

Monday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 1:1-28.

What is your view on God? What do you believe about Jesus? The disciple John wrote the book of John to record the many powerful signs, miracles and statements Jesus made in his time here on earth so that we may believe the truth.

We may have preconceived notions of who Christ is because of the way our parents raised us, the mentors and coaches who have influenced us along the way, and even the way we've seen other Christians treat us and others. Whatever the philosophy, we may have heard this or that about who Jesus is and what Christianity looks like, but unless we've spent time reading and backing it up with his Word, it's all just hearsay. And we deserve more than that. Our future, our convictions, and our souls deserve more than that.

As we navigate through this Bible reading plan and try to figure out what it means to live a life for Christ, let's set aside our past assumptions and impressions and learn from John, the one whom Jesus loved, an authentic witness who recorded Jesus' miraculous ministry of three and a half years. "Those who search will surely find me." (Proverbs 8:17)

Jesus, I'm showing up today with the desire to grow in my faith and knowledge of you. Thank you for giving us your Word, the beacon of truth, to reveal your heart, your purpose, and your desire for me.

Tuesday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 1:29-50.

Many prepared the way for Jesus' coming and ministry—we can read through the prophecies in the Old Testament to be sure of that—but it wasn't until this point in time, when John the Baptist was knee-deep in the waters of Bethany baptizing others, that he claims very clearly, "I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the Lord's coming!'"

The very next day, John pointed people to Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John knew his purpose as a disciple wasn't to take the glory and live for his own fame—although, he could have easily done that with the attention he was getting. Instead, it was to be a faithful witness and clearly point people to Jesus as their Savior.

As followers of Christ, how can we do that in our own lives? It would be easy to live for our careers climbing the ladder or for our families as the primary caregivers, but the purpose of life as a Christ-follower is to become less so Jesus can become great. How can we point others to him as we go about our workday, take care of our kids, grab coffee with a friend, or even bump into a stranger?

Lord, I want to live my life, not for myself, but for you. Show me and empower me to be a faithful witness for you today.

Wednesday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 2:1-25.

The first miracle Jesus ever performed was at a wedding in Cana. The guests at the party far surpassed the available wine supply, so Jesus' mother pulled him aside and told the servants to do whatever he said; surely, Jesus would save the day. And he did.

Jesus told the workers to fill up six water pots with water, and as they followed his instructions, the water turned into the tastiest wine. Simple request, ordinary water jar, traditional wedding, extraordinary miracle.

In the same way, Jesus can take the ordinary parts of our lives—the career you've had for 10 years, the exercise class you always go to at the Y, and the same family dinners you schedule on Sunday nights—and make them extraordinary. If something needs fixing or there's a need that must be met, there is no limit to what Jesus can take and what he can do when we decide to follow his instruction and believe that he has the ability to perform a miracle.

Jesus, thank you for the hope you give us from the miracles we find in your Word. We may see ourselves as just a stay-at-home mom, just a husband, just another employee, or just a random neighbor—but there's a need you want us to fill, and we rely on you to work the miracle in our lives.

Thursday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 3:1-36.

Church members and leaders tend to have a language of their own—"Meet you in the narthex" or "Join us as we sing the doxology"—and before long, it can get confusing. We can ditch the words sanctuary for worship center or fellowship for community, but there are a few words in Christianese that actually have meaning and are important to know and understand.

Take being "born again" for example. Jesus coined this phrase long ago when he first had a conversation with a man named Nicodemus, and even after Jesus himself explained the meaning, Nicodemus still didn't get it. Jesus was conveying what it meant to be transformed spiritually, but Nicodemus was caught up in what that would look like physically: "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

But being born again is in fact the Gospel in its truest sense. All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; in other words, the Bible describes this as being dead in our trespasses. But through Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and rose back to life as an ultimate defeat against its punishment, we can be made alive and be born again through faith in him alone.

Praise God for this forgiveness and the perfect relationship he longs to have with each of us!

Friday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 4:1-38.

It was the hottest time of day, Jesus was stopping by a well for water, and he came across a woman. Not just any woman, but a Samaritan woman—who already was considered in that day to be unworthy to talk to a Jew—and an adulteress. She was well-known among the village as the woman who had five husbands plus lived with someone she wasn't even married to. That may seem more commonplace today, but back then, it was downright shocking and called for alienation from the rest of the people.

But there, in the heat of the day and at the base of the well, Jesus knew full well the history of this woman, and yet he reached out to her anyways. Because Jesus came—not for the perfect, the well-kept, the sinless—but for the sick, the sinful, the lost. He came to save and give abundant life to all who would turn to him, and at this moment, Jesus came for the Samaritan adulterer. And today, he may be reaching out to your unbelieving co-worker, neighbor or sister-in-law and wants you to join him in his mission to show them love and speak the Truth.

Lord Jesus, I praise you for your full acceptance! I want to partner with you and reach others with your Gospel, so they can experience this complete forgiveness themselves.

Saturday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 4:39-54.

One day, a group of Samaritans went out to see Jesus. They had heard about him from yesterday's woman at the well, but they knew they couldn't just take her word for it. They needed to see and hear from Jesus themselves before they believed he was the true Messiah. And after a couple days spent with Jesus, learning from him and hearing his message, they were able to state on their own accord: Jesus is indeed the Savior of the world.

Maybe you grew up in a Christian home and your parents both believed Jesus was their Lord and Savior, but you? You needed to see and hear from him yourself before you could call yourself a Christ-follower. Or maybe your friends have told you story after story of how God impacted their lives, but you knew you couldn't take on their faith as your own. You needed a faith that went beyond their testimony and conviction to one based on your own experience.

Whatever your story may be, the same is true for others. Our faith must be based on our own relationship with Christ—not one based on the relationship he has with others.

Lord, I love that you aren't a hidden, unknown God, but that you reveal yourself to anyone and everyone who simply wants to see and hear from you themselves.

Sunday

The Gospel of John: Week 1

Read John 5:1-47.

There are many differences between Christianity and other religions—especially how they view Jesus and who they say he is. Muslims don't believe Jesus died on the cross; they think he was replaced by Judas. Hindus believe Jesus was a wise teacher, reincarnated into a higher caste system maybe, but not the Son of God. But Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God who was crucified on a cross but three days later resurrected back to life to defeat sin and death once and for all.

As we interact with friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors that may have slightly different beliefs or obviously large differences in our convictions, it's important to know where we stand and why. Maybe that requires a little digging and means we request "The Case for Faith" or "The Case for Christ" from the library. Or maybe it looks like listening to relevant podcasts or messages, such as Eagle Brook's past series *Asking for a Friend*, while working out or driving into work.

Whatever it means for you, let's all give words to our faith and be ready to share with others who Jesus is.

Lord, thank you for giving me eternal life as the one and only Son of God. Give me the courage to share this truth and gift with others today.

Monday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 6:1–40.

It seemed as if everywhere Jesus went, there were people that needed healing, crowds that demanded his attention, and miracles just waiting to be performed. Things that people couldn't even fathom before—like walking on water or multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish to plentifully feed five thousand people (with leftovers!)—Jesus did right before their very eyes. It certainly wasn't for show, but every act done, and every word spoken was intentional, to speak truth or teach a lesson.

As you're heading into the breakroom today, would you expect the crumbs on the counter from a breakfast sandwich to turn into a five-course meal for your lunch? Probably not. Or as you're putting in the dock at the cabin or swimming in the pool at the Y, would you predict someone would float above the surface of the water rather than dip below? More than likely, the answer is no. That's because we know water can't carry the weight of a human body, and we know food doesn't just multiply instantaneously.

But because Jesus is God, unlike us, he lives outside of our physical realm and can work beyond the basic laws of physics. So even when our resources are small and circumstances look impossible, Jesus is able to provide. Or when the storms of life are raging and we have zero control over the chaos in our lives, Jesus can protect, rescue and guide us. Whatever you're facing or coming up against today, rest in these truths and have peace knowing the true strength and character of the God we serve.

Lord, thank you for being bigger than my physical circumstances, and help me trust in your power and saving grace today.

Tuesday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 6:41-70.

People had been following Jesus from town to town, soaking up his teaching, interested in his miracles and wanting to perform some themselves, and even claiming to be his disciples. But Jesus said, “But some of you do not believe in me.” At this point, it would be easy to wonder how they couldn’t believe. They were seeing the Son of God in the flesh and witnessing the wonders of his power firsthand; yet, they complained and said it was hard to understand? Because of this unbelief, many ended up walking away and deserting Jesus.

Do you know anyone like this? They grew up in the church, attended confirmation or youth group, possibly was even baptized, and made sure to attend service every weekend—yet, they ended up walking away from Christianity later on in life, and essentially, deserted Jesus.

This goes to show us the importance of having faith versus doing works. It doesn’t matter how many times we step into the worship center, open up our Bibles, or listen to KTIS in the car. We can have front row access to Jesus our entire lives, but if we don’t have faith in him as our Lord and Savior, then all of our religious acts are empty and meaningless. On the flip side, even when doubt creeps in and it’s hard to understand what Jesus is saying in his Word, true faith still claims, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.”

Jesus, today and every day, I choose faith in you.

Wednesday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 7:1-31.

Things for Jesus were getting down to the bare wire. Plenty of his disciples had left, he knew the ultimate betrayal was just around the corner, and on top of it all, Jesus was receiving death threats from the Jewish leaders. All of this made his brothers panic, and they started to strategize Jesus' next move: "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles!" But Jesus replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime."

Put yourself in the brothers' shoes; when in your life have you felt the same way? When did you experience a time when you looked around at your circumstances, began to panic, and then strategized with Jesus about the next move? "Lord, I need to know what college to pick—show me the answer by their registration deadline!" or "Father, I'm getting older and haven't found someone. Please send the perfect match my way soon!"

But what if God wants to say to you, "Now is not the right time"? Because the truth is God isn't ignoring you. Quite the contrary, Jesus hears your requests, knows the desires of your heart, and has a good future planned for you. He doesn't want you to panic or stress about tomorrow, but simply, to give your desires to him and trust that he will be faithful in the grand scheme of things. As we can see in this passage, Jesus knows what he's doing!

Jesus, thank you for your sovereignty over all things. I give my desires to you today and trust in your perfect plan.

Thursday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 7:32–53.

The Pharisees were considered the religious authority in their day. They not only knew the Scriptures inside and out, but they also boasted in how perfectly they upheld the law—especially in comparison to those they viewed as lowly sinners. They were quick to judge, quick to flatter themselves, and quick to dismiss everyone else. So it's no wonder they chose to shrug Jesus off. They knew God's Word said the Messiah was supposed to be born in Bethlehem, and Jesus was from Galilee; so surely, there was no reason to give this Man any further thought.

But although they knew the Scriptures, they didn't take the time to get to know Jesus. Because, in fact, Jesus was born in Bethlehem—He just grew up and was raised in Galilee.

Have you ever fallen into this trap? You thought you knew what Christianity was all about—a religious system made up of all kinds of rules and restrictions—but it wasn't until you took the time to read God's Word and learn about Jesus himself that you realized he came to set us free from that law that used to strangle. Or on the flip side, when you heard that Jesus was all grace and all love, you thought that meant he was tolerant of everyone and everything; but then you read the Scriptures and realized that although God does indeed extend grace and love to everyone, he also doesn't tolerate sin and won't bless that type of destructive behavior.

Whatever that may have looked like for you, let's take it as a reminder to compare our thoughts and others' interpretations with God's truth. Does it sink or hold water?

Jesus, thank you for giving us your Word, so we always have and can always know the truth.

Friday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 8:1-30.

Jesus was attending a lamp-lighting ceremony that lit up every courtyard in the city as a way to celebrate and remember how God led his people out of slavery in Egypt with a pillar of fire by night. And in the glow of the festivities, Jesus takes this symbolism further and proclaims to be not just the light for the Jews but the Light of the World. Here he is promising a much greater salvation than the one the Israelites experienced in the exodus; he's promising an eternal salvation that brings life today free from sin and life forever with God in heaven.

Where may you be needing light shone today? Whether it's a big decision you're facing in your career or guidance on how to deal with your two-year-old's tantrums, Jesus offers his light to all who follow him.

Lord, thank you for freeing me from today's bondage and tomorrow's darkness. Thank you for your light that leads to life.

Saturday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 8:31-59.

Don't we all strive to be free? Free from judgement, free from debt, free from violence, crime, and hatred? Free to be ourselves, free to love others, free to pursue our hopes and dreams? Jesus was clear that he came to this world for that very reason: to free us. Jesus saw us drowning in our sin—lying, cheating, scamming, and coveting—and he came to take the punishment of all of that and give us a free life in exchange.

When we first put our faith in Christ, we easily feel that freedom. In that life-changing moment, with the weight of sin gone and our slate wiped clean, we feel lighter and truly feel what it means to be a new creation.

But how do we carry forward that feeling of freedom day in and day out? When our decision doesn't feel as fresh and the fire has waned even in the slightest? Jesus gives the answer: "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." There's the condition; there's the key. The way to continually receive this freedom from sin and death is to remain in Jesus' commands and study his Word. May you experience this promise today as you read through today's passage.

Lord, continue to give me the zeal to study the Bible.

Sunday

The Gospel of John: Week 2

Read John 9:1–41.

Have you ever wondered why certain people are plagued with hardship while others seem to get off scot-free? Just like today, suffering seemed to be a hot topic in biblical times too, and the disciples wanted to get Jesus' take on it all. Many openly assumed that disease and misfortune struck because of the sin committed by that person or that nation, but would Jesus say the same?

But instead of focusing on the cause, Jesus turns to its purpose: "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him." This is also true for us today. We may not understand why our friend is struggling with infertility or why mom was diagnosed with cancer, but when we shift our focus from the cause to the purpose, we can find peace by trusting that the situation can reveal more of God himself and his purposes here on earth.

Lord, may your light and purpose shine on the suffering in my world today.

Monday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 10:1-42.

Not many of us would consider herding sheep to be an everyday activity, but in Jesus' day this was a common part of life. The responsibilities of a shepherd and the behavior of sheep were widely known—so Jesus used these examples to speak their language and reveal more of his identity as the Good Shepherd.

Since we aren't as acquainted, here's some context: It wouldn't be out of the ordinary for families in a community to share the load and combine their flocks into one sheepfold overnight. In the morning, whenever a shepherd wanted to gather his flock, he could stand at the gate and use a distinct call or whistle that only his sheep would recognize. There may have been other calls they heard earlier from other shepherds, but when they heard the familiar sound from their leader, they would easily separate from the crowd and follow his voice.

In the same way, there are plenty of voices battling for our attention—news headlines splashed across Twitter, your boss breathing down your neck, opinions and gossip from your friends, and on top of it all, your own insecurities echoing throughout your mind. But what about the voice of Truth? The whispers of the Holy Spirit? The commands of God? When everything else in our world is blaring and overpowering, it can seem impossible to tune into the Good Shepherd.

But that's exactly what He's called us to do today. We are His sheep and He is our Shepherd; when He speaks, we need to listen, and when He commands, we need to obey. The more we do, the louder His voice becomes and the clearer His whistle sounds.

Lord, I want to hear you and follow your direction above all the other noise in my world. Give me ears to hear and eyes to see you moving in my life today.

Tuesday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 11:1–44.

Have you ever felt that God couldn't possibly understand the pain, sorrow, anxiety, fear, (or insert emotion here) that you're experiencing?

Then it's time we read John 11. Here we see Jesus was very close to a man named Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha; so much so that when Lazarus became ill, his sisters sent the message: "Lord, your dear friend is very sick." Other translations state, "Lord, the one you love is sick." At the time, things were a bit dicey back where Lazarus lived; in fact, only a few days before, people in Judea tried to stone Jesus. But Jesus knew the will of the Father, and his love for Lazarus far outweighed any danger that threatened him—so He made his way back.

When Jesus arrived at their home and heard the news that Lazarus had already passed, we see how Jesus was angered, then troubled, and finally even wept. But after Mary affirmed her faith in him as the Son of God and after Jesus called others to believe as well, he rolled aside the stone of the tomb and raised Lazarus back to life.

This is the heart of the Gospel. God's Word tells us Jesus doesn't show favoritism from one person to the next but loves every one of us with the same intensity we see here with Lazarus. Jesus experienced it all—temptations and emotions alike—and can completely understand what we are going through, and that's why he went to the cross. He took our sin and the reality that we would all face death someday, went to the cross, and overcame it all by rising again on the third day. Those who choose to put their faith in Jesus also experience this victory—over sin today and over death eternally.

Jesus, thank you for giving up your life to give me mine. I'm so grateful you empathize with me every day, in every emotion, through every outcome—I live today to praise you!

Wednesday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 11:45-57.

Jesus was gaining a following. His popularity was rising, and many believed in him. Yet this recognition and acceptance became a cause for concern for the authorities of that day, and it all climaxed when the high council got together and proclaimed Jesus as a threat to national security. The decision was then made to kill Jesus, and it was a hearty decision at that.

If you were living during this time, wouldn't you be alarmed by this plot? Instead of your Leader taking over the nation, He was being brought down unanimously by governing officials. Instead of your Lord reigning as king on earth, He was being sentenced to a death that was only used to punish criminals. In all of this, some still kept the faith—while others turned away and went back to their old way of life.

But this is one very big example of how God's ways are not our ways. His plans may sometimes be so unlike anything we'd ever expect or imagine, but we see here that we can trust Him. When pain, confusion and evil seem to be running rampant, we can instead hold strong in our belief that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and God is indeed still on the throne. He is working, moving and bringing about something that may just require us to have patience and perseverance. But in the end, the truth is Jesus always holds the victory.

In our own lives, whether we're facing infertility, health issues, or marital conflict, and the pain, confusion, and evil seem to be running rampant, let's be like the disciples that kept the faith and hold strong in our conviction that Jesus is in control and he will come through.

Lord, thank you for showing us your strong sovereignty today.

Thursday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 12:1-19.

Nowadays, washing someone's feet seems a little gross and definitely out of place. We bathe ourselves, we may bathe our children and dogs, but we don't need to bathe another adult—especially if that means touching sweaty feet that may or may not have lint stuck between the toes. Not a pretty picture.

But in biblical times, washing someone's feet was an act of humility usually done by the lowliest of all servants, and here we see Mary pouring out her perfume, bending over Jesus' feet as a devoted disciple, and washing his feet as an anointment. This was scandalous for a few reasons: 1) The amount of perfume she poured out is interpreted to equal something worth over \$10,000, 2) Sitting at the feet of Jesus was reserved for men—and absolutely not a place for women, and 3) It was socially inappropriate for Jewish women to let down their hair in public. But Mary was filled with such gratitude and strong devotion to Jesus that it didn't matter if she ignored the taboos of that time—she would worship Him with full abandonment.

It may seem weird to your family to give 10 percent of your income back to God and the Church. And it may be unthinkable to your friends to attend church on a Saturday night when everyone else is going to a party. But as followers of Christ, we may be called to obey God or worship him in a way that others don't understand. Ultimately, our commitment to Jesus is what matters—not the approval or agreement of others. How can you show your devotion and servanthood to Christ today?

Jesus, my allegiance is to you, today and always.

Friday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 12:20–50.

Jesus healed the lepers, opened the eyes of the blind, walked on water, calmed storms, turned water into wine, and fed five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Yet, despite all of these miracles and God's own voice booming down from heaven, most of the crowd still didn't believe in Him. How could that be? Wouldn't you think if people were able to see Jesus perform miracles firsthand, it would be easier—if not logical—to have faith and believe what he says?

But faith in Christ is never dependent on miracles. It isn't founded on answered prayers, and it isn't dependent on things going our way either. Salvation is based on the fact that we were all once blinded to the truth and unable to lift ourselves out of the darkness of our world. Christ saw this, came to earth as our rescue, and shone light into the darkness that previously dominated our sight and our hearts. Ultimately, it's the decision to follow Him and believe that Jesus is the Son of God regardless of our circumstances that reflect true faith.

Maybe you have friends or family that haven't yet put their faith in Christ. They may be waiting for an answered prayer, a sign from the heavens, or a modern-day miracle before they take that leap. As you keep proclaiming truth in their lives and sharing the Gospel through the opportunities you're given, you can trust God will surely use you to shine his light into their darkness.

Lord, thank you for pulling me out of the darkness into your marvelous light, and I pray that my friends and family will experience your saving grace as well—no matter what the circumstances are in their lives.

Saturday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 13:1-38.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. We see his divinity as he predicts the things to come, and we see his humanity as he grieves a close friend's betrayal. It's this disciple's deception that surprises the rest of the gang; when Jesus not only knew the betrayer, but he knew the hour and manner it would happen as well.

Jesus wasn't secretive about it either. He exclaimed in front of all twelve that one of them would sellout, yet they looked around at each other dumbfounded. "Is it me, Lord?"

Wouldn't you think such close friends, traveling, rooming, and eating together, would know who is capable? Wouldn't you think they had some suspicions? Or at the very least, have a few faces that were obviously so loyal they could never double cross? But no one lifted a finger at Judas. No one even had a clue who it could be. And yet, Jesus knew, called Judas out on it, and gave him an opportunity to come clean or change his mind—but Judas left at once.

It would be easy to think we'd never end up like Judas—or later, like Peter, who denied Jesus three times before the very next morning. But reality is we are all human, capable of sin and in desperate need of God's grace. There's no use in pretending we've got it all together or that our sin isn't really that bad; Jesus knows and is just waiting for us to come clean. Today, let's praise Jesus for always giving second chances and a way out of our sin.

Jesus, thank you for your never-ending grace!

Sunday

The Gospel of John: Week 3

Read John 14:1-31.

Jesus made it clear to the disciples that it was time for him to leave and return to the Father, but this news wasn't received well. At the time, the authorities in Jerusalem were looking for Jesus, and the disciples knew they were just as guilty by association. Would they be next in line to be executed? They could maybe handle it with Jesus by their side, but now leaving them to fend for themselves? How could they face the opposition without him? The future looked bleak, and their hearts were troubled.

But Jesus commands them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." And the key word is: let. Meaning, they had a choice in the matter. The disciples could either let it happen or not let it happen. But Jesus knew they had control over their fears—it was just a matter of trusting in him, the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

What fears may you have about the future? How will I pay off student loans? Will the cancer return? When will I finally land a job? Will we ever be able to have kids? Whatever questions plague your mind, hear Jesus' words today as fresh and new as when he said to them 2000+ years ago: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." We are not alone in the circumstances we face because God sent the Holy Spirit to counsel, advocate, and comfort us—and he surely will never leave us nor forsake us. Today, through his strength and power, let's throw off fear and not let our hearts be troubled.

Father, thank you for your reassuring presence as I face the unknown of the future.

Monday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 15:1-27.

Jesus has extended invitation after invitation to anyone who hears to come to him, believe in what he says and who he is, and they will be set free. Now, we see Jesus switching gears and talking to an audience who has already put their faith in him.

As the Vine and his followers, the branches, Jesus made it clear that the Christian life goes far beyond the initial decision to follow him; the ongoing charge for the disciples then and for us today is to live a life fully devoted to loving and obeying him. Those who remain in Jesus—not just simply believing but living day in and day out for his purposes—are promised to bear fruit.

We all know people who bear fruit and those who don't. When we see those who are out serving their communities, opening their doors to others, being generous with what they have, and extending forgiveness to those who've wronged them, we see the fruit of their labor because they're remaining in Christ. They are living out the charge to obey Him, love Him, and love others.

Conversely, we've had conversations with people that claim to be followers of Christ, but they're crass in their language, unkind toward others, and selfish with the possessions they own and the ideas they have. We've been surprised when we've heard about their faith—but that's because they aren't necessarily remaining in Jesus, and thus, they aren't bearing fruit.

Ultimately, Jesus says we will be known by our love, but how can we extend his love if we aren't remaining in him? Staying connected to His Word? Building a relationship with Him through prayer and service? Today, what may you need to do to activate your faith and produce lasting fruit?

Lord, help us to stay true to you as the Vine today and forevermore.

Tuesday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 16:1-33.

Being fully God, Jesus knew what the future ahead looked like for his disciples; and now we know that future held suffering, persecution, blame and rejection. But even though Jesus was fully aware of the pain they'd have to endure, he still told them to not let their hearts be troubled, to take heart, and embrace the peace he had to offer. How could that even be possible—refusing to be anxious, distressed, or scared when they were staring down the barrel of a gun, about to suffer physical persecution and emotional heart break?

Being fully God, Jesus also knew what our lives would look like. He knew that some of us would face infertility, others would deal with cancer and health struggles. Jesus was aware our kids would turn away from us, or that our checkbooks wouldn't balance and we'd be buried in debt. He knew what kind of trials we would battle, and yet even still, He tells us the same thing today: do not fear, do not let your hearts be troubled; take heart for I have overcome the world.

That last part is key: Jesus has overcome. Whatever temptation is knocking at our door, whatever sin is trying to tear us down, and whatever trial is weighing down our spirit, Jesus has already overcome it—he has paid the price, defeated it on the cross, and offers us life over death today. By surrendering these things in our life to Christ, we can receive his peace that surpasses all understanding. Because truthfully, greater is the One living inside of us than he who is in the world. God alone holds the victory and wants us to join him in his triumph today.

Jesus, thank you for knowing, conquering, and reigning overall.

Wednesday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 17:1-26.

Have you ever had someone stand up for you in the heat of an argument or in the middle of a dispute? You fell short, did something wrong—but this person put all of that aside, took your place, petitioned on your behalf, and made an entreaty in your favor. They were your intercessor and exactly how they intervened saved you.

We see many prayers throughout the Bible, but here we read Jesus' most extensive prayer ever recorded—and it's one big intercession. Jesus knew his time here on earth was coming to a close, and for the sake of everyone listening, he bowed his head and prayed for protection over his people, unity among all believers, knowledge of the truth, and ultimate glorification of the Father. And this prayer wasn't just for the disciples back then—it was for His followers today and tomorrow too.

Where might you need intercession today? Not just any intervention, but where may you need Jesus, the Lord over all things, the All-Powerful One, the Great High Priest, to swoop in and save the day? Maybe you know your kid is mixed up in the wrong crowd, and you can't seem to get through to them; pray to Jesus. Maybe your husband is distancing himself further and further from you, and you're scared the next fight will push him over the edge of divorce; pray to Jesus. Or maybe you realize your addiction to pornography, alcohol, or work is too big for you to save yourself; pray to Jesus.

God's Word says that Jesus constantly lives to intercede for us, and the reason is because he loves us—truly, wholeheartedly, intensely, and forevermore. Nothing we can do will change that—so be bold today. Go to your Savior, pray resolutely, and he promises to reveal himself to you.

Lord, thank you for living forever to intercede with God on my behalf.

Thursday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 18:1–40.

Remember in an earlier passage when Jesus warned the disciples that his time was coming and one of them would betray him? Swelling with love and pride, Peter couldn't even imagine such a thing: "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you!" Yet here we see Peter being questioned three times about his relationship with Christ, and three times Peter denied even knowing him. He was scared of the consequences, caught up in his emotions, and gave into the bullies and peer pressure.

How many times have we done the same thing? When we first committed our lives to Christ, we were just like Peter—emphatic in our love for Jesus, ready to live a life publicly devoted to him, and making strong promises we were convinced we would keep. But in a moment of weakness, when a friend put us on the spot, a family member disagreed with us, or a co-worker bullied us into a wrong decision, our faith was put to the test and we failed. We petered out under the pressure of it all and fell short of the promises we first made.

Today, we can experience the same grace Peter himself received. Our Savior is so merciful that when Peter was so down and broken about his failure, shameful to even talk to Christ when he came back to life from the grave, Jesus went to him. He not only forgave him, healed him, and restored him, but Jesus told Peter that he would be the rock upon which God would build his Church. What a high and lofty calling!

The same is true for us: no matter where we have fallen short or whatever shame we are carrying that tempts us to hide from God, Jesus' mercy is available. He wants to forgive us, heal us, and restore us—so let's learn from Peter and run to Him, not away from Him.

Jesus, thank you for always offering forgiveness.

Friday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 19:1–42.

After Jesus was arrested, questioned, and brought to trial, his sentence to death soon followed. It's true that Jesus carried his own crossbeam, nails about 5–7 inches long were pounded into his feet and wrists, and as he was hoisted into the air, the sign that read "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" blazoned for all to see. In His final breath, Jesus said, "It is finished!" and with the weight of our sin on his shoulders, he died.

As the writer John records these details, he also directs our attention to the three types of people surrounding Jesus in these last moments: 1) his fierce enemies, 2) the indifferent bystanders, and 3) his true disciples. The first group didn't believe a word Jesus said and wanted to put an end to his presence immediately. The second group wondered what all the commotion was about but didn't feel the need to take sides—they just kept going about their business. But the devoted followers were there to the end; even in the chaos and confusion, they held onto the faith that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

Are there people in your life who fit into these categories? You've put your faith in Christ, but what about your spouse, friends, family members, neighbors and co-workers? Are there people in your world who don't believe a word the Bible says and want nothing to do with God's presence in their life? Or do you know the indifferent bystanders, who have dabbled with church here and there, curious about Jesus but don't feel the need to dive into a relationship with Him?

Jesus took the punishment for our sins—for you and for them. He could have saved Himself and called for the angels to intervene, but He didn't. He saw you, and He saw the people in your life too.

Today, let's be inspired to share about our relationship with Christ, so that they too may be saved and experience a new life through him.

Lord, thank you for taking the punishment of my sins on the cross, so that I can live in freedom today.

Saturday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 20:1-31.

The Gospel doesn't end at the cross, or that wouldn't be very good news at all. Rather, the Good News becomes glorious three days later when Jesus resurrected from the dead. He didn't stay in the tomb—three days after His torturous death on the cross, the tomb had been rolled away and Jesus had come back to life.

But this wasn't necessarily an easy pill to swallow—even for followers. In fact, His disciples came to believe this to be true in different ways. John was one of the first on the scene, and all it took was seeing Jesus' wrappings lying on the ground for him to believe in the resurrection. Mary had a once-in-a-lifetime experience, where angels and Jesus himself appear, but it wasn't until he calls out her name that she cries out to her Lord as teacher. Then, Jesus shows up at a meeting of his disciples, and after showing them the wounds in his hands and side, they all believed. Lastly, even though these disciples shared the news with Thomas, it wasn't until he actually put his fingers into Jesus' wounds that he finally believed.

These instances are powerful, and how neat it would be to live during this time and see Jesus return to life for ourselves! But Christ finds immense value in how we come to know him in today's world too: "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

Whether we had an experience like Mary or just put our faith in Christ the second we saw evidence of him moving in our lives like John, each of our faith stories are different and how we came to know Christ is unique. But the point is Jesus knows and loves us so much that he reaches out to us exactly how we need based on our wiring and how we were created. Today, let's rejoice in our invisible God who reveals himself to us in the best of ways.

Jesus, thank you for showing up in my life in a way that only you knew I needed.

Sunday

The Gospel of John: Week 4

Read John 21:1-25.

Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him. This wasn't because Jesus was hard of hearing or couldn't understand what Peter had to say. Rather, Peter had denied Christ three times, and he was still dealing with the embarrassment and shame of that night. Jesus knew this, knew Peter was desperate for forgiveness, and with every question, Jesus repaired what went wrong.

On top of that, the English language is restricted with only one word to describe love, while other languages, such as Greek, have multiple versions to describe different levels. Just days before this conversation, Peter claimed to have an all-consuming, self-sacrificial love for Jesus that assuredly would never fail; this would be agape love. Yet, we know that very night, he denied even knowing Christ three times.

So, when Jesus asked Peter the first two times if he loved him, Jesus asked with this agape love in mind. But Peter didn't know if he could live up to that or if he would fail once again, so he replied this time with an honest assessment of his heart: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love you." His reply was with the phileo love, meaning brotherly friendship. When Jesus asked the question the third time, he met Peter at his level and asked with the phileo love—to which Peter affirmed it with the same response. This is important, because it shows us God's heart, how he meets us where we are at, and even when our devotion wavers, his perfect love for us will never change.

This question is still valid today. Do we love Jesus in the sense of phileo? Or do we love Jesus in the ultimate translation of agape? He knows our hearts; he knows everything, but he isn't expecting us to be perfect Christians or jump to a place we simply are not at yet. Jesus just wants honest communication, which is the basis of any strong and developing relationship—so let's do just that and turn to him in prayer.

Lord, thank you for always meeting me where I am at, and thank you for never waffling in your love for me.