:44). But the risen Jesus didn't need anyone to untie him. His grave cloths, folded and left behind, were one sign that his resurrection was qualitatively different, the creation of a new plane of human life. In your walk with God, have you ever met something that didn't fit your previous ideas about how life works? How do you remain open to see "and believe"?
- Mary went to the tomb "while it was still dark." She didn't expect to find Jesus alive, but in love and devotion she was eager to care for his body as soon as possible. (The Jewish laws, the very ones Jesus had challenged, forbade that on the Sabbath.) How can you nurture a desire to go to Jesus first, even in times of discouragement and darkness?

Prayer: Lord God, your creative power is always at work in my life and in the world around me. Keep my mind open and willing to believe in all you want to do in my life. Amen.

¹*Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, comment on John 20:6-7.)*

“They have taken away my Lord”

TUESDAY 3.29.16 John 20:11-13

In John’s gospel, as we’ve learned, details matter. Pastor Hamilton wrote, “John’s account... tells us there are two angels, and they are sitting inside the tomb on the ledge ‘where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot’ (20:12)... I believe these details are an allusion to the so-called mercy seat of God—that is, the lid of the Ark of the Covenant... Was [John] hoping we would see that this place where Jesus’ body had lain was the new mercy seat and that here, by his own blood, Christ had reconciled humanity to God?”¹

- Mary thought she was going to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus’ body for burial. Why not weep? Expressing grief over a loss is healthy. Yet two angels (“in white,” not the color of sorrow) asked her, “Why are you crying?” Has God ever helped you see a painful or negative experience in a different light? What are you facing now that needs the touch of God’s life and hope?
- Mary at first could see only one likely explanation for the empty tomb: “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they’ve put him.” Have you ever faced a situation in which “they” (whether “they” were faceless and nameless, or very well known) have tainted something you care about deeply? What helps you lift your focus from what “they” may have done to the living Lord of your life, letting him help you reframe the situation?

Prayer: Living Lord, help me never to fear tears and sorrow—and never to get stuck in them, either. Give me eyes to see people, situations and myself in the light of your eternal love. Amen. ¹*Adam Hamilton, John: The Gospel of Light and Life. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 150.)*

“I’ve seen the Lord”

WEDNESDAY 3.30.16 John 20:14-18

Mary thought Jesus was “the gardener.” In symbol, he was—Adam failed, but Jesus would tend earth’s “garden” well (cf. Genesis 2:15, Romans 5:15-21). Mary didn’t recognize Jesus (scholar William Barclay suggested she may have been blinded by her tears), but it seems his voice, the way he said her name, was unmistakable. Then Jesus sent Mary to be the very first eyewitness to the risen Christ.

- At the sound of Jesus’ voice, Mary moved in a flash from utter despair to unbelievable joy. How can you more and more come to know the “sound” of Jesus’ voice? What steps will help you keep your relationship with Jesus personal, a link between your heart and his, rather than just an academic exercise?
- Scholar N. T. Wright said, “If someone in the first century had wanted to invent a convincing story about people seeing Jesus, they wouldn’t have dreamed of giving the star part to a woman. Let alone Mary Magdalene.”¹ What does Jesus’ trust in Mary to share the good news of Easter tell you about how Jesus saw the value of both women and men in his new creation?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in the beginning you created. Then, when everything went wrong, you came and launched a new creation. I want to be part of that, and join Mary in sharing the news of a risen Lord. Amen. ¹*N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, part 2. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004, p. 148.)*

Peace—and a purpose—for frightened disciples

THURSDAY 3.31.16 John 20:19-23

Everything the disciples thought they understood about Jesus seemed lost. He was dead, and now his body was missing. The disciples were hiding, afraid the Jewish authorities would come after them next. But no one had stolen Jesus' body. He was still their Messiah, in ways that surpassed their wildest dreams. "Jesus...stood among them" and gave them his peace, his purpose ("As the Father sent me, so I am sending you"), and his power ("Receive the Holy Spirit").

- Pastor Hamilton wrote, "God's work was only begun in Jesus' resurrection.... This is why, on the night when the risen Christ finally appeared to his disciples, he breathed on them and said, 'As the father sent me, so I am sending you' (John 20:21). What Jesus began, we're meant to complete."¹ How can you be part of Jesus' work of extending the message of God's love and forgiveness to others, of restoring the world to what the creator intended?
- John kept including clues to remind his readers of the creation stories in Genesis 1-3. After Jesus commissioned the disciples in verse 21, "he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'"—a clear echo of Genesis 2:7. How has Jesus breathed new hope and purpose—new life—into you? In what ways can you tangibly share that peace and wholeness with those around you today?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for defeating death through Jesus' resurrection. Help me to embrace your peace and purpose, and to trust the Holy Spirit as my power source as I shine your light to those around me. Amen.

¹Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 157.)

Thomas: from "Unless... I won't believe" to "My Lord!"

FRIDAY 4.1.16 John 20:24-28

For unknown reasons, Thomas missed Jesus' first appearance to the disciples. He refused to take their word for the remarkable claim that Jesus was alive. But Jesus was patient with Thomas' fears and questions. He came again when Thomas was present, and said "Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side." The presence of his clearly-alive Lord overcame all Thomas' doubt. He worshipped, calling Jesus "my Lord and my God."

- John began with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). At the end, Thomas became the first person in the entire gospel to fully get that, to look at Jesus and address him directly as "God." Will you join him in bowing before Jesus and saying "My Lord and my God"?
- The risen Jesus was different—he could pass through locked doors, for example (verse 26). But he was not just a ghost—that was the point of "Put your hand into my side." This was physically him, Jesus, the body the grave clothes could not contain. The Word who became flesh (John 1:14) arose as flesh still, with what Paul would call a "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-47). In what ways can these hints about what the risen Jesus was like "flesh out" your hope and expectation for life with him eternally?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are my Lord and my God. You are my Creator and my Redeemer. Because you live, I too will live forever. I thank you and I praise you today. Amen.

“So that you will believe... and have life”

SATURDAY 4.2.16 John 20:29-31

John wrote this gospel as the generation of the apostles was dying, so Thomas' experience had special significance. If people weren't willing to trust the testimony of those who'd seen Jesus, the faith would soon die out. Jesus said, "Happy are those who don't see and yet believe." We don't see Jesus as the apostles did. But an eyewitness wrote this gospel so that we may believe as they did, and have eternal life.

- This was almost certainly the fourth gospel's original ending. (We'll see next week that chapter 21 reads like a sequel, added for a special purpose.) John's gospel was not an exhaustive biography, written for abstract, academic purposes. No—"these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and that believing, you will have life in his name." Scholar William Barclay wrote, "We must read [the gospels], not primarily as historians seeking information, but as men and women seeking God."¹ In what ways have you come to know God better as you've read the gospel of John? How can you more fully share the bread of life, the living water because of this journey with Jesus?

Prayer: Dear God, I thank you that John used his consummate writing artistry to bear witness to Jesus, the Messiah. Guide me as I use whatever gifts I have to bear witness to my Savior. Amen.

¹William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of John—Volume 2*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, revised edition 1976, p. 280.)

Family Activity: Jesus is risen and lives forever as the Light of the World! To celebrate Easter, share one or both of these activities. First, bake or buy cupcakes. On top of each one, place and light a trick candle. Encourage each person to blow out his or her candles. When people see that the light keeps appearing and it is impossible to extinguish, read John 1:5 and John 20:1-20. Remind everyone that Jesus is the Light of the World and that death or darkness cannot ever overcome him! Later that night, take a family walk. Try to walk only in the darkness, then turn on a flashlight. Discuss which is best and why. Give thanks and praise to God that Jesus is the light and will always show us the way. Happy Easter!

WEEK 8

April 3, 2016 Sermons on the Gospel of John “Get In Touch with Your Thomas”

Scripture: John 20:24-29

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Jesus sought out the fishermen

MONDAY 4.4.16 John 21:1-6

John's gospel showed Jesus in or near Jerusalem more often than Matthew, Mark or Luke. Chapter 21, however, told of Peter and several other disciples back at the Sea of Galilee. (There are various guesses, but John did not explain why they chose to go fishing.) Despite their past experience as fishermen, they were not successful on their own. Yet when Jesus guided them, they hauled in a huge catch.

- This story (like a similar one in Luke 5) showed Jesus showing skilled, experienced fishermen where to find a startlingly large catch. When have you found yourself ineffective (in your personal life or an area of ministry) because you weren't open to Jesus' wisdom? When has "practicing the presence of Jesus" made your efforts clearly more effective?
- In his prologue, John wrote, "The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world... but the world didn't recognize the light" (John 1:9-10). In verse 4 of chapter 21, he wrote, "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus." What has helped you to recognize Jesus when his presence touches your life? How can you sharpen your spiritual "vision" to "see" Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you promised to be with me "every day until the end of this present age" (Matthew 28:20). Help me keep my heart open, attuned to your comforting, guiding presence with me. Amen.

"They knew it was the Lord"

TUESDAY 4.5.16 John 21:7-14

Jesus was no ghost—he was truly, physically alive. He built a fire and cooked breakfast! John, a master of evocative images, must also have recalled that Peter's faith "crashed" around a fire in Caiaphas' court (cf. John 18:15-18, 25-27). He probably meant the unbroken net full of fish (153—fishermen would count!) to point to the wide reach of Christ's gospel, the truth that there would always be room for all the people for whom God's messengers "fished."

- The fish and bread were ready, yet Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Have you ever thought about why Jesus doesn't just do everything for us, changing us into the people he wants us to be, but instead asks us to join our effort with his spiritual power? In what ways does his call for you to work with him as you grow spiritually offer the best path to character development, allowing you to still be you, but a new you?
- John 6:11 said, "Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish." Today we read, "Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish." Try to imagine what memories this action must have triggered in the disciples. Think back on your own walk with Jesus. What memories of high points strengthen you for today's challenges?

Prayer: Loving Lord, long before you prepared this breakfast, the psalmist wrote, "You set a table for me" (Psalm 23:5). As I eat my meals today, remind me of all the deeper ways you feed my soul as well as my body. Amen.

Healing Peter's triple denial

WEDNESDAY 4.6.16 John 21:15-17

Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus (cf. John 18:15-18, 25-27). As his urgent dive into the water and swim to shore seemed to show (cf. John 21:7), Peter was aching inside, eager to reconnect with Jesus. Jesus didn't want that failure to haunt the rest of Peter's life, either. Three times, he allowed Peter to affirm his love, deeper and more solid now because he knew Jesus forgave him even when he had failed.

- Scholar N. T. Wright said, "The three questions correspond to Peter's three denials. Three for completeness, yes, but three also for reminder. The smell of the charcoal fire lingers. Peter's night of agony—and Jesus' own night of agony—returns. But because of the latter, the former can be dealt with."¹ What failures haunt (or once haunted) your relationship with Jesus? Imagine yourself on that beach around that fire with Jesus. Hear Jesus ask you, "_____, do you love me?" Answer, and hear Jesus deal with any barrier that disturbs you, leaving it in your past.
- Wright also noted that as Peter affirmed his love for Jesus, "the answer earns, each time, not a pat on the back, not a 'There, that's all right then', but a command. A fresh challenge. A new commission."² Our work doesn't earn forgiveness, but Jesus' call to join in his work is the clearest sign that he forgives us. In what way(s) do you sense Jesus calling you to serve, to feed his sheep, today? How are you answering the call?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, like Peter, I love you. Like Peter, I sometimes fail you. Thank you for always drawing me to you and welcoming me back, like Peter, and for calling me to live your love more and more to all I meet. Amen.

¹N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, part 2*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004, p. 164.) ²N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, part 2*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004, p. 165.)

A somber call to follow

THURSDAY 4.7.16 John 21:18-19

When Peter first chose to follow Jesus, he couldn't possibly have realized all that Jesus' call meant. Now he'd seen Jesus go to the cross. And now Jesus told him that he would yet have the chance to live up to his words in John 13:37 ("I'll give up my life for you"). With the cost of following him clearly in view, Jesus repeated the same simple, sweeping call: "Follow me."

- Though there have been (and are today) brave martyrs for Christ, the vast majority of Christ-followers through the ages have not had to die for their faith. Rather, Jesus asks us to "die" to ways of thinking about life and faith that are inconsistent with his life and example. How eager or reluctant are you to follow Jesus into a changed way of thinking and living that will show God's glory to those around you?
- "[Jesus] said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God." Most of us don't know what the future holds, what kind of death we'll die. We do know that we will all die, that it's not a matter of "if" but "when." How can you and God make the most of each day of the rest of your life? What does it mean for you to "glorify" God?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, "Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee." I recite the words at church. Please help me to mean them. Amen.

Your journey is your own

FRIDAY 4.8.16 John 21:20-23

In John 17:18 Jesus prayed, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent [my disciples] into the world.” In John 20:21 he told them, “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Peter had personally accepted Jesus’ call anew, and he would follow, even at great cost—but he wondered what might await the other disciple. Jesus said our call is to follow him, not to compare our path with anyone else’s.

- Jesus’ prayer and call for his disciples to follow him applied not only to his first disciples, but extends to his disciples today. It is not always an easy call, then or now. When has following God’s call on your life challenged you? How has Jesus’ hope and peace helped you through the ups and downs on your journey of knowing, loving and serving God?
- It can be tempting to compare your journey with other people’s, to wish your journey were more like someone else’s. Jesus doesn’t call all of his followers down the same path. We each have a unique set of life experiences, gifts and a personal relationship with Jesus. What aspects of your journey are easiest for you to thank God for? Which parts do you wish God would change, or free you from? In what ways can you see that you’ve grown through tough things you’ve faced with God in the past?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for calling me to follow you. Help me to trust you at every stage of my journey, without trying to compare my path with anyone else’s. Amen.

One disciple’s reliable testimony

SATURDAY 4.9.16 John 21:24-25

In his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, scholar Richard Bauckham documented that first century readers considered history nearly worthless unless an eyewitness wrote it. The writer of the Gospel of John was an eyewitness to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, he said. He could have written much more about Jesus, but his testimony was trustworthy and powerful. “I saw it—you can believe it!” he seemed to say at the end, probably recalling Jesus’ words to Thomas (“Happy are those who don’t see and yet believe”—John 20:29). • Although he wrote down his testimony to Jesus, John did not say, “The Word became a book.” He said, “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). How will you take what you have learned about Jesus from studying the fourth gospel and weave it into your day-to-day life, so that your life becomes more and more a living embodiment of God’s great love for the world?

Prayer: Dear God, let me live my life each day in such a way that more and more I disappear, and those who see me see your love lived out by a person. Amen.

Family Activity: Place some coins in a container. Take the container as a family to a nearby fountain. As you sit by the fountain, ask each person to take one or more coins. Review the story in John 21 of how Jesus forgave Peter, even after he denied even knowing Jesus. Explain that this is a time to tell God “I’m sorry” for any times we fell short of God’s ideal. Ask each person to individually pray (aloud or silently), “Lord, I am sorry for...” and confess the error to God. Toss a coin into the water. Repeat as many times as people wish. When everyone is finished, invite family members to dip their hands in the fountain for a symbolic washing. Finish by praying, “Thank you, God, for the promise of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Amen.”

