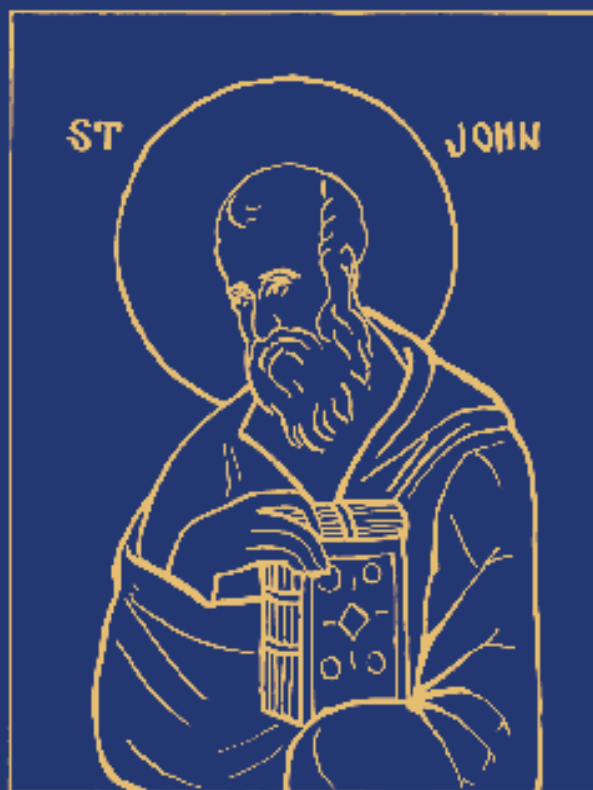


The
BELOVED
Disciple



*A Prayerful Reading
of the Gospel of John*

VOLUME 1



I am his BELOVED

Dear Friends,

Like each one of us, Jesus had concentric circles of influence and friendship. There were the generic “crowds” that followed him from place to place. Within the crowds, there were disciples—his true followers. Within the disciples, there were his chosen twelve. Within the twelve there were the three: Peter, James and John. And of the three, there is one who is called “The Beloved Disciple”—also known later as St. John the Evangelist. As the one who worked most closely with Jesus, John went on to author five New Testament books, and be a foundational leader of the early church.

In his writing to the church, John left the imprint of Jesus’ love. The Gospel according to John is certainly the warmest and most tender book in the Bible. Where did this tenderness come from? It came from John being loved first. And now, John himself calls the church he addresses “Beloved.” We are not only John’s beloved but God’s as well. He has loved us with an everlasting and unbreakable love. His love is demonstrated by Jesus’ work on the cross. His love is felt by the comforting work of the Spirit. And now, we are commanded to “keep ourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21a).

This prayer guide is designed to slow you down so that you can keep yourself in God’s love. Every weekday, there is devotional, a prayer, and a prompt to encourage you to journal your experience of God’s word. Please set aside time so that you are not rushing through this, but giving space for transformation. As you begin this journey, I encourage you to be still, focus on your breathing. As you breathe, say to your soul: “I am his beloved.”

May the peace of God which transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Gray Ewing

Lead Pastor, New Valley Church (Downtown)

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Family
WORSHIP
Week 1

For family worship, please choose any day of the week that works best. Gather your family and set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss the following. Anytime will work, but often after dinner or before bed works best.

THEME: Jesus Is Precious

Discuss:

Do you have a favorite stuffed animal, blanket or belonging? Go and get it and tell your family why it's so special to you. How would it feel to give up this precious belonging? God had one, perfect and beautiful Son. God loves His precious Son. He was a sinless man who God sent to the world He loved. The Bible calls Him the Spotless Lamb.

Memorize:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29

Ask:

Who is the Lamb of God?

Who takes away the sin of the world?

Take Away:

Jesus is more precious than anything in the world.

Family Prompt:

Write something that is precious to you. Jesus is better than _____. Write this on a white board, chalk board or piece of paper and hang somewhere you can all see it.

Pray:

God, we thank you for sending us

What was most precious to you,

Your perfect Son and Spotless Lamb.

You love us so much that you sent Him

To take away our sin.

We love you God,

We thank you,

And we pray this in your Son Jesus' name,

Amen

The True Light

Read John 1:1-13

The Bible's claims to truth are not subtle. It claims to be nothing less than the true story of the whole world. Like Genesis 1, John 1 opens with "In the beginning," reminding us that everything that was made was made through Jesus. It turns out that Jesus is the only way to understand the world—He is the true light.

Allow your heart today to contemplate this fact: If you have Jesus, you have everything. All our searching, as complex as it may seem at times, finds complete resolution in Jesus Christ. He gives light to everything. Underneath every other longing is a longing for him. Every joy is a gift from him. For those who receive him, he is the key to understanding the true nature of reality. So everything in our lives can be seen in his light. Everything belongs. Everyone will bow.

Pray

Light of the world,

We worship you as the One who was from the beginning.

"God from God. Light from Light. True God from True God."

Help us to see the world through your gentle eyes.

Illuminate our paths with your wisdom

So that in your light we will see light

Give us the courage of John

To be a witness to the darkness around us.

And bring us finally into the kingdom of the beloved,

Where there is no difference between what is

And what will be.

Amen

Journal: Take a few moments to write down your greatest longings. How does Jesus give light to those things?

A Name or an Influence?

Read John 1:14-28

When faced with the persistent question, “Who are you?”, John the Baptist answered in a peculiar way. He did not say his name, like most of us would. John knew that his answer must point to Jesus, because Jesus ranks ahead of him. Jesus is the only One worthy of honor and praise, who is full of grace and truth. John’s responses to the questioning from the Priests and Levites show that he had no desire to make a name for himself. Rather, his desire was to influence those he could for Christ.

As Christians we have a profoundly beautiful responsibility to use our influence in the world to point others to Christ rather than make a name for ourselves. John knew that lasting glory is found only in God himself, not in the praise and esteem of man.

Pray

Jesus Christ our Lord,

You are glorious as the only Son from the Father,

Altogether truth and grace as no one else can be.

We thank you that you humbled yourself to come to earth,

To dwell among us in all of your heavenly glory.

Help us to be transformed by the power of your love,

To seek after truth and grace in all aspects of our life.

Give us the humility to be gracious at all times,

And the boldness to proclaim the Gospel truth to everyone.

Encourage us to seek your glory rather than our own,

That our influence would be directed all to You.

Amen

Journal: Name some specific ways you can use your influence to point away from yourself and toward Jesus in your community, office, school, or family.

Saturated in God's Promises

Read John 1:29-34

When rain is expected in the desert, plants should be watered before the rain comes. If the ground is too hard and dry, rain simply runs off and washes away without providing much-needed hydration. But, when the soil is prepared and softened, the rain soaks in, giving life and water to thirsty plants. It is much the same with our hearts. When we are soaked in the truths of Scripture and our eyes are fixed in expectation of witnessing His presence and power in our lives, we will encounter Jesus.

John's faith, saturated in the Old Testament promises of a Redeemer, compelled him to the work of preparation. John has been baptizing people with water, proclaiming the coming of One whom he had never seen or met. Because his heart was prepared to receive, he could immediately recognize what the world needed to behold--the Lamb of God!

Pray

Jesus, Lamb of God,

In You we live, and move, and have our being.

Apart from you we are nothing and have nothing,

yet so often we live as if we have no need of You.

Forgive us, Lord. Help us learn to watch and wait for You,

Cause us to long for your coming as John did. Increase our faith,

And allow us to walk in the path of faithful obedience

Even when we don't understand or can't see the whole picture.

Teach us to notice with gratitude and faith your presence and power in the world, and in our lives. Amen.

Journal: What are some ways to prepare your heart and mind to more fully recognize the presence of Jesus in your life?

Instilling Identity

Read John 1:35-51

When Jesus calls his first disciples, he demonstrates how identity is wrapped up in names and titles. Who is Jesus? He is The Lamb of God, the Rabbi, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man. Who are His first disciples? They are Andrew, a curious mind looking for answers; Simon, whom He calls Peter (meaning a fragment of a monolithic rock formation); Philip, an eager Galilean seeking a teacher; Nathanael, a blunt Israelite who clearly doesn't sugar-coat anything. Jesus knows them without introduction. He already sees the connection between their identities and his story.

Pray

Redeemer of souls,
You confer upon us our true identities,
You call us by name,
You even call us by Your Name,
You knit us together in the womb,
You remind us who we are, and whose image we bear
Through the words of Your prophets, and Your Son.
Help us to render to You what is Yours,
And live out of our identity in You.
We thank You for bestowing on us roles in Your story.
May we live them out for Your glory. Amen.

Journal: How would you define your “identity?” How has God both named that in you, and demonstrated it in your story?

To The Brim

Read John 2:1-12

As Creator God Incarnate, Jesus did not need to enlist the help of servants for the first miraculous sign of his ministry. He could have made empty jars overflow with wine or transformed all the water of the well into wine. Yet He chose to partner with the obedient servants to manifest His glory. By obeying fully in a common task, the servants participate in the greatest accomplishment of their lives! They work together with Christ for an extraordinary sign of His identity and power. They are blessed to see and know what others do not. While the wedding guests delight in the goodness of the new wine, it is the servants who exchange a knowing smile with Jesus amid their amazement. How many times are our opportunities to co-labor with Christ wrapped in ordinary or inconvenient invitations to obedience?

Pray

Lord Christ,

You are the Bridegroom of Your people.

Our life and all joy comes from You.

You poured out Yourself for us,

And now You are making all things new.

You turn our thin works of obedience into full-bodied fruit.

Strengthen us to be faithful in the little,

to be patient and diligent in the demands of each day.

Give us eyes to see the constant miracles You provide.

Help us to serve others in brimful measure,

and to rejoice in the sweetness of Your grace.

May we trust in You to always supply what is good.

Amen.

Journal: Reflect on a time you have seen God's power in action. In what ways can you cheerfully "do whatever He tells you" today?

Family
WORSHIP
Week 2

For family worship, please choose any day of the week that works best. Gather your family and set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss the following. Anytime will work, but often after dinner or before bed works best.

Theme: God Gave His Son

Discuss:

God created the entire world, the sun, the moon and the stars and every grain of sand. God created you! He knows every hair on your head! We know that he loves us because of what He has given us in creation. But he shows his love in an even more important way.

He loves you so much He sent His only son Jesus for you!

Memorize:

“For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

Ask:

Who did God love?

Who did God send?

Who will have eternal life?

Take Away:

God is love.

Family Prompt:

What is something God created that you are thankful for? The sun, the birds, the ocean? Take a walk outside and look around. Find something God created and thank Him for it. Then thank him for the greatest gift: That he sent his son!

Pray:

God, thank you for your love.

You sent Jesus to the world you created

So that we could know you

And be known by you.

Thank you for knowing us

And loving us.

Help us love others

The way you have loved.

Amen

They Remembered

Read John 2:13-25

Here are two instances in which the disciples remember the Word of God. The first is after Jesus cleanses the temple (v. 17). The second is after Jesus' resurrection (v.22). These references to the disciple's memories may appear as lesser details in light of the Lord's passion and prophecy. But they offer us a tremendous insight: The gift of remembrance. For it wasn't when they first heard the Word of the Lord that they "believed the Scripture." It was when they remembered them in light of the works of Christ.

However, it is important to note that the disciples could not have remembered God's Word if they did not know it to begin with. Neither can we remember if we do not endeavor to familiarize ourselves with the Scriptures. As we consider the work of Christ in our own lives, let us abide in His Word, that He may write it upon our hearts.

Pray

Lord,

Your Word is a lamp to our feet,

And a perfect light upon our path.

We praise You for this wonderful gift.

As we meditate upon your precepts,

Give us greater wisdom and understanding,

Of the marvelous works of Christ.

Help us to store Your Word in our hearts,

That we may live rightly before You.

Keep them at the forefront of our minds,

That our faith may be continually strengthened.

Amen

Journal: Write about one Scriptural promise from God that your heart needs to remember today.

Embracing a New Heritage

Read John 3:1-15

Jesus disrupts the religious society by mirroring their self-righteous, in-or-out, thinking right back to them. Over and over, we see him share that knowledge, power, and status are not the keys to the Kingdom of God. In this passage, Nicodemus, the teacher-of-Israel, and a ruler-of-the-Jews visits Jesus by night. Through riddle, Jesus shares that one must be born again (born of the Spirit) to see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus knew all the Scriptures and missed seeing everything. To understand the heavenly things Jesus has for us, we must be willing to let go of our prideful insistence on power, status and our own understanding. Unfortunately, we have sewn these identities so tightly to ourselves, we forget that this is not who we truly are. Humility helps loosen these identities, and compassionate acceptance from our Creator helps them simply fall off. Can we embrace the humble teachings of Jesus and let go of what we think we know? When it comes to seeing the kingdom of God, we have much to relearn.

Pray

Gracious Creator,

You move and have your being where you please.

Yet you choose to move and dwell within us.

Help us see and surrender to your kingdom.

Comfort us as we loosen our grip on our egos

And trade our reputation for yours.

Soothe our tired bodies as we learn to rest in

Your acceptance with nothing left to prove.

Amen

Journal: Where are you gripping onto your own version of reality that limits your ability to see the true Kingdom of God?

Hiding in the Shadows

Read John 3:16-21

It is hard to fathom a child who wants all the lights turned out at night. Light drives out fear. Light drives out evil. What isn't hard to imagine is wanting to hide, like a child-- wanting no one to see our brokenness. We can conceal in the darkness. This is why we love the darkness.

Make no mistake, we do love the darkness. We long for light to shine on other evils, but we love to cower in our own shadows.

God knows this about us. That is why He stepped into the darkness to find us. He so loved this world that He came with His floodlight. For He loves us—the shadow-lurking, darkness-hiding us. And He didn't come to catch us red-handed. Instead He came to hold our hands, to guide us to the comfort of His mercy. He came that we might leave the shadows and love the light. His love drives out any need to hide, for in His light we find no condemnation.

Pray

Jesus, beloved Son of God,

You know we love the shadows and darkness.

You also know how desperate we are for light.

Thank you for stepping into our darkness for our rescue.

Thank you for shining a light on the darkest parts of our heart.

Thank you that in Your light there's no condemnation, only mercy.

Help us choose the light, confident of the love we'll find there.

Grant us the courage to, like You, step into dark places.

May we bring Your light to this world.

May there be no condemnation, only compassion.

Fill our hearts with Your boundless mercy.

Illuminate this dark world through us, Your little lights.

Amen.

Journal: What parts of your heart still live in the shadows, hidden from God's light?

There's Plenty of Water

Read John 3:22-36

We see here both an impossible gift and an impossible challenge. The gift is eternal life, given to us by a trustworthy God. But we can't lock our eyes on the gift and lose sight of the challenge: "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). In a world catered to our every desire, bursting with personalized advertisements and the expectation of free 2-day shipping, becoming "less" is counter cultural.

But what if what we need more than anything is to become less? What if the gift is twofold: we hand off our everyday lives into His capable hands, and we experience the beauty of eternal life with Him?

"There's plenty of water" (John 3:23). There's no need for fear that we will not have "enough," contrary to what the world tells us. Jesus has already fulfilled our every need.

Pray

Heavenly Father,

We acknowledge today that your love

Fulfills our every need.

Thank you for the gifts of peace,

Family, love, employment, security,

Community, and so many more that you have

Generously given us.

Though we daily turn your gifts into idols

And treat your love as a commodity,

You alone are enough for us.

Help us to remember this truth in seasons of plenty

And seasons of hardship.

Amen.

Journal: Reflect on areas of your life where you put yourself first. What would it look like to magnify God in these areas instead?

Put Down Your Buckets

Read John 4:1-26

We live in a hot and harsh land where, without water, we would perish. If we lived in Samaria we would go to Jacob's well to fill our buckets to the brim. This is where the Samaritan woman went the day she met the Messiah she had long been waiting for. Jesus knew every detail of her life. He knew her sin, her status and He knew her shame. He knew she was thirsty for more than a bucket of water. Out of His love for her, he stopped in the midday sun to sit beside a well. He knew that well would continue to leave her thirsty, so Jesus offered her something better: living water.

Because of sin we are born parched. God offers us living water from a well that will never run dry. He meets us where we are and offers us an invitation to something better. We can give our tired arms a rest. We can set down the buckets we carry around and stop running to the wells of the world. We can accept the invitation to sit with our Savior and drink deeply of God's grace, mercy and love.

Pray

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Living Water and Fountain of Faithfulness, Gracious God.

You are the wellspring of life.

Jesus, we thank you for drinking our cup of wrath

So that we can imbibe your holiness and mercy.

Only you know the depth of our thirst and can satisfy it.

Let us drink deeply from your well of grace.

In your kindness you offer springs that will never run dry.

Bring us back to your well-

To sit with you, and talk with you, and be filled by you.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

Journal: Name some "wells" (satisfaction substitutes) that you return to over and over. How can you practically drink more deeply of Jesus Christ?

Family
WORSHIP
Week 3

For family worship, please choose any day of the week that works best. Gather your family and set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss the following. Anytime will work, but often after dinner or before bed works best.

Theme: True Food

Discuss:

What is your favorite food? Do you have a sweet tooth or do you prefer more salty, savory foods? Food is good because it fills us up, it satisfies our hunger.

The Bible says that only God can satisfy what our hearts are all looking for. They are looking for God!

Memorize:

“Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.”

John 4:34

Ask:

What did Jesus say was His food?

Who sent Jesus?

Take Away:

God satisfies our deep needs.

Family Prompt:

As a family come up with one meal or treat that you all enjoy and make it. As you eat it thank God for the good food. Then thank Him that His plans for you are good, even better than the good food you are eating!

Pray:

God, thank you for filling us up.

Your Word, the Bible

Is like a sweet treat

to the taste buds of our souls.

You satisfy our hunger

Spiritual Harvest

Read John 4:27-38

The Samaritan woman rushes to tell people about Jesus. The townspeople drop everything to investigate her claims. Jesus calls the crowd a field ready for spiritual harvest. Yet the disciples do not immediately see the abundant spiritual victory unfolding around them. They can't see past their cultural perceptions of the Samaritans to see them as Jesus does: as people to be redeemed. Similarly, the disciples can't see past their physical bread to see Jesus' spiritual bread on display.

Sometimes we are like the woman and the crowd, eagerly responding to spiritual realities. Sometimes we struggle to see the spiritual aspects of the world among our day-to-day life. Especially in a pandemic, practical needs can feel overwhelming and crowd out matters of the soul.

Yet Jesus calls us to prioritize the work of the Kingdom. All our practical daily activities can be done for the glory of God and the care of other's souls. Whether our work is immediately effective or a seed planted for future harvest, Jesus declares that everyone who works for the Kingdom will share in the abundance of the harvest.

Pray

Light of the World, you show us new realities, new possibilities.

Help us to see them in our daily lives, in cooking, in cleaning,

In conversation, in our mundane, everyday existence.

Give us eyes to see spiritual opportunities.

Help us plant seeds and harvest crops.

Empower us to seek the eternal, no matter how earthly we feel.

Let us glimpse the life of the world to come.

Kindle a fire in us for Your coming kingdom,

As we eagerly seek its advent on earth, as in heaven.

Amen.

Journal: Name a few of the ordinary things that you will do today. Write beside each one how it can become an opportunity for planting and cultivating spiritual fruit.

Unable and Unworthy

Read John 4:39-45

One of the most counterintuitive paradigms in Scripture is the fact that Almighty, Holy God uses sinful and unprepared people to accomplish his purposes. It's one of those things we may "know" yet find hard to "believe" when push comes to shove. Jesus uses unworthy and unable people like this Samaritan woman.

He reveals her moral disqualification in earlier passages, and she herself reveals her lack of understanding by calling Jesus a mere prophet. Regardless, "He told me all that I ever did," sufficed for an effective testimony.

Here we're challenged to relearn that God chooses us to be a conduit for His glory. Often our failure to follow the Great Commission isn't necessarily our lack of skill, but our doubtful introspection. Do we protest, "I am not able; I am not worthy?" Considering the Samaritan woman and the great cloud of witnesses that went before us, we are in good company. But the focus is not on our ability, but on the story that God tells through us.

Pray

Almighty Sovereign,

As we come to the end of ourselves

And as we face our deficiencies and sins,

We pray to see more of You, Your grace, Your strength in our weakness.

We believe, Father, that unless You build the house

Our labor is in vain.

We believe that should we in our own strength confide

Our striving would be losing.

Help us Lord, to desire faithfulness instead of coveting achievement.

Help us to trust that You multiply our meager offerings

And bring a harvest we could not achieve, nor ever deserve.

In Christ's name, Amen.

Journal: If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you do for the Kingdom? What are some obstacles you face in serving God more fully and richly?

Taking Jesus at His Word

Read John 4:46-54

Whether we realize it or not, we often operate with an “I’ll believe it when I see it” attitude. We lean into the world with cynicism and caution, never wanting to risk being naive, wrong or overly zealous. We would rather keep expectations low and be surprised by the unexpected. But faith often means stepping out into uncertainty.

The “official” in this passage had to take Jesus at his word. He wanted Jesus to physically come to his son. Jesus gives him a test—“Must you see to believe?”—but then says, “Go, your son will live.” The official had to believe him. He had to take that hard first step away from the presence of Jesus and toward home, trusting that Jesus’ word had that power. Jesus still speaks to us through the Scripture--through his teaching, his life, his death, and his resurrection. Can we hear him and respond in faith?

Pray

Eternal Word,

We depend on you for even the mustard seed of faith.

To turn and do the work of belief is too burdensome.

But your word enables what it requests.

Your word empowers what it commands.

Your word provides what it requires.

When you speak life there is life on the other side.

And when we follow you into the hard places

We find everything to be as you say it will be.

Give us a growing and absolute trust in you

So that obedience is not burdensome.

Amen

Journal: Write about something that the Scriptures promise, but you have a hard time believing.

Helper of the Helpless

Read John 5:1-18

Helpless--that's how we could describe the man Jesus encounters in this text. He has been disabled for thirty-eight years. He is alone, impoverished, and without any way to heal himself. But Jesus brings healing to his life. This healing is undeserved yet unmistakable.

Through this story, Jesus shows how He has come to not only do the Father's work, but to reveal the Father and His love for His image-bearers. The invalid man is fully dependent on Jesus to be healed, and in that dependency, the nature of the Father's love and grace is made visible. In less obvious ways, we are just as needy as the man in this story. When we inevitably are faced with trials, sickness, persistent temptation, or anything else that causes despair, it is not only acceptable, but necessary that we recognize our helplessness. In our own weakness, our willing dependence on Jesus Christ reveals the love and the work of the Father in our lives.

Pray

God of the Helpless,

We praise you for your unmerited love.

Help us to see our own need;

To see that we are entirely helpless.

Direct our hearts and minds to you.

Teach us to be dependent on you.

Holy Spirit, guide our hearts

Into the love of God and steadfastness of Christ.

Amen

Journal: In what area of your life do you need to grow in dependency on Jesus? Describe what that dependency would look like?

A Beautiful Invitation

Read John 5:19-30

The Father and the Son are equal in power and glory, and united in their mission to accomplish redemption. Yet they choose to actively promote the glory of each other. Jesus' joy is to do the will of the Father. When we see Jesus, we see the Father, and the heart of God - to destroy death and bring life.

We are invited into a kingdom where the power of death will be broken. We are adopted into a perfect, eternal family as children of God, co-heirs with Christ. Like Jesus, we have the opportunity to show the character of God to others. When people looked at Jesus, they saw God the Father; when people look at us, whose glory do they see?

Pray

Loving Father,

What a beautiful privilege it is to be your child.

Thank you for adopting us into your perfect love, giving us every spiritual blessing, equipping us for life and godliness, and rescuing us from the chains of sin and death forever. This precious gift of salvation could not be ours without the perfect obedience and costly, painful work of Your Son, who endured separation from You so that we might live and be united with You.

Cause our hearts to overflow with love and gratitude.

May we do nothing of our own accord, that our joy would be to do Your work, and to bring You glory. Amen.

Journal: Write a short letter from God to yourself beginning with "My child..." What does the Father want you to experience today as his beloved child?

Family
WORSHIP
Week 4

For family worship, please choose any day of the week that works best. Gather your family and set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss the following. Anytime will work, but often after dinner or before bed works best.

Theme: Where Else Will We Go?

Discuss: Have you turned around and your parents aren't where you thought they were? How did that feel?

God knows the best place for us to be is with Him. As many people were walking away from Jesus, He asked his friends: "Do you want to leave as well?" His disciples knew that being with Jesus was the best and only place they wanted to be.

Memorize:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." John 6:68

Ask:

Who has the words of eternal life?

Where can we find these words?

Take Away:

With God is the best place to be.

Family Prompt:

As a family, remember a time you were somewhere amazing and beautiful. Remember what made it so good to be there. What did you love about it? Thank God for making that beautiful place. Talk about why knowing and being with God is even better than that amazing place.

Pray:

God, we thank you for your Word.

You are the author and illustrator

Of our stories.

Help us to stay near to you

Even when others walk away.

Help us to know that with you

Is the best and most beautiful place to be.

Amen

DAY 16
September 28

Fickle Pharisees

Read John 5:31-47

Everyone has a testimony about Jesus, including Jesus' friends, enemies, and even the Father himself. If the testimony of people like John the Baptist helps people find salvation in Him, Jesus is not opposed. The problem is that Jesus' critics pore over the testimony about Him, yet they remain blind to the truth of who Jesus is.

Jesus challenges the fickleness of His critics. They seek perishable glory – praises from one another. They tout Moses' words as the source of both their future hope and current authority. Ironically, these are the same words that condemn them for failing to recognize who Jesus is.

Pray

O, Giver of eternal life,

Have mercy upon us,

Let us not be so puffed up that all we seek is other's esteem

Nor the self-inflating testimony of perishable voices.

Help us seek to know You and be known by You.

Let us find hope and life in the pages of Your Word,

Not in the eyes of another.

Redeem our brokenness.

Let us use Your Word to edify and strengthen,

Not to denigrate or goad.

Help us yield ourselves to You.

Guide us by Your Spirit to rightly divide Your Word

For Your glory and the sake of Your kingdom. Amen.

Journal: Write about one thing in Scripture that challenges your current worldview.

A New Exodus

Read John 6:1-15

With Passover near, the story of the Exodus echoed in the minds of the Galileans that day. When they experienced Jesus providing bread (manna!) in the wilderness to satisfy their hunger, it could only mean one thing: He was the long-awaited prophet about whom Moses had written (Deut. 18:15-18). He must be the new Moses who would secure their political and religious freedom, delivering them from their new oppressor, Rome. Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and He performed signs pointing to a new Exodus, but His kingdom was not their physical kingdom.

Often our hearts likewise seek to force Jesus into a mold to fulfill what we desire to see here on earth. We want Him to heal our bodies, end financial poverty, eliminate injustice. Our desires are legitimate. His promises in His Word are sure. But He goes about things in His own glorious way and it does not always look like what we expect.

Pray

Bread of life,

You make us lie down in green pastures so that You might feed us.

Thank you for providing everything we need.

Forgive our doubting minds and faithless hearts.

In Your hands, little is much.

Receive our offerings, we pray,
and multiply them for Your kingdom.

Your ways are higher than our ways.

Teach us to see You as You are,
not as we would selfishly imagine You to be.

Grant us the courage to set all our hope in You, our Savior,
and lead us in the way of Your good and perfect will.

Amen.

Journal: What areas of need are you desperate for Jesus to come fill? How has He surprised you before?

Dark Waters

Read John 6:16-21

When the darkness comes our hearts begin to falter. As the disciples started across the sea, they still possessed the evening light. But soon darkness fell and the God of all creation allowed the winds and the waves of adversity. No amount of experience could help them conquer the rough waters or their anxious hearts. And by the time Jesus appeared, they were too frightened to recognize Him. But upon hearing His voice, a palpable relief washed over them as they gladly brought Him onto the boat. The darkness remained, but they now possessed Peace Himself.

Adversity is an unavoidable facet of the Christian life. Yet the source of our peace is always the Person of Jesus. There is no darkness the light of Christ cannot pierce. No wave that will roll outside of His sovereign hand. We do not survive life's storms by conquering the waves, but by remembering that Christ is in the boat with us.

Pray

O God of all creation,
You ordain all things for Your glory.
Your loving hands work all things for our good.
Keep our hearts from faltering when adversity comes.
And help us to place our trust in You.
Remind us of Your presence when we are prone to worry,
That we may possess Your peace that transcends all understanding.
Guide our hearts into a sweet surrender,
Relinquishing illusions of our own strength.
Making us rely wholly upon You alone,
Through life's every season.
Amen

Journal: What is your greatest adversity right now? In what ways are you tempted to rely on your own strength or experience, rather than upon Christ?

Hunger No More

Read John 6:22-51

Many ancient cultures tried desperately to satisfy false gods with flesh and blood. We aren't too different. We have our own modern versions of insatiable gods. Perhaps it is work, progress, or perfection. Maybe for others it is image, knowledge, and reputation. We sacrifice to these gods, but find we are always just out of reach of satisfaction. And if we manage to experience a glimmer of satisfaction, it is only for a moment.

Jesus declares that he is the Bread of Life who meets our every desire. We are to eat his flesh and drink his blood. His statement reverses all the sacrificial rituals! Feast on him and hunger no more. Listen to this good word: Jesus comes to satisfy you! Breathe in that good news! We no longer need to satisfy the One True and Living God or the distant gods of our own creation. You are more loved, accepted, and free than you ever dared imagine.

Pray

Bread of Life,

Teach us how to be satisfied with your sacrifice.

Help us taste and rejoice in your body.

We are are a forgetful and hangry people,

Often unsettled, irritated, and looking for more.

We try to feed false gods that never satisfy.

We forget your invitation to feast on you.

Remind us often that you are our daily bread.

Help our eyes to see that everything is satisfied in you.

Amen

Journal: In what areas of your life are you unsatisfied? How would feasting on and absorbing Jesus change your satisfaction?

A Hard Word

Read John 6:52-71

People loved to listen to Jesus' words, but not all of the words were easy to hear. His words often brought offense. Here even his disciples question his words. Their ears bristled at the idea of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood. How could Jesus invite them into something so barbaric?

God hadn't opened their eyes to the full story. He had not yet revealed his plan for His Son's death and resurrection. There was a final communion feast ahead. These pieces of the narrative were still unknown to the disciples; they were unable to see the big picture.

But Peter is unfazed. Peter doesn't know the whole story, nor does he understand the words Jesus spoke. However, Peter knows Jesus. Peter trusts Jesus. Peter believes Jesus' words are those of eternal life. So even when Peter is baffled by the details, he is able to look to Jesus and trust the source.

Pray

Bread of Life,

We do not always understand Your word.

At times we are lost in the language, absorbed in details.

We struggle to see the full picture.

Lord, deepen our faith in Your character.

Help us to remember all we know to be true of You.

Root us in Your nourishing love and Your steady presence.

Remind us that Your word is a gift to Your people.

When the Word seems hard, don't allow us to turn away.

Help us believe that the Author is trustworthy.

For where else shall we go?

You have the words of Eternal Life.

Amen.

Journal: What do you do when the word of God feels confusing or hard to you?

Family
WORSHIP
Week 5

For family worship, please choose any day of the week that works best. Gather your family and set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss the following. Anytime will work, but often after dinner or before bed works best.

Theme: Light of the World

Discuss:

Do you have a night light in your room? Do you like being in your house when it's completely dark? It's hard to see where you are going without tripping or bumping into things!

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the light that will show us the way to live. He has gone before us to light up the path so we can know where to go and so we can get there safely.

Memorize:

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 8:12

Who is the light of the world?

Who will have the light of life?

Take Away:

Jesus shows us where to go.

Family Prompt:

Turn off all the lights in your house and sit together. Now light a candle, lantern or night light. Talk about what the light makes you feel. Thank God for being the Light of the World. Sing together “This Little Light of Mine”.

Pray:

God, thank you for sending Jesus-

The Light of the World.

Thank you that we don't walk in the darkness.

Help us to follow your light

Into the world that has a hard time seeing you.

Keep us from being distracted

By the shiny things of the world that want to pull us off your path.

Help the light you have shine in us

For the world to see.

Amen

Waiting on God

Read John 7:1-24

While God does not promise us that this life will be easy, He does provide hope for the future. Lately, however, it's easy to cry out, "When?" When will seasons of suffering end? When will reprieve come? When will God make himself known in this broken world? We expect God to answer in the time frame and the manner of our choosing. But God shows us in this passage that we cannot understand His timing; rather, we are challenged to trust Him even when our expectations are not met.

Often, Jesus' actions did not make sense to the people he encountered. As humans, our perspective is limited to what appears best to us in the moment. But our God can be trusted. When we look at matters from God's point of view, we can "stop judging by appearances," (i.e., our misplaced/misguided expectations) and move forward in confidence that He will make a right judgment.

Pray

Loving Father,
Trustworthy Guide,
Your plans are always more fulfilling than our own.
Please help us to release our expectations
For what today "should" look like,
What gifts we "deserve,"
And how much adversity we are able to handle.
When we are tempted to judge you
By our limited perspective,
Help us to recognize the truth of your heavenly one.
We trust in your perfect timing.
Amen.

Journal: Reflect on a time you realized God's timing was more perfect than your expectations.

Your Will Be Done

Read John 7:25-31

God's sovereignty, authority and power cannot be thwarted. Even while the authorities plotted and planned Jesus' arrest, trying their best to seize Him, they could not lay even one hostile hand on Him. "His hour had not yet come"(v. 30).

God's timing has always been, is, and always will be perfect. His power is perfect. His protection and provision are perfect. No person, power, or position of authority could touch His son until He had finished what his Father sent him to do.

Because of Jesus' work on the cross we too can walk confidently in what God has for us. We can link arms with our Savior and set our aim on the same target- to submit to the Father's will for our lives. In so doing, we show a beautiful, perfect, and Holy God to a broken, fallen world

Pray

Sovereign and Holy God,

We praise you as the Lord of our lives.

Help us to trust what you have for us,

Being confident in our calling and your timing.

Give us hands that are open to receiving your grace

And hearts that cry out, "your will be done."

Thank you for the ways you protect us and provide for us.

Let us use everything you give us

To point others to your throne of mercy,

That many will see and many will believe

You are God and you are good.

Amen.

Journal: What is one area where you are tempted to try to force God to your will rather than wait on his timing?

DAY 23
October 7

Rivers of Living Water

Read John 7:32-52

No one who hears Jesus talk leaves unchanged. Some are confused; some call him the Messiah; some don't know what to say; others are furious. Jesus stirs up big emotions. New Christians may share this experience, but after some time of being a Christian, the joyful shock of Jesus' words can wear off. We can become too familiar with his words, and no longer be challenged or excited by them.

Hear Jesus again: If you believe in Jesus, you have the spirit of God flowing through you like rivers! God himself sustains you personally, constantly, day by day, moment by moment. Life flows out from you to strengthen you and serve the people around you for the work of the kingdom.

Does that sound thrilling? Saccharine? Encouraging? Flat? The emotions that well up in us when faced again with the good news are indicators of our soul's condition.

Pray

Water of Life,

Let us receive your Word with joyful hearts.

Awake in us the thrill of salvation.

Give us the joy of seeing Your glory anew,
not for the fleeting joy of emotion itself,
but to kindle a deeper love of You.

Let us dive deeply into relationship with You.

Guide us to Your heart; lead us to Your will.

Help us seek Your kingdom enthusiastically.

Point our hearts toward You and our hands to the world,

So that we love you, your people, and your kingdom.

Amen.

Journal: What emotions well up in you when you read the Scripture, and what does that say about your relationship with Jesus?

DAY 24
October 8

Who's Really On Trial?

Read John 8:1-11

It's easy to see the accused woman at the center of this trial, and Jesus as the one meant to judge her. And while the overarching message of grace should remain the focus, we miss something when we only focus on her sin. Namely, Jesus was ultimately the one on trial (v6). The Pharisees didn't want to stone her as much as they wanted to discredit Him.

We are united with Christ. When the enemies of God attack us, they seek to undermine the finished work of Christ. But these attacks are ultimately useless, because Christ himself fights and wins the battle. To attack the sheep, is to attack the Shepherd Himself, and our Shepherd gave His life for us. When we think of the adulterous woman and of our sins, let us first think of Christ and the victory that he has already secured.

Pray

Our Father and Protector,

With reverence and trembling we thank You for your Son.

Whose holiness and righteousness You've imputed to us

"Even so as if we never had had, nor committed any sin,

Yea, as if we had fully accomplished that obedience

Which Christ has accomplished."*

Yet Lord, our hearts conspire with the enemy of our souls

To condemn us and in doing so,

Wage war against the proclamation of Jesus on the cross: "It is finished."

Remind us Lord that our accusers cannot stand against Jesus,

And robed in His righteousness, and adopted as His brethren,

Neither can they stand against us.

We pray this in Christ's name, our Lion and Lamb

Amen

Journal: What are ways Satan tries to condemn you? What truth of Christ's work can you preach to yourself to combat it?"

*Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 60

DAY 25
October 9

Jesus and Circular Reasoning

Read John 8: 12-30

How often Christians have endured this criticism: Having faith is circular reasoning! Some say, “You believe the Bible because the Bible itself says it’s true” or “you believe Jesus was the Messiah only because he claimed to be.” As today’s passage shows, these accusations are not new. Jesus receives this criticism: “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.”

Jesus agrees and disagrees. His testimony is rooted in himself (and has authority) but it’s also rooted in the Father (vs. 18). Jesus appeals to this because he knew his accusers would also say that they believe the Father. There was common ground but also a fundamental difference. As we engage with those without faith, we can find common ground by asking, “What is your source of truth?” In the end, however, faith is a gift and is rooted in the Father’s trustworthiness. And He has proven his goodness again and again.

Pray

Jesus,

You are the Light of the world, and the light of life!

We believe the testimony that you say about yourself

But we also need help with our unbelief.

We confess that we have called darkness “light”

And we have bent your testimony to suit our worldview.

Shine on us with the truth of your witness!

Send the Spirit again to refresh and guide us.

Help us to abide in the confidence that you are life,

And engage those who disregard you.

Come quickly and make the testimony about yourself

Known to all who feel the pain and uncertainty of doubt.

We ask in your authoritative name, Jesus.

Amen

Journal: What is something (other than God) that you are tempted to trust in? Why does it hold sway over you?

Family
WORSHIP
Week 6

For family worship, please choose any day of the week that works best. Gather your family and set aside 15-20 minutes to discuss the following. Anytime will work, but often after dinner or before bed works best.

Theme: The Best Shepherd

Discuss:

If you were standing in a room with your entire family; aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents and they all said your name-do you think you could pick out your dad's voice? How would you know it was him? Does any one else's voice sound exactly like your dad's?

The Bible tells us that we can know God's voice by spending time with Him; in His Word (the Bible) and with His people. Like a shepherd that protects and leads his sheep, Jesus is our perfect Shepherd and we can know His voice.

Memorize:

"The sheep follow Him, for they know his voice." John 10:4

Ask:

Who are the sheep?

Who do the sheep follow?

How do the sheep know it's Him?

Take Away:

We can know Jesus' voice.

Family Prompt:

Practice saying the memory verse in different voices. Let every member of the family suggest a different voice. Thank God that we can know His voice!

Pray:

God, thank you for Jesus.

Thank you that He protects us and leads us.

He is our Good Shepherd,

And we are His beloved flock.

He guards us when we lay down to rest,

He leads us to cool waters of joy,

And He calls us by name.

In a noisy world, help us to follow our Good Shepherd

And to know His voice.

Amen

DAY 26
October 12

True Freedom

Read John 8:31-47

Our culture teaches us that we need to be true to ourselves to experience true freedom, and that submitting to someone or something in any way is a form of captivity. The Jews of Jesus's day believed that true freedom was found in their status as sons of Abraham and followers of God's law. Yet, Jesus challenges this belief by saying that only He can lead us to true freedom. How is this possible?

In our experience of faith, freedom begins with forgiveness. Christ offers freedom from sin, fear, guilt, shame, and self-worship. But true freedom doesn't stop with what we are free from, but what we are freed to live for- God and others. This is the way we were created to live.

When we understand that God created us to know him and be known by him, we see how his rule is actually good for us. The more we abide in His Word, the more we know God and how he relates to us, which leads to freedom. That is the freedom Jesus offers and wants us to experience in Him.

Pray

Father God,

Draw near to us as we draw near to you.

We long for freedom from sin, guilt, and shame

We try and find freedom in the world,

But only you provide what we seek.

Thank you for the truth of Your Word,

Which proclaims the good news of Jesus:

That while we cannot attain freedom ourselves,

You made a way through the cross and the empty tomb.

Help us to abide in Your Word and find freedom there.

Empower us to live for You and our neighbors

And fill us with Your Spirit to do good works.

Amen

Journal: Where are you in bondage and need to experience the freedom of

DAY 27
October 13

The Claim of I AM

Read John 8:48-59

When Jesus says “I AM” he pronounces Himself as God. Using the I AM is designed to provoke a response. For the Jews of His day, the response was to grab stones to kill him. May our hearts respond to this bold claim in an entirely different way.

All that we long for is met in Jesus’ claim, I AM. He is the answer to our heart’s deepest longings— tender Father, adoring beloved, faithful friend, perfect sovereign, great physician. When we look to our earthly families, marriages, relationships, governments, and our physical bodies, we experience the heartache of failures and flaws. He answers I AM to all of those. When we turn to Christ, we already have what we are looking for, the perfect version of it. He has always been, is now, and forever will be God, I AM, the One in whom all desires are met.

Pray

The Great I AM,

Apart from you, we have nothing and are nothing.

We look to you as the true God, the ready answer

For all the longings of our hearts.

You are the One in whom we place all of our hope.

Teach us to turn to You more and more for satisfaction.

Help us learn to look to You as our Father, adoring beloved,

Faithful friend, perfect sovereign, great physician.

Forgive us for putting our hope in other things,

and heal us from the wounds that doing so has caused.

Increase our faith, hope, and love in You. Amen.

Journal: What aspect of God’s character do you most need to remember today?

DAY 28
October 14

Preposterous

Read John 9:1-23

The Jewish leaders are unable to come to grips with someone from an apparently “lower station” in life than themselves performing miracles they couldn’t perform. They resort to contempt for Jesus and for the favor He receives from the people. The scribes and Pharisees cannot accept that an itinerant carpenter’s son from Nazareth could use a dirt-and-spittle poultice to restore the sight of a middle-aged street-groveler. “Preposterous!” they conclude.

They disparage both Jesus and the beggar. The basic sinful tendency of mankind since the Fall of Adam has been to judge and condemn those created in God’s image. Yet, the basic premise of the Gospel is to restore them to God’s original design. Jesus brings that healing to all who respond in faith.

Pray

Redeemer of all creation,

You bless when our flesh condemns,

You speak truth and life when the world chooses disparagement and lies,

You restore what the enemy hastens to destroy.

We thank You for your lovingkindness towards fallen creation,

And Your relentless redemption of the basest of sinners.

Thank You for Your perfect purposes

And Your plan to set aright all that’s come undone.

Help us to be Your channels of restoration

To the afflicted in our neighborhoods and homes.

For the love of Your only Son,

Our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Journal: What are the most common ways you find yourself judging or condemning other image-bearers? What would it look like to repent of this sinful pattern?

DAY 29
October 15

Grace to See

Read John 9:24-41

The story of the blind man's healing reads like a "what to expect" guide for early Jewish believers. To encounter Jesus is to be healed and illumined, but to be identified with Him is to be misunderstood, ridiculed, and rejected by others. Humility and softheartedness are required if we want to truly see God. We will see even more of Him when we suffer for being His disciple.

The Pharisees devotedly followed the Word of God written by Moses and yet could not see the Word of God incarnate when He stood right before their eyes. His grace cannot be received by those who cannot admit their need of it. May we take care to pursue Christ less like the blind Pharisees and more like the seeing blind man.

Pray

Giver of Light,

We confess our blindness to you.

In our arrogance we are sure we know what Your Law requires.

Keep us humble so we may walk in the light of Your truth.

Grant us grace to believe and worship You.

Reveal to us who You truly are, we pray.

Fill our hearts with your mercy.

Give us courage to boldly testify of Your works,

And enable us to follow You no matter the cost.

Thank You for your love and tender care for us.

Lighten our darkness, we pray, now and forever.

Amen.

Journal: In what ways does the experience of the formerly blind man align with your experience as a disciple of Christ?

His Voice in our Hearts

Read John 10:1-21

There are many ways we can appear as something we are not. But it is notoriously difficult to impersonate another's voice. Jesus says His sheep hear His voice, and there is no mistaking it. Such a statement would have drawn specific images in the minds of His audience. Unlike shepherds in the West who drive their sheep from behind, Eastern shepherds go before their flocks and guide them with their own specific call. The flock will not be led astray by an imposter, because his voice would betray him.

The beautiful truth is that God's people are given the ability to recognize His voice. This gift also comes with a subtle directive. The sheep flee from the voice of the stranger (V.5). And so should God's people when they come in contact with false teaching (2 Tim 3:1-5). Let us diligently keep our hearts attuned to the voice of our Good Shepherd who keeps us on His perfect path.

Pray

Dear Lord,

In a world humming with so many voices

That are working toward our destruction,

May it be Your Voice alone that resonates within us.

As we spend time in Your Word,

Give our hearts increasing sensitivity to Your truth,

So that we will not be deceived by subtle falsehoods.

Guard our hearts and minds

From the wolves and the lies that seek to lead us astray.

Keep us on Your perfect path,

Which brings peace to our souls.

Amen

Journal: What are some ways you can guard your mind so that you are able to quickly flee false teaching when it arises?



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