

BELONGING (S2)

Crosswalk Daily Study

INTRODUCTION

Belonging . . . You are loved and welcome right now, as you are, no exceptions. Jesus was radically inclusive, so come on in.

This is the first core value at Crosswalk. You are loved and welcome “right now, as you are, no exceptions.” Everyone belongs at the feet of Jesus – right now and as we are – no exceptions. This sacred place at the feet of Jesus is always inclusive. No one deserves to be at His feet based on anything we have done. We all belong at His feet because He created us to be with Him from the very beginning of time. It is the place of the purest and most perfect love—the place of highest human dignity as His beloved.

C.S. Lewis considered the incarnation of Jesus to be the greatest of all miracles. God coming to the earth and taking on flesh and bone. God, the almighty Creator, became one of His creatures. The Apostle John says it this way, “So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. *And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. [John 1:14 NLT]*

He came for the sole reason that we belong to Him. We belong in His Kingdom now and to come. Sin has done everything to make us question and doubt our belonging to God. Jesus came to fight for us in all of His righteousness, justice, and uncorrupted power.

The miracles of Jesus reveal how strongly and deeply God is committed to reminding us and revealing to us our belonging to Him. It has been said that miracles are when heaven intersects with earth, when Divine love breaks through the lie of the devil, whose shadow has been cast on our world, that says you don't belong to God, and that God isn't interested in you or wants you, because you are damaged goods.

You and I are not damaged goods. We are God's beloved children that He left the heavens above to live, die, and rise again to proclaim our belonging to Him.

In Season 1 of our Belonging series, we explored our belonging to God through Jesus' miracles of healing. In this season, Season 2, we will gain a further glimpse into our belonging through some of Jesus' other miracles, such as His feeding of the 5,000 and turning water into wine at a wedding celebration. No one ever has to defend their belonging to God. Jesus does that for us through His life and miracles.

At His Feet,
Pastors Jon Ciccarelli & Milton Marquez

BELONGING (S2) - WEEK 1

By Milton Marquez

WEEK 1 - MONDAY

(John 6:1-3) After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him.

It's easy to be busy. You know you have never had a hard time finding something to do. In fact, if you ever get to that point, isn't it interesting that there is always someone out there ready to put more on your plate? It seems like the minute you sit down to take a breath, the email notification pops up, or the text ding sounds. It feels as though you are never not going to be busy.

I wonder if that is the reason why our pastor for discipleship, Jon Ciccarelli, chose this past summer to have us all read the book *An Unhurried Life* by Alan Fadling. As I read it I was thankful and angry at Jon for choosing it. I needed this book in my life, even though I didn't want to admit it. If you want frustration and transformation in your life, read the book. Believe it or not, I am recommending it.

We find Jesus in this passage facing two choices. One, help the crowd that is following, or two, take a minute and connect with his disciples. We assume that in every crowd that followed Jesus there were people that were sick, sad, lost, confused, broken, and Jesus had the power to heal them all. The table was set for Jesus to change all their lives. But in that moment, he chooses to stop, sit, and connect.

There will always be more to do to help others. There will always be a need to fill. You are never going to have to try and create more opportunities to do ministry. They will find you. But times to connect with God and each other, with no other agenda but to create community, those need to be intentionally sought out. They will not fall in your lap. You have to make them happen.

So follow Jesus' example today. In the midst of all the needs and the requests, take time, sit at the feet of your Heavenly Father. Pause. Take a breath and bask in his love.

- 1. What do you imagine Jesus and the disciples did during this moment of connection?**
- 2. What makes it hard for you to pause and connect with God?**
- 3. Who is someone you can connect with today? Check in with him or her and see how they are doing.**

WEEK 1 - TUESDAY

(John 6:4-6) (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

I've never liked tests. They scare me. I never feel prepared enough to feel confident that I will do well. And if you see my report cards from high school, you will see that I wasn't prepared enough.

The idea that God would test us is a scary one to me. What if I am not prepared enough? What if I fail? What does it say about me if I drop the ball?

John writes that Jesus was testing Philip at this moment. What's interesting is that Jesus wasn't concerned about how much money it would take to feed the people. He just wanted to know where to get the food to feed them, almost as if Jesus knew the money was not an issue. For Jesus the question that

needed to be answered by Philip was where the solution was going to come from. The resources needed to make the solution happen were secondary.

When you read passages like Psalm 50:10 you understand Jesus' attitude.

*For all the animals of the forest are mine,
and I own the cattle on a thousand hills.*

Jesus knows that for God, resources are easy, and feeding a crowd is nothing. God has access to all the money, all the animals. According to Psalm 50:10, if God wanted every person in the crowd could have had filet mignon.

So the real test here was whether or not Philip believed that Jesus could feed all these people through him. Did Philip believe Jesus could do his will of helping all these people through the work of his disciples?

Jesus stated his mission when he read the words of the prophet Isaiah,

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,
for the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted
and to proclaim that captives will be released
and prisoners will be freed.
He has sent me to tell those who mourn
that the time of the Lord's favor has come,
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.
Isaiah 61:1-2*

Jesus is going to accomplish this mission. The test isn't if you can do the mission of Jesus. The test is if you believe that God will do the mission through you.

1. **What would your response to Jesus' question have been if you were Philip?**
2. **Have you ever been tested by God? What were the results?**
3. **What is something that God is challenging you to do at this point in your spiritual journey?**

WEEK 1 - WEDNESDAY

(John 6:7-9) Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!"

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

The truth isn't always right. That sentence seems silly at first glance but allow me to expand on this idea for a bit.

Philip said something that was true.

"Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!"

There was an immediate need to feed thousands of people. That was true. The only way to make the amount of money to feed all those people was for all of the disciples to work for months. That was also true. But these truths created a false premise in Philip and probably some of the other disciples.

What Philip was basically saying was that it would be impossible for them to feed the crowd. They couldn't do it. They didn't have the time or the resources to get the job done. All of that was true.

But what Philip got wrong was that he didn't understand that the crowd would be fed. We will find out later in the story that Jesus feeds the crowd and doesn't need to use time or money. Although Philip was right about their lack, he was wrong about the will of God.

So in comes Andrew, with a little boy and his little lunch. And here is where the story turns. Here is where the truth begins to get blown away. Jesus grabs the opportunity to show that the truth of the limits of the situation don't mean anything to Jesus. The people will eat today. God's power will shine through the lunch of a boy.

1. **What is a need you have today that God could fulfill?**
2. **In what area of your life do you struggle to have faith that God will provide?**
3. **How have you seen God provide for you lately?**

WEEK 1 - THURSDAY

(John 6:10-13) "Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

BOOM! There it is. Jesus comes through. Hungry people are eating. Conversations are happening. An amazing moment is unfolding in front of the disciples. Philip and Andrew's jaws are probably hitting the grass as Jesus continues to distribute fish and bread to the thousandth person, the two-thousandth person, the three-thousandth person, and on and on until every mouth was chewing and every stomach was full.

It is amazing when you get to witness with your own eyes the movement of God in your life or the lives of others. It's indescribable and I have found it overwhelming. Now we don't all get moments like the ones described in the passage we read today but even in the small moments, we get to see God work and it is always amazing.

As a pastor I have seen God change so many lives. Unexpected money has arrived in envelopes, cars have been gifted, marriages have been mended, sicknesses have been healed, attitudes have been changed, addictions have been overcome, and salvation has been offered and accepted time and time again in all kinds of circumstances and each of those moments are demonstrations of God's love and providence.

We want to see more and more of these moments and the more we journey with God we will. These are the "twelve baskets" we get to partake in when we become disciples of Christ. What do I mean by that? After Jesus fed the crowd, John tells us in the story that there were twelve baskets left over. In my imagination, I see each disciple carrying away a basket full of bread and fish. They didn't just get to serve the people by distributing the food, they walked away blessed by the overflow. Because God doesn't give, he gives abundantly which means that there is going to be enough and more. And when you become a disciple of Christ, get ready because you are going to see God work and you are going to walk away with one of those baskets.

1. **What miracle of God have you witnessed?**
2. **How has God used you to serve others?**
3. **What “basket” are you experiencing in your life right now?**

WEEK 1 - FRIDAY

(John 6:14-15) When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

This story should have had a better conclusion. No author or screenwriter worth his salt would end this story the way John did. The people were hungry, Jesus fed them with an amazing demonstration of his power, they recognized that he could free them from oppression, they wanted to make Jesus king, and Jesus walked away from it.

The story should have had the people putting a crown on Jesus’ head, the people bowing before him, and Jesus giving them a Braveheart-like speech where he yells “Freedom!” at the end and they go and conquer the Romans and gain their independence. Now that’s a story we want.

But instead Jesus denies himself that opportunity for power and is all alone, in the hills, by himself. Why? Alan Fadling in *An Unhurried Life* has this opinion:

It wasn’t that he didn’t care for the individuals who comprised those multitudes, but they wanted something from Jesus that he didn’t want to focus his attention on. They wanted him to be a meal ticket or a magician—anything but Savior, Lord and God! The crowds were not following him for transformation, but for benefits. Their motivation was far more outward than inward. And their excitement about Jesus would only last as long as he gave them what they wanted.

Fadling, Alan. An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest (p. 28). (Function). Kindle Edition.

Seeing the work of God in our lives is exciting. It creates in us the desire for more of God. But what is the motivation that moves us? Are we seeking more of God so that he can do more in our lives or are we seeking more of God so that he can do more for our lives? Is God a power for heart transformation or resource acquisition?

Jesus had to walk away from the people because their heart was in the wrong place. Let’s make sure that doesn’t happen to us.

1. **What is your biggest request of Jesus right now?**
2. **Does God feel close or far from you? What is contributing to that feeling?**
3. **Take time to pray to God and ask him to make your motives pure in your pursuit of Him.**

BELONGING (S2) - WEEK 2

By Jon Ciccarelli

WEEK 2 - MONDAY

(John 6:16-21 NLT) That evening Jesus' disciples went down to the shore to wait for him. [17] But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn't come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. [18] Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the sea grew very rough. [19] They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, [20] but he called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am here!" [21] Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!

This week, we are going to spend some time looking at two passages from the gospels of John and Mark. Both of these passages tell the story of Jesus miraculously calming storms that seemed to stir up incredible amounts of fear for His disciples.

Today's passage from John's gospel stirs up memories and feelings from my childhood of times when I felt scared. They're not what I would call good or fun feelings and memories. As I reflect on what is common among these experiences, I realize that they were instances when I didn't feel safe, and I didn't recognize anyone around me as being someone or people I belonged to. For example, I can remember a time when I got separated from my family while we were shopping. While I could see many people around me, I couldn't see my family. I panicked and began to cry. I don't remember the details of that moment, but I definitely remember the feeling of being terrified that I didn't know anyone around me, and the people I belonged to were not in sight or near me as far as I could tell. After many tears and the fear of thinking I might not see my family again, I experienced great happiness and peace when I was back with the ones I belonged to.

As we begin another week of pondering our belonging to God through some of the miracles found in the Gospels, we will see, through both John and Mark's accounts of Jesus calming the storms, that in Jesus performing these miracles for His disciples, He is reminding them that they belong to Him. That He loves them, cares deeply for them, and is concerned for their well-being. Miracles are one of the ways God, who is not limited by human or earthly limitations, reveals how much He loves us and how profoundly we belong to Him, as they are all miracles related to His presence with us, despite what we might experience in the moment as frightening or dire. This is when Jesus calls out to us and says, "Don't be afraid. I am here!"

- 1. When you think about times when you have felt scared or afraid, are they connected to a sense of feeling alone and/or maybe sensing the situation makes you question your sense of belonging?**
- 2. Take a moment to think about a time or two when you sensed God breaking through to remind you that you belong to Him.**
- 3. Take a minute right now to pause and listen to Jesus say to you, "Don't be afraid. I am here."**

WEEK 2 - TUESDAY

(John 6:19-21 NLT) They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, [20] but he called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am here!" [21] Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!

To refresh our memory a bit about the situation the disciples found themselves in, remember it was evening, so it was dark. They had waited for Jesus to join them down by the shore because they were going to cross the lake toward Capernaum. The plan seemed to be that Jesus was going to go with them.

"But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn't come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum."

I often wonder when I read this story about what might have happened had they waited for Jesus. However, that is not the case, so we will continue with the story as it stands. We are told that a gale swept down upon them and that the sea grew very rough. A gale of wind can range anywhere from 32 to 63 miles per hour in gusts. Anything above this amount enters hurricane level. Some think given the context of the passage and the other accounts in the synoptic gospels, it was probably somewhere between 32-54 mph. The word is translated from the original Greek text, which describes it as a great, large, and powerful wind. Whatever strength it was, it was a powerful force that swept them into a sense of feeling overwhelmed and having to deal with a chaotic situation that was out of their control.

What I love about this story is how Jesus shows up. This is the essence of the gospel. God showing up. God showing up when we don't have a fighting chance. (While we were still yet sinners, Christ died for us.) As mentioned in the introduction to this study guide, the incarnation, in which God became human in the life of Jesus, is the greatest miracle that proclaims God's love for us, showing that we belong to Him. Can you imagine being one of the disciples in that boat, being almost completely overpowered by the wind and the waves, and suddenly seeing Jesus walking on the water toward you? I would have expected the disciples to feel overwhelmed now with joy and excitement, but the text says they were terrified! Upon further investigation of the text, it becomes apparent that the disciples didn't recognize Jesus but instead thought they were seeing a ghost, according to scholars. This seems to be why Jesus called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am here!" Then, it says, they were *eager* to let him in the boat.

1. **What do you think Jesus would like His disciples to know about their belonging to Him, given this miracle of His presence with them in the storm?**
2. **Are there times you can think of when you might think God is so distant and question your belonging to Him that when He is revealing Himself to us so we know we are His, that we might even be thinking it is something or someone else?**
3. **How might Jesus be inviting you to let Him give you His peace through His presence of belonging?**

WEEK 2 - WEDNESDAY

(Mark 4:35-41 NLT) As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." [36] So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). [37] But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. [38] Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" [39] When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. [40] Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" [41] The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

Today, we have another account of Jesus revealing that the disciples belonged to Him through the calming of another storm — another miracle. We're going to break down this passage over the next few days, but for now, let's consider some of the significant elements of this narrative. It was evening again. Why do scary things seem to so often take place at night and in the dark? Jesus is the one who invites the disciples to get into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake. Another fierce storm suddenly arises, complete with waves so high that the boat is beginning to fill with water. We can only imagine what the disciples were thinking and feeling in this terrifying moment. A moment when, taking into account all of

the given elements of the situation, your life is at risk because there is a good chance that if this keeps up, you are going to drown.

So, what is Jesus doing in this overwhelming and life-threatening situation? He is sleeping. Yep, that's what the text says. Sleeping. So what does a disciple of Jesus do when you fear you are going to drown because the boat you are standing in is filling up with water from the overpowering storm you are losing a battle with? You do everything in your power to wake Jesus up! The text says they woke Jesus up by shouting at Him. Apparently, disciples of Jesus sometimes shout at Him when they are scared and aren't sure He cares about them. Jesus wakes up to their shouts of accusation, questioning His care for them.

I love the phrase in this text that says, "Jesus woke up." While I also love the powerful description that follows this phrase, which states that Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves, and how He spoke to them, and they immediately stopped and became calm, I appreciate the miracle of God's response to our fears of questioning our belonging to Him. As disciples of Jesus, we are still human beings who sometimes still question our belonging to God when things get scary. We do this from time to time, and I want to encourage us not to beat ourselves up over it or shame ourselves. Instead, extend grace and compassion to yourself in these moments and understand that God understands, and this is why He continues to perform miracles to remind us of our belonging.

1. **Have you ever "shouted" at Jesus because you didn't think He was caring enough to pay attention to you and the situation you were in? Maybe you would like to shout right now because of what you are going through. Go ahead. It's ok. Disciples do this sometimes. He can take it.**
2. **Is there a possible invitation from Jesus for you as you reflect on an experience of shouting, wanting to shout, or currently shouting at Jesus? If so, what do you sense He is offering you?**
3. **How might you extend grace and compassion to yourself by accepting your belonging to Jesus?**

WEEK 2 - THURSDAY

(Mark 4:35-38a NLT) As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." [36] So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). [37] But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. [38] Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion.

My wife says I can sleep through anything. I told her it's a spiritual gift. Let's just say she didn't like that answer very much. When our first child would wake up in the middle of the night crying, I never heard him. She would get up to console him at times, and after a while, she couldn't understand how I could sleep right through his wailing. She was pretty convinced that I was not asleep, but just pretending. To test her hypothesis, next time our son woke up crying and screaming, she brought him to me and put him right next to my head. I don't remember this at all, because I was sound asleep. She couldn't believe it! How could I stay asleep even when he was crying so loud right next to my head? My answer is that I have no idea. But I'm glad my wife was able to care for our son because his life may have depended on it one of those nights, and I would not have been able to help him.

How on earth did Jesus remain asleep during a "fierce storm" that included "high waves" breaking into the boat, filling the ship with water? By the way, I'm not suggesting with the story about me sleeping through my son's middle-of-the-night wailings that I'm a lot like Jesus. I believe the reasons for His sleep and my sleep were totally different.

When Dallas Willard was asked what one word he would use to describe Jesus, he said "relaxed." I'm not sure that is the word any of us would choose. However, I think Dallas is onto something. Jesus was completely relaxed (spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially) because He rested in the

reigning love of His Heavenly Father. His Abba/Daddy. He could rest because His father was always working. Always caring for Him. Always loving Him. Why? Because He knew Who He belonged to. He was living with peace and rest beyond an earthly understanding that was steeped in a profound Father and Son abiding intimacy.

1. **What keeps you up at night when you can't sleep?**
2. **What do you think about how Dallas describes Jesus being relaxed?**
3. **What do you sense is Jesus's desire for you in this moment?**

WEEK 2 - FRIDAY

(Mark 4:38b-41 NLT) The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"

[39] When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. [40] Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" [41] The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

We now enter the scene where Jesus wakes up to His disciples shouting at Him. Imagine, for a moment, being Jesus and being sound asleep. I love how Mark, in a subtle way, gives his readers some insight as to how comfortable Jesus was as he makes the extra effort to include this little extra detail, "with His head on a cushion." It is clear that the Spirit writing through Mark is emphasizing how comfortable Jesus is in His deeply peaceful sleep on His Father's lap.

I don't get the sense from the text that Jesus was startled when He woke up to their shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" But, I'm glad He woke up. Maybe their life did depend on Him waking up. We don't know. Or could they have ridden the storm out with Jesus sleeping through the entire episode? Now that would have been an interesting conversation with the disciples telling Jesus all about what happened and Jesus, their Rabbi, asking all sorts of profoundly curious questions, pulling out profound theological truths about living in God's Kingdom now on earth as it is in heaven.

What we do know is that Jesus did wake up, and when He did, He rebuked the wind and the waves by telling them to be quiet and to be still. Suddenly, the wind stopped, and there was great calm. I love that Mark used the word calm. It says more than just that everything became still. Jesus then asked them two questions. "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" I believe these two questions are steeped in our reality of belonging to God and His Kingdom. I think our unhealthy fears (yes, I believe there are healthy ones) are critically connected to our understanding and acceptance of our belonging to God. And when Jesus talks about faith, I don't believe He is referring to a personal power to do incredible things, but rather the faith that is based on actions stemming from a genuine belief. In this case, acting like I belong to Jesus because I do. And if I believe I belong to Jesus, my faith is the day-to-day way I live that out naturally as I live this life with God, self, and others. What I hear in Jesus' question for His disciples when He asks, "Do you still have no faith?" is, do you still question your belonging?

1. **Can you imagine yourself resting with your head on Jesus's lap? If so, what does it feel like? What do you notice?**
2. **How might you be struggling with allowing yourself to accept your belonging to Jesus?**
3. **For a fun spiritual exercise, search for Rembrandt's painting of Jesus calming the storm and spend some time reflecting on Jesus in the boat, and pick a disciple or two you can relate to based on how they are interacting with Jesus in the storm.**

BELONGING (S2) - WEEK 3

By Jon Ciccarelli

WEEK 3 - MONDAY

(John 2:1-11 NLT) The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, [2] and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. [3] The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." [4] "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." [5] But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." [6] Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. [7] Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, [8] he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions. [9] When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. [10] "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!" [11] This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

This week we will be abiding with Jesus, His disciples, and His mother at a wedding. I love everything about this story. I love all of the interaction Jesus has with everyone at this wedding celebration. Which, if you are not aware, this wedding and all of the events associated with it would typically last about seven days. There was a great deal of love, rejoicing, and celebration, complete with plenty of food, wine, dancing, and feasting.

The miracle Jesus performs in this story is also understood to be His first miracle of His ministry, going forward. Everything about this miracle is fascinating if we allow ourselves to engage with its subtleties and nuances. Don't be quick to read over this passage. I want to encourage you to linger in it for a few slow minutes. Go back and reread the passage. Perhaps take a few deep breaths before reading it and ask Jesus to draw you in and help you engage with Him in the beautiful and non-threatening ways He reveals Himself in this story. Allow yourself to be there with Jesus as you participate with Jesus in the festivities. Now that you have lingered with Jesus in this moment:

- 1. What are some things you noticed?**
- 2. How did you interact with Jesus and/or the others in this situation?**
- 3. Was there anything Jesus was offering you and/or others? Jesus always extends invitations to us in every situation. What is the invitation being offered to you from Jesus?**

WEEK 3 - TUESDAY

(John 2:1-5 NLT) The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, [2] and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. [3] The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." [4] "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." [5] But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you.""

Our text starts by saying, "The next day . . ." In the immediate days leading up to this day, according to John 1, John the Baptist had been testifying of Jesus and had baptized Jesus. Jesus was calling people to follow Him as His disciples, and many were responding to His call. Can you imagine the excitement of these new disciples of Jesus as they are just beginning to spend time with Jesus and having no clue what would happen from day to day? They likely had preconceived notions about what life would be like after following and learning from a rabbi, based on their upbringing and what they had heard from others

growing up. But when you read the Gospels and see and hear the things Jesus did and taught, we are quickly reminded that Jesus was not an ordinary rabbi, but the very Son of God, Immanuel—God with us, tabernacling with us in the flesh. As John said at the beginning of his gospel, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. I can imagine them thinking, “Wow, being Jesus’s disciple is very cool. We begin by attending a wedding celebration for the first week as His apprentices. Talk about living the dream!”

However, right in the middle of feasting and celebrating, a serious problem arises. “The wine supply ran out.” Now, for a Jewish wedding celebration in Jesus’s day, this was a serious problem. This would cause the host of the wedding incredible shame and embarrassment. The parents and family of the bridal party would be so ashamed. So, Jesus’s mother, who could be feeling concern and empathy for these parents, comes to her son believing He can take care of this situation. I love the interaction between Jesus and His mother.

It is in this brief and simple interaction that I believe we gain a deeper understanding of bringing our situations to Jesus in prayerful communion with Him. She shares the problem with Jesus, and He answers her. But it doesn’t stop there. She trusts that Jesus knows what He is doing and surrenders the situation to Him. We see this in what she says to the servants when she says, “Do whatever He tells you.” She surrenders the situation to Jesus and trusts Him in whatever He decides to do. His will be done.

1. **When has there been a time you faced a dire situation? What did you think, feel, and do at that time?**
2. **Is there a situation you are facing today that you would like to trust Jesus with? If so, what and/or who?**
3. **What might it be like to trust The One you belong to?**

WEEK 3 - WEDNESDAY

(John 2:6-8 NLT) [6] Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. [7] Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, [8] he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.

This is the first miracle Jesus performs. John refers to them as signs in his gospel. There are seven significant signs in the book of John. Biblical scholar and historian, NT Wright, says we need to understand these signs as signposts pointing to what God is doing in fulfilling His covenant through Jesus. They are moments when, “Heaven and earth intersect with each other.”

Remember the scene, everyone at this wedding celebration is deep into rejoicing and feasting when the wine runs out. Jesus’s mother, Mary, has made Him aware of the problem and trusts Him to do whatever He sees fit to do about it. She tells the servants to do whatever He tells them.

Our text tells us there are six stone water jars there, which are used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Jesus boldly tells the servants to fill, not the vessels that were being used for the wine, which would have been made of clay or a substance other than stone, but the stone ones, which were used for Jewish ceremonial purposes. By instructing the servants to fill the jars used for ceremonial washing, Jesus was making an unequivocal statement. Given that there were six jars, each capable of holding 20 to 30 gallons, the total would be 120 to 180 gallons of wine. (Some have estimated this would be about 800 bottles of wine!) He was here on earth to fulfill everything the Old Testament ceremonial laws and practices had been pointing to. The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, says it this way. *“These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” [Colossians 2:17]* The actual reality and fulfillment of everything in the Old Covenant was coming to life and fulfillment in Jesus. The Kingdom of God has come, on earth as it is in heaven, in and through the life of Jesus.

Jesus will later institute what we refer to as The Lord's Supper on His way to the cross. In this divine meal, He will say the wine represents His blood shed for us, for the forgiveness of our sins.

1. **When you think about how lavishly Jesus provided the wine for this couple's wedding, how might you imagine how lavishly He wants you to experience His love and care for you?**
2. **Given the grandness of this miracle and the statement being made by Jesus, how serious and determined do you think God is for you to know you belong to Him?**
3. **Take 1-2 minutes right now to sit still and imagine being completely covered in your belonging in Christ. What would this feel like? What thoughts do you notice?**

WEEK 3 - THURSDAY

(John 2:9-10 NLT) [9] When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. [10] "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!"

I can't imagine the master of ceremonies tasting, "the water that was now wine." In the midst of possible chaos for this master of ceremonies, he experiences abundant grace and provision. Just when he thought his reputation and acceptance among his relatives and those within the village and community where he lived were about to be devastated, God does the impossible, and he is surprised by grace.

I love thinking about the servants in this story. I like to imagine myself as one of the servants interacting with Jesus and contemplating what it would be like to fully let go of my fears and do whatever He says. The text doesn't tell us exactly when the water turns to wine. It is possible that it didn't change until the master of ceremonies drinks it. What if when the servant dipped some out and took it to the master of ceremonies, it was still water? Talk about feeling anxious and freaking out! But you're trusting Jesus. Remember, he did not yet have a reputation for miracles. This was His first one! But then it happens, and you are so relieved. You can breathe now. The master of ceremonies must have had an expression on his face that revealed incredible astonishment. So much so that he calls the bridegroom over to honor him because he thinks he has saved the best wine for last. But, in reality, he had come up short and had run out of wine.

One of the things I have learned and experienced in my life as I 'increase in years' is remembering the many times I have come up short, but God... But God showed up and provided a life I didn't deserve. Provided love I hadn't experienced but longed for. Provided for needs I couldn't figure out how to address. And not just barely, but over and beyond what I thought could be possible.

1. **Is there something happening in your life right now where Jesus is inviting you to trust Him like the servants did?**
2. **Can you reflect on a time when you have been surprised by God's grace in your life?**
1. **How do you sense Jesus would like to fill the vessel of your life with His life and presence?**

WEEK 3 - FRIDAY

(John 2:11 NLT) *This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.*

What must it have been like for the disciples in this moment when they believed in Jesus? This is such a pregnant statement. Jesus revealed His glory through this astounding miracle, and they believed in Him.

The theme and entire purpose of the Gospel of John is to believe. To believe in Jesus. To believe everything about Jesus and what He said, did, and offers to all of humanity. John is the book containing all of the “I Am” statements of Jesus. I Am the Bread of Life. I Am the Light of the World. I Am the Door for the sheep. I Am the Good Shepherd. I Am the Resurrection and the Life. I Am the True Vine.

During COVID, my mother was in an assisted living facility nearby where I live. It was a tough time for all of us. She was a very active member of the last two churches I served as a Lead Pastor. Let's just say she was one of my biggest fans. During this time, she would watch my sermons online. She was struggling with her purpose at the age of 91. For many decades, she devoted her life to serving and caring for others. She would take people meals when they needed them, visit those in the hospital, and visit those who couldn't leave their homes. Since she couldn't get out and was growing more frail, she felt she wasn't making a difference.

One week, I had preached a sermon on John chapter 11 about Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave. With the thrust of John's writing being to believe in Jesus and what God was doing through His life, death, and resurrection, the story of Lazarus emphasizes this. The word “believe” is used eight times in this chapter. This was the thrust of my sermon. My mother, of course, watched my sermon. She called me later that day, and I sensed excitement in her voice. She said, “Jon, I have found what God wants me to do!” I asked her what it was, and I was also excited that she had found relief from the ache of not knowing what God wanted her to do. She said, “Believe! I'm supposed to keep believing in God and that He loves me and has not abandoned me.” I was so happy for her.

Unfortunately, six months later, she would contract COVID and not be able to fight it off. I realized how good God was in that moment. That God was giving her what she needed to continue believing and trusting Him in the final stages of her life.

The very first verse of this story we have been looking at says, “The next day there was a wedding celebration.” (NLT) Unfortunately, this is not a very good translation of what the original Greek says. It actually says, “On the third day.” With everything John writes serving as a signpost to point to Jesus and all that God is doing through Him to put everything back to right and make all things new again, what do you think John was pointing to when he mentions that all this happened on “the third day?”

- 1. How is Jesus asking you to believe Him?**
- 2. Take some time to linger over the “I Am” statements Jesus uses to say Who He is for humanity. Which one connects with you the most in this moment? Why do you think so?**
- 3. How might Jesus desire to come to life in you during this season of life?**

BELONGING (S2) - WEEK 4

Milton Marquez

WEEK 4 - MONDAY

(Matthew 21:18) *In the morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, he was hungry...*

The debate on the nature of Christ has been around since the first century. The question of whether or not Jesus was human or divine has been asked for a long time. For hundreds of years after Jesus' ascension the church wrestled with these questions and formed councils to give answers to the church at that time.

After all the debates the leaders of the church came to this general conclusion: Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Of course, that is a simplistic summary of the church's answer to the question and I'm sure you have your own thoughts on the issue. The issue still lives on to this day, as more thought has been given to the idea of Jesus' humanity.

So you may not be sure if Jesus was fully human or fully divine or some combination of the two and to what percentage. If you think about it enough, you might just blow your mind away. To try and understand our God, who lives on another plane of existence, by our reality seems to me an impossibility. But Matthew helps us understand at least one thing about Jesus' humanity.

"he was hungry"

Jesus understood and experienced the human need for sustenance. He knew what it felt like to need and to lack. He knew not only what hunger and thirst felt like, but also exhaustion, disappointment, physical pain, sadness, joy, fear, and loneliness.

When I read the story of Jesus, I see that there isn't anything that I haven't gone through that Jesus couldn't understand, because he went through it himself. So the next time you are hungry, remember that Jesus was hungry too. In fact, whatever you are going through right now, Jesus has felt it, he understands it, and he's with you in it. You are not alone.

1. **What was the hungriest you have ever been? What did you eat to stop your hunger?**
2. **How do you understand the concept of Jesus being fully human and fully divine?**
3. **Do you feel that Jesus understands what you are going through? Why or why not?**

WEEK 4 - TUESDAY

(Matthew 21:19) *...and he noticed a fig tree beside the road. He went over to see if there were any figs, but there were only leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" And immediately the fig tree withered up.*

Expectations are everything. Whenever you go into a situation, your expectations will determine whether or not that situation is positive or negative. If all goes according to your expectations, thumbs up! If not, your day has just been ruined. At least that's the way it goes for me.

This happens to me in a couple of ways. Since I enjoy movies, I get a lot of reviews and opinions pop up on my feeds giving me someone else's thoughts about whether a movie is good or not, or if it has some political or social agenda in its messaging. I have gone into several films with my popcorn and Milk Duds ready to be disappointed with the movie, and usually I find the opinions to have been a stretch at best.

A similar dynamic happens when I meet people for the first time. Someone finds out I am going to have a coffee appointment with a new person visiting the church and they may have some opinion on the person based on an interaction that may have happened years ago. Now I'm walking into the coffee shop ready to experience someone who, according to someone, may be problematic. And it's usually not the case.

Jesus was hungry, saw a fig tree with great-looking leaves, and when he arrived, was disappointed. The leaves of the fig tree gave the impression that there was going to be good fruit. Jesus walked up to the tree expecting it to have delicious fruit. But Jesus' expectations were not met since the tree was bare. You and I walk around with the leaves of "Love Well" on us. It could be a hat, t-shirt, water bottle, or the knowledge that we are part of Crosswalk. That creates an expectation of who and how we are. When people meet us, do our actions disappoint in the light of what people expect "Love Well" to mean. I think about that a lot when I put on a shirt or hat that identifies me with Crosswalk. And I ask God to help me never fall short of the expectation to always love well.

1. **Have you ever been disappointed by a meal? What was that experience like?**
2. **On a scale of 1 to 10, how good are you at loving well? How can you improve your score?**
3. **What would you like people to expect from you once they know you are a part of Crosswalk?**

WEEK 4 - WEDNESDAY

(Matthew 21:20) *The disciples were amazed when they saw this and asked, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?"*

The response of the disciples to the withering of the tree shows that they had never seen anything like this before. Jesus, with just one phrase, made a fig tree wither. In an instant Jesus demonstrated his power.

The speed of God's actions is a mystery to me. There are times when it seems that God acts fast, like in this scenario, but then there are times when God seems to move super slow. And if you have ever experienced those feelings, you know how frustrating they can be.

I entered the seminary believing that I was called to be a pastor, but when I graduated, nobody wanted to hire me. For six months I wondered when God was going to reveal to me when I would start my pastoral ministry. I was getting tired of waiting. But the day came when the phone rang and God opened the door for me to be a full-time pastor. I was so relieved, but it was hard to wait.

What the disciples and you and I have to understand is that God always works quickly. I am realizing that God has only one speed, and it's instantaneous. Think about creation. God spoke and it happened. BOOM!

It's not an issue of whether God acts fast or slow. It's an issue of God's timing. When God seems to delay, it's because the time isn't right. When things are lined up the way God wants them to be, his actions will be quick.

This was my situation becoming a pastor. The call came immediately, and it came at the perfect time. I know that now, but I didn't know it back then.

So our job is not to wonder why God is going slow. Our job is to thank him for working in such a way that when he acts, it will be the perfect time.

1. **How have you seen the power of God demonstrated in your life?**

2. **What has your experience been waiting on God? Was it a positive or negative experience?**
3. **What is something you need God to do in your life right now?**

WEEK 4 - THURSDAY

(Matthew 21:21) *Then Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen."*

Did Jesus really mean this? I know on its face it's a silly question. I have never known Jesus to say something that wasn't true. In Mark 9 he made a pretty bold statement:

"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead." Mark 9:31

Obviously he said it and it happened. We have no issue with the truth of this statement about his resurrection, but faith moving mountains? That is another thing entirely. For some reason, this one is hard to believe.

If I think about it, the reason we have such a hard time with Jesus' statement is because when he talked about his resurrection, he was talking about himself and his power. But this claim about you and me seems like a stretch. It's hard to think that we could have that kind of power, the ability to move mountains.

We don't doubt Jesus, we doubt ourselves. When I look in the mirror I don't see a powerful person of faith. I see someone who struggles to walk with God more times than I would want to admit. So that statement by Jesus seems far-fetched and truly impossible, not because of his lack of power but because of my lack of faith.

But it's at that time that we need to remember that Matthew had a different version of this statement:

"I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." Matthew 17:20

So the size of our faith doesn't really matter. Big or small, it's still faith, and in the hands of our mighty God and savior it will move mountains.

1. **Do you feel powerful? Why or why not?**
2. **How big is your faith today? What can help make your faith stronger?**
3. **Who is someone in your life you can talk to when you struggle with faith? Reach out to that person today and let them know how your walk with God is doing.**

WEEK 4 - FRIDAY

(Matthew 21:22) *"You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it."*
Let's take a moment and parse this statement by Jesus.

First, Jesus says...

"You can pray for anything..."

The Psalms is a manual on prayer and if you take the time to read through the whole thing you can see that there is truly nothing you can't pray for. There are prayers for forgiveness, renovation, restoration, and all sorts of miracles. There are prayers of celebration, joy, and worship. There are also prayers for destruction, complaining, and the annihilation of enemies. Yeah, check it out. You might be surprised by some of them. So whatever you are going through, good or bad, all prayers are welcome.

Second, Jesus says...

"...and if you have faith..."

Again, that faith subject. So there has to be a level of belief and trust when it comes to approaching God with our requests. And it might not be that we believe that we are going to get everything we ask for. My experience has been that we don't get everything we ask for. But our faith helps us to know that we have a God who listens to our requests. All of them. That is why we keep coming back to him.

And third, Jesus says...

"...you will receive it."

But we just established that we don't get everything that we ask for. This is true. But if you think about it, we do get what we ask for. Because the closer we get to God, the more we ask for the things that truly matter. The more we abide with him, the more our hearts align with him and the more we want the things of the kingdom.

So keep abiding. Keep praying. Keep asking. And watch God deliver the things that will truly make a difference in the world.

- 1. What is something that you have prayed for that you have not received yet? Why do you think that is?**
- 2. How aligned do you feel with the heart of God? What can help you be more aligned with Him?**
- 3. What was the last prayer God answered for you? Take a moment and thank Him.**

BELONGING (S2) - WEEK 5

Milton Marquez

WEEK 5 - MONDAY

(Psalm 68:6) *God places the lonely in families;*

*He sets the prisoners free and gives them joy.
But He makes the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.*

Loneliness is one of the worst feelings one can experience. To feel like you have no one in your life can lead to so many negative emotions. Deep down, we all want to be part of a family, to never experience deep loneliness.

There was a time that I felt deep loneliness. It was when I was in college and, through my own choices, found myself a failure and all alone. All the people who were willing to be around when I was making foolish decisions were not there when the consequences hit my life. I had no direction spiritually, socially, or academically. I was alone and did not know what to do next. And it was at that moment that a miraculous moment happened between my mother and I. Expecting the “I told you so” speech, I reached out to her and the only thing that I remember from that conversation was her saying to me, “Come home.” I wasn’t lonely anymore. I had direction. I had a purpose. I had a new start.

Family is the remedy to loneliness. That is why God created it. And it goes beyond blood. Because you don’t just have your immediate family, you have the family of God, or what we call the church, or what around her we call Crosswalk. It’s the people that worship with you, that cry with you, that wrestle with you, that doubt with you.

What we are creating at each Crosswalk campus is a place where belonging happens, on the days of good connection and on the days of deep, dark loneliness. So remember, when you are feeling that you need someone, look to your Crosswalk family. We are all here for you.

- 1. When you think of your family, whom do you think of?**
- 2. When you are feeling lonely, who is someone you can reach out to?**
- 3. Do you know someone who is lonely? What can you do to be present in his or her life?**

WEEK 5 - TUESDAY

(Luke 1:5) *When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron.* You have just read about a power couple. Think about it.

First, we have Zechariah who was from the order of Abijah. Abijah was one of the priests assigned by King David to serve in the temple. All his descendants would serve during their assigned time. This was a great moment for Israel and the temple in Jerusalem that would ultimately be built by Solomon. Zechariah was from this important line of priests.

Second, we have Elizabeth, who was from the line of Aaron. Zechariah's line lived in the shadow of Elizabeth's line, her being from the OG priest. The brother of Moses. The first of them all.

If you wanted to put two important people together to serve in the temple you couldn't have done much better than Zechariah and Elizabeth. Impressive pairing to say the least. But a famous lineage isn't truly what's important.

What was important for Zechariah and Elizabeth was the role they were called to play in the story of Jesus. They would bring about, through the power of God, their son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for Jesus' arrival. But that wasn't because of their lineage. How do I know this? Because of others that God chose for the same reason who had unimpressive lineage.

Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute. Ruth, a Moabite widow. Neither of these two were part of the storied history of the Israelite people and yet, when presented with the opportunity to follow the will of God, they did. That makes them worthy of inclusion into the family of God.

So don't worry if you come to the table with some great pedigree. It doesn't matter. Whether you have been part of the Crosswalk family for years or just getting started, all that matters is your willingness to journey together and abide with Him. If you do that you are a part of the family we call Crosswalk.

1. **Who is the most famous person you have ever met? What was that experience like?**
2. **How easy is it for you to know God's will for your life? Why do you think that is?**
3. **What can you do to make people feel like they are a part of the family of God?**

WEEK 5 - WEDNESDAY

(Luke 2:1-5) At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

Growing up in the church gave me multiple opportunities to read and hear this story. You would think by now I would have considered every angle of the Christmas story having lived this long as a believer and half of the time being a pastor.

But it wasn't until now that I thought about this particular moment in the story of Jesus' birth. The return of Joseph to Bethlehem. Yes, we understand that there were prophetic implications for the birth of the Messiah and that this moment had to happen. But I think about Joseph at this time.

His fiancée, Mary, tells him that she is pregnant and it is by the Holy Spirit. Well that is one option, the other being much more problematic. He is told in a dream that it is true, but who will believe him, especially when it becomes obvious that Mary is pregnant.

He decides to stay with her, and now he has to return to his ancestral home. What popped into my head was this question: Did Joseph have any people that he knew in Bethlehem? Were there family members there that would have been excited to see him come back to Bethlehem after being gone for a while. I'm not sure but it's not out of the question.

But imagine coming home under such circumstances. I grew up in a culture where this level of scandal would most likely place you outside of the family. If you made such a grave mistake, it brought shame to the family and you were not welcome, especially in church.

That is not the way the family of God is to function. We are all one bad decision away from consequences that could change the rest of our lives. We aren't immune to making huge mistakes and blowing

everything up. But it is in those moments when we need a community that will be there to dust us off, and help us reengage with God and his people and keep walking with Him. This is the kind of community and family that we are seeking to create at Crosswalk, the kind of place where all are welcome, no matter what the issue, mistake, or level of spirituality. So whatever you are going through, know this. You can always come home and be loved well.

1. **Have you ever made a huge mistake? How did you deal with the aftermath?**
2. **Who has been there for you when your life has blown up?**
3. **What is the biggest need you have that the Crosswalk family can help you with?**

WEEK 5 - THURSDAY

(Acts 9:1-2) Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

Being in community feels good. I love getting together with people. There is a giddiness I experience every time I come to church for worship. The reason for my excitement is that I know there is a good chance that I will meet someone new at church and have an opportunity to make a coffee appointment and hopefully make a new friend.

I'm sure I have been a little too eager at times trying to make a connection happen but I can't help it. I just love forming new connections. It makes me feel closer to people and closer to God as I hear the stories of what He is doing in other's lives. That is why I say that community feels good.

But the forming of a community isn't only for good feelings. The early church formed a community and things couldn't have been worse for them. Yes, they were growing and sharing and eating and worshiping and praying together. All of that sounds amazing. But they were also being persecuted. People wanted them arrested and even killed if possible. That doesn't sound all that great. So even though community feels good, sometimes things in the community can get challenging.

The reason for that is because we are in a cosmic war. Good and evil, God and Satan, are at odds and we are caught in the middle. Satan would love nothing more than to break our community apart and leave us in pieces, wondering if it was worth it to pursue being the body of Christ. And you know what will be our best weapon against the forces of evil trying to break us apart. By each of us becoming the most powerful version of ourselves inside the community.

That is why we encourage you to keep abiding, both with God and with each other. The stronger our bonds become, the harder it will be for the enemy to break us apart. Saul tried to do that and he had to change his name and join the movement.

So let's keep investing in our own spiritual lives and in each other. That will make us unstoppable. That will make us the body of Christ.

1. **What is your most positive memory of being a part of the Crosswalk family?**
2. **What are some things in your life that create disconnection for you from God and others?**
3. **What can you do to promote unity within the body of Christ?**

WEEK 5 - FRIDAY

(Romans 12:4-5) Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

Crosswalk Point Loma is the sixth church I have had the privilege to pastor. I love what I do. Leading a church is challenging but very rewarding.

Every time I have gotten to a church, I have gone into analysis mode. I take inventory of what is happening, I identify the needs and I get to work. The pressure to successfully lead and grow the church is what pushes me to get into this mode.

This approach to church growth has brought me some success but what it has also brought me is stress, imbalance, and workaholism. And that is just my own experience. Church leaders and volunteers, at times, have seen the darker side of me where I not only push myself, but push them to the point that church has become more of a chore than a community. I have some regrets when I look back at my career as a pastor and I ask God to forgive me for misunderstanding my calling.

The reason this happened is because I misunderstood a key point in the passage we just read:

“...each part has a special function.”

For many years I thought my function was to do it all. I thought the church could not move forward without my special intervention. It took many years to finally understand that all God needed me to do was to be the pastor. I didn't need to be the worship leader, chairman of the board, fellowship meal director, or prayer ministries coordinator. All of those roles are important, but they aren't my calling.

The passage is very clear, that all the parts of the body have a special function. If I do all the functions, there is no need for the body. So when I lived in my role as pastor, and allowed God to bring up the parts of the body that were needed, that is when significant growth happened.

Are all the roles filled at Crosswalk Point Loma? At the time of writing this lesson they are not. But the body continues to grow and when the time is right, the people who will fulfill those roles will arrive and the ministry of loving well will continue. And it won't be because I had to push.

- 1. How have you seen the church grow this year?**
- 2. What special function is God asking you to fill in the body of Christ?**
- 3. Ask God to send the right people to your church to fulfill the roles that still need to be filled.**