

HONEST TO GOD

STUDY GUIDE



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RALLY CRY

Living in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus

MISSION

Following Jesus in Community on Mission

VISION

To be an inter-ethnic, intergenerational community of disciples partnering with Jesus to bring about renewal in Escondido, North County, and to the ends of the earth.

HONEST TO GOD

WELCOME to the Honest to God Series

Questions have a way of getting beneath the surface. They interrupt our assumptions, uncover our motives, and invite us to see ourselves in a new light. The right question, asked at the right moment, can change the direction of a life.

Jesus knew this.

So it makes sense that throughout the Gospels, we read more than 300 questions Jesus asked. Jesus asked questions not because he lacked information, but because his followers did. His questions weren't designed to trap people or embarrass them. They were invitations; gentle, probing invitations to examine their own hearts, to discover what was true, and take one more step toward life with him.

That's our hope for this journey.

Over the next several weeks, we'll walk through some of Jesus' most searching and provocative questions. What do you want? Who do you say I am? What are you so afraid of? Do you love me? These aren't questions meant only for the people Jesus met two thousand years ago; they are questions he still asks today. And if we're willing to answer honestly, they have the power to transform us.

This isn't a journey toward having all the right answers. It's a journey toward greater honesty with God, ourselves, and one another. Real transformation never begins when we pretend; it begins when we tell the truth. The good news is that Jesus is never threatened by our questions, our doubts, our fears, or our failures. He meets us there with grace and invites us into something better.

A few encouragements as you begin:

Come with an open heart. Resist the temptation to rush to familiar answers. Sit with Jesus' questions. Let them linger. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what lies beneath the surface.

Engage the whole journey. Read the daily devotionals. Memorize the weekly Scripture. Participate fully in your group discussions. Listen carefully; not only to what others say, but to what God may be saying to you.

Be honest. You don't have to impress anyone here. Some of the most significant moments of spiritual growth begin with the simple words, "I don't know," "I'm afraid," or "I need Jesus."



Our prayer is that by the end of this journey, you won’t simply know more about Jesus; you’ll know him and yourself more deeply. We anticipate ways that his questions will expose what needs healing, strengthen what is weak, and awaken a deeper love for him. See, in the end, Jesus doesn’t ask questions to win arguments; he asks them to transform hearts.

Thank you for saying yes to the journey. We can’t wait to see what God will do as we answer Jesus’ questions together.

A few things as we begin:

1. This course is built for community. Discipleship isn’t a solo project. Connect Groups are places where we get to grow with others, whether that’s a few friends around a table, your life group, a class at church, or even our whole church family leaning in together.
2. The journey will take intentionality. Over the course of the next few weeks, we’re going to invite you to do some deep work. To get the most out of it, we recommend three things. First, commit to spending time with God daily. Second, ask him to help you grow. Finally, when things get challenging or uncomfortable, push in; don’t drift away.
3. Each topic takes about 1-2 hours, plus Group time. It will depend on how long your group wants to linger in discussion and whether you use the optional group practices. Don’t rush. Make room for God to do His work in you.

We believe the Holy Spirit loves to meet ordinary people who make simple, consistent room for Him. Expect fresh courage to obey, freedom in places that have felt stuck, and a growing desire to bless our city. As we follow Jesus together, our prayer is that the aroma of Christ would linger in our homes, workplaces, schools, and streets; little foretastes of the day He makes all things new. Thank you for saying yes. Let’s take the next step following Jesus in community on mission.

Grace + Peace, The Emmanuel Faith Team

DISCIPLESHIP PLAN OVERVIEW

OUR GOAL:

To build a disciple-making culture that is intentional, reproducible, and maximizes every opportunity to help every disciple take their next step with Jesus.

OUR DEFINITION:

At EFCC, we define a disciple as someone who is following Jesus in community on mission

PATHWAY	PRACTICES	PROGRAM	TOOLS
Follow Jesus	Daily time with God	Worship	REST Journal
in Community	Nurtured in community	Groups	Questions
on Mission	Active on mission	Service	Prayer Note

CONNECT GROUP COMMITMENT

CONNECT GROUP COMMITMENT:

At Emmanuel Faith, we want Connect Groups to be a safe and sacred place where real life and real faith meet. Our goal is to create an environment where you can be honest about your story, wrestle with questions, and experience grace without fear of judgment. We are not here to fix one another; we are here to walk with one another as we follow Jesus together.

Growth happens best in an atmosphere of trust, so we ask every participant to help protect that space by maintaining confidentiality and showing care. What is shared in your group stays in your group. Speak with honesty, listen with empathy, and extend the same grace you hope to receive. Also, be mindful not to monopolize the time; we want everyone to have a chance to share and be heard.

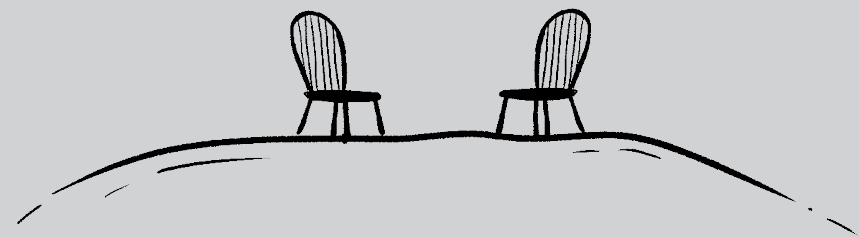
The best way to get the most out of this journey is to make it a priority—your presence and participation matter, not only for your own growth but for the growth of others. We encourage you to attend at as many group sessions as possible.

MY COMMITMENT:

I will make every effort to attend all sessions, participate openly and with respect, and maintain complete confidentiality about what others share in our group.

.Signed: _____

Date: _____



Week One

01 | WHAT DO YOU WANT?

SCRIPTURE: John 1:35-42
MEMORY VERSE: John 10:10 - *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*
SONGS:
 Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For by U2
 My Soul Cries Out by Gungor

DESCRIPTION:
“What do you want?” It was the first recorded question Jesus asked, and it was a question that plumbs the depths of our humanity. It was an invitation to examine the gap between our strongest desires and our deepest desires. Our strongest desires are often immediate: comfort, success, approval, control. But beneath them lies a deeper longing: to know God, to be loved, to be whole, and to experience the abundant life Jesus promised (John 10:10).

Saint Augustine famously wrote, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” We were created with a longing that nothing in this world can ultimately satisfy. This week, Jesus invites you to slow down, listen to your soul, and answer his question honestly. What do you really want? Your answer may reveal both what you’ve been chasing and what your heart has been seeking all along.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: Mark 10:17-22
 ¹⁷ *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”*
 ¹⁸ *‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.”’*
 ²⁰ *Teacher,’ he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’*
 ²¹ *Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’*
 ²² *At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”*

SCRIPTURE STUDY | MARK 10:17-22

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He’s saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you’re going to do in response to what you’ve read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

WEEK 1

DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **THE POWER OF A QUESTION** | Genesis 3:8-13

Ryan Paulson, Lead Pastor

My spiritual director once asked me, “If you were wrong, would you want to know?” The question stopped me in my tracks. I had been so certain that I was right that I hadn’t given any thought to the idea that I might be wrong.

That’s the power of a good question.

Questions have a way of slipping past our defenses. Think about it: statements often make us argue. Advice can make us push back. But a thoughtful and well-placed question invites us to reflect. Psychologists have found that questions engage a different part of our minds than commands do. They awaken curiosity, expose assumptions, and help us uncover what’s happening beneath the surface. In his book *Healing What’s Within*, author Chuck DeGroat writes that transformation begins not by trying harder but by becoming curious about our inner world. Good questions create that kind of curiosity.

It’s no surprise, then, that after the first sin in human history, God doesn’t begin with a sermon, but with a question: “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)

Now, God knows all things, and He knew where Adam was. He wasn’t looking for information; He was inviting self-awareness. Then came another question: “Who told you that you were naked?” (Genesis 3:11)

God was helping Adam identify the voice that had begun shaping his identity. Before sin, Adam lived in light of God’s declaration that creation was “very good.” Now he was listening to shame. Then God asked one final question, “What is this that you have done?” (Genesis 3:13). Not because God needed an explanation, but because confession is the first step toward healing.

Really notice the heart of God. He doesn’t chase Adam with accusations. He pursues him with questions. Questions that expose, invite, and eventually begin to restore. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus does the same thing. Again and again, He asks questions, not because He lacks answers, but because He knows that transformation often begins when we honestly answer the questions God is asking us.

Take a few moments today to sit quietly with Jesus and allow these questions to search your heart. Where might you be hiding from God today? What voices have been shaping your identity more than his voice? Is there an area of your life where God is gently asking you, “If you were wrong, would you want to know?” Don’t rush to answer. Let the questions do their work. God’s questions are never meant to shame you; they are invitations to deeper honesty, greater freedom, and a closer relationship with him.

DAY 2 | **WHAT DO YOU WANT...REALLY?** | Mark 10:17-22

Kim Freels, Digital Media Specialist

In the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-22, we meet a man who thought he knew what he wanted. “How do I get eternal life?” He thought he had it in the bag because he had done everything right since childhood. He kept all the commandments, so surely he could inherit eternal life, right?

The Christian life isn’t about checking boxes, though. You can’t simply go through the motions and hope you’re “good to go.”

This man had something he cared about more than following Jesus: his wealth. Jesus’ asking him to go sell all his belongings and then follow Him lovingly showed this man that he had yet to surrender what was most important to him.

The rich young ruler couldn’t do it.

“What is it I want in this life?” That can be a pretty vague question. Maybe the more pointed way of putting it is, “What is it I have yet to surrender?”

What are you holding onto that is hard for you to let go of? What relationships, career paths, money transactions, or idols are you clinging to that are preventing you from fully surrendering to our Lord?

He wants you, your whole heart. If you choose Jesus over other things you might “want,” you will be able to obtain the one thing the rich young ruler never could: A life of abundance in Christ that leads to eternal life with Him.

DAY 3 | **MY SOUL PANTS FOR YOU** | Psalm 42:1-2

Kassie Lowe, Young Adults Lead

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2)

Back in 2019, I went on a vision trip to Cuba. Having grown up in San Diego, I figured that I would handle the July heat just fine. I had no idea how wrong I was. On our second day in the village, the temperature reached upwards of 100° with humidity up to 95%. I wasn't at all prepared for that weather. I remember being incredibly dizzy and lightheaded while walking through the village, enough so that I had to stop halfway. I had become extremely dehydrated without even realizing it. Because I had thought that I could handle it, I wasn't serious about drinking enough water and staying properly hydrated.

I think this happens to us more than we might realize. We feel like we can handle the seasons of life we're in, so we become really casual in our pursuit of God.

The imagery in Psalm 42, with the deer, is so helpful because it communicates how desperately we need God. Just as the deer knows that it cannot survive long without going back to the stream, we too cannot survive without the Lord. If our expectation is to be refreshed by the presence of God, we have to stay connected to the source. Just as the deer returns to the stream, we must continually return to God. Our longing to return to the stream is affirmed by how good the water is. When we experience the sweetness of life with God and His provision, our desire to continue to experience that intimacy only grows stronger.

Our souls long to be connected to the source of life. May we taste and see the Lord's goodness and continue to return to the stream.

DAY 4 | **THE WOMAN AT THE WELL** | John 4:1-26

Judy Linscheid, Writing Team

The woman this passage focuses on came to draw water during the hottest part of the day, possibly to avoid the condescending looks from the other women. I find the contrast between her and Jesus' actions to be very interesting. She feared man's judgment, so she came to the well alone. Had Jesus feared man's judgment, He never would have spoken to her. Jews didn't associate with Samaritans, and she was not just a Samaritan, but a woman with a bad reputation. When He asked her for a drink, she was surprised. He needed a drink from the well, but she needed much more. Her soul was dry.

When Jesus told her to go and get her husband, He knew her situation. When she said, "I don't have a husband," His reply demonstrated that this was no ordinary man she was speaking with. For He knew she'd been married five times, and the man she was currently living with wasn't her husband. Bingo! Jesus went straight to the heart of her pain.

She tried to divert the conversation to religion, but Jesus would have none of it. She didn't need more religion. She needed to worship the one who would finally free her from sin and its debilitating shame. She had been living under a heavy burden for years. Her pursuit of love only led her into sin. On top of that was the judgment of man. What a load! Jesus came along and freed her from it all. He defied man's judgment so He could reach her heart. Her faith freed her from everyone's opinion but His.

This encounter with Jesus gave her so much courage that her reputation in town no longer mattered. He mattered! She was free! John 10:10 says that the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but

Jesus came to give us abundant life. He wants this for us. He doesn't want us looking for love in all the wrong places, and yet He doesn't want to stifle our hearts' desires. He wants to be the one we go to.

He knew the Samaritan woman's greatest need was forgiveness, acceptance, and unconditional love. He knew He would ultimately go to the cross to make this possible. She walked away free. When we look back at what He did, we can receive the same freedom. I'm so grateful for His covering over me, His acceptance, and my freedom from condemnation. This is the living water He gives. It is a fresh, bubbling spring within. It is eternal life.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | The Examen

The Examen was established by the 16th-century Spanish soldier, St. Ignatius of Loyola. While in battle, he was struck in the leg by a cannonball and became incapacitated. During his convalescence, he started to ponder his relationship with God, keeping a journal as he gained insight that deepened his spiritual experience. While convalescing, he felt sorrow and a seeming distance from God (desolations) as well as a peace and a very real connection to God (consolations). From these experiences, he developed The Examen, which brought about growth in his union with God as well as a deeper ability to discern God’s will for his life. It reminds us of God’s constant presence and provides a way of noticing what God is showing us in the regular movements of our daily lives.

Consider the following consolations and desolations; things that bring you life and things that bring you sorrow. Through these, we practice discerning God’s presence in light of each. Slowly read through the following lists, identifying areas in your life where you have been more fully aware of God’s presence. Next, read through the list of Desolations, identifying times when God has felt distant and/or it was difficult to feel his presence.

CONSOLATIONS:

- * Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves
- * Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people
- * Bonds us more closely to our human community
- * Generates new inspiration and ideas
- * Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision
- * Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us
- * Releases new energy in us

DESOLATIONS:

- * Turns us in on ourselves
- * Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings
- * Cuts us off from community
- * Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us
- * Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision
- * Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far]
- * Drains us of energy

The Examen is valuable to practice on a regular/daily basis; at the conclusion of each day, at the end of an intense season, or even as you enter a new one. It causes us to ask God to bring to mind what is most pressing or even whatever brings the most resistance. As you practice The Examen, invite God into the chaos, the joys, or the mundane, and allow him to bring comfort, encouragement, clarity, and truth. The following questions can serve as a guide:

STEP 1: BECOME AWARE OF GOD’S PRESENCE

- * Look back on the events of the day (or week, month...) in the company of the Holy Spirit. Do they seem confusing to you?
- * Where have you experienced desolations? Consolations?
- * Ask God to bring clarity and understanding, and to show you where He was at work in each.
- * Remember that God is with you always. Allow yourself to experience his presence.

STEP 2: REVIEW THE DAY WITH GRATITUDE

- * Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights.
- * Focus on the day’s gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive and what did you give? Pay attention to it all—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

STEP 3: PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EMOTIONS

- * St. Ignatius realized that we can detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day.
- * Did you feel boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying to you through these feelings?
- * Are you frustrated? Is God leading you in a new direction?
- * Are you concerned about a friend or loved one? Perhaps you could reach out to him/her in some way.
- * God may be showing you some ways that you have fallen short. Come humbly before Him and ask for forgiveness. Praise God for His never-ending forgiveness!

STEP 4: CHOOSE ONE FEATURE OF THE DAY (SEASON) AND PRAY ABOUT IT

- * Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling, positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant.
- * Look. Pray. Allow the prayer that it provokes to arise spontaneously from your heart, whether it’s intercession, praise, repentance or otherwise.

STEP 5: LOOK TOWARD TOMORROW

- * Ask God to give you hope and energy for tomorrow’s challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what’s coming up.
- * Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer.
- * Seek God’s guidance. Ask Him for help and understanding. Pray for strength.
- * Ask for God’s wisdom, protection, and help.
- * Do all this with gratitude. Your life is a gift, adorned with gifts from God.
- * End your conversation knowing that your God loves you! You are his precious child.

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Welcome & Check-In

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

Read John 1:35-42 out loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps

What are you going to do in response?

Who will you share this with?

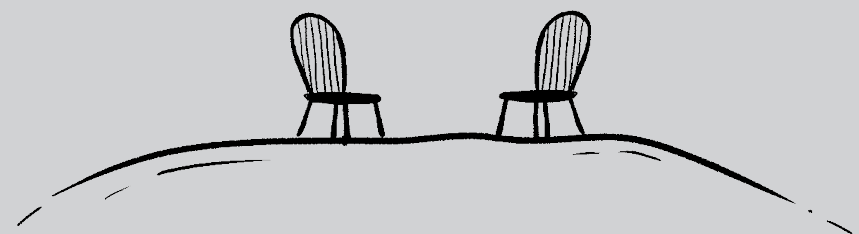
5. PRAYER:

Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote—read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!





Week Two

02 | WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:13-20
MEMORY VERSE: John 14:6 - *"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
SONGS:
Is He Worthy? by Andrew Peterson
My Lighthouse by Rend Collective

DESCRIPTION:
At the center of Jesus’ ministry comes the question that every person must answer: “Who do you say I am?” It’s not enough to know what others believe or to repeat what you’ve heard. Jesus invites a personal response. Your answer to this question shapes everything else: how you understand God, yourself, your purpose, and the way you live.

C. S. Lewis observed that Jesus doesn’t leave us the option of admiring him as merely a good teacher. He is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Discipleship begins when we recognize Jesus for who he truly is, but it doesn’t stop there. The Jesus you believe in is the Jesus you’ll follow. This week, consider not only what you believe about Jesus, but whether your picture of him is transforming the way you live.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: Colossians 1:15-23
¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

SCRIPTURE STUDY | Colossians 1:15-23

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He’s saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you’re going to do in response to what you’ve read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

I vividly recall being in the 2nd grade at a Wednesday night church class and hearing the gospel for the first time. The teacher said that Jesus died for our sins and that if I wanted to receive his gift of eternal life, all I needed to do was accept him as my Savior and ask him into my heart. I jumped on that! Of course, I wanted to be with him in heaven one day. But my 7-year-old self understood little about life or the depths of my own heart

Growing up, I struggled to fit in. I desperately needed approval and worked hard to prove myself, yet never felt like I was enough. Jesus was my Savior, but I didn't realize the depth of his saving work until I let him define me—to tell me who I am. He was with me as I strove to earn acceptance, reminding me I was already loved. His hand held me close when I was afraid, and today his smile remains warm and steadfast when the world feels cold.

His work on the cross did more than secure forgiveness. It secured my place in his family. As his adopted daughter, I am accepted, sustained, and held securely in his hands.

-Judy Linscheid

WEEK 2
DEVOTIONALS

Day 1 | **The Grandeur of Jesus**

Claire Williams, Welcome & Executive Coordinator

I have always felt closest to God while alone in the beauty of nature. My most intimate moments with Him have happened when I have been surrounded by His creation.

I remember running around Convict Lake near Mammoth, overwhelmed by the pure serenity of the moment. As I stopped, I became aware of God’s presence. I looked up, and the sky opened, and rays of sunlight shone through the clouds. In that moment, I felt wrapped in God’s warmth, peace, and love. It was clear to me that God’s authority, love, and goodness are reflected in all of his creations. And every storm, bloom, fallen leaf, and ray of sunlight points us to Him.

Colossians 1:15–20 highlights Christ’s supremacy; He is not simply part of creation but the Creator of it all. Paul writes, “*All things have been created through Him and for Him.*” He continues to say that as Creator, Jesus sustains and cares for creation. Through His death, He reconciles all things to Himself.

James Bryan Smith, in *The Magnificent Story*, shares this truth. He writes that the Bible is a story centered on Jesus Christ. He plays the starring role. He begins as the Creator of all, continues by showing His eternal love through His constant presence, and will ultimately restore all things through His death. The Creator became part of His own story to rescue and renew what He made.

Creation’s seasonal and continuous rhythms point to this greater story of Christ. The growth of spring, the abundance of summer, the transformation of fall, and the hardship of winter remind us that He is our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. He holds all things together, as Paul writes in Colossians.

The beauty around us points to what God has done and continues to do. Jesus’ sacrifice reconciled humanity to God, restoring our relationship with creation, and began the renewal of all things. While we stand in awe of nature, we should reflect on the truth of Jesus’ story, as it is reflected throughout the Bible, throughout creation, throughout history.

Step outside and witness the grandeur of nature. The grandeur of Jesus. Let every raging fire, cleansing raindrop, powerful wave and wind, and shooting star point back to Him. The One who created it all is the One who holds everything together, and He invites us to know Him, trust Him, and stand in awe of Him.

DAY 2 | **Who Then is This?** | Mark 4:41

Jaisen Fuson, Emmanuel Faith Elder

Most of us have experienced storms we cannot escape. Some rage outside us, while others rise from within. We often think peace is simply the absence of conflict or the removal of danger. Yet Jesus reveals something altogether different.

Some of the disciples were seasoned fishermen. They understood the power of wind and waves better than most. They knew that nature is not sentimental. A storm on the Sea of Galilee could overturn a boat in moments. Fear was not irrational—it was entirely appropriate from a human perspective.

I remember being caught inside a powerful wave set at Waimea Bay. In those moments, the force of the ocean leaves little room for pride. You discover immediately how small you are. The sea does not negotiate. The wind does not ask permission. We are reminded that creation possesses a power far beyond our own ability to master.

It is striking, then, that the wind and the waves recognize a voice that human hearts so often resist.

At a single command—“Peace! Be still!”—creation responds without hesitation. The sea does not deliberate. The wind does not argue. Everything in nature gladly yields to the authority of its Creator.

The deeper question in this passage is not merely whether Jesus can calm storms. It is the question spoken by the disciples themselves: “Who then is this?” Until we answer that question, we’ll continue searching for peace in changing circumstances rather than in the unchanging presence of Christ.

Peace is not simply an emotional feeling, though it often quiets our emotions. Nor is it merely a disciplined state of mind, though it transforms our thinking. Biblical peace is the settled confidence that comes from living under the care and authority of the One whom all creation obeys. It is the soul resting in reality—the reality that Christ is Lord over every force that appears beyond our control.

The storms of life will continue to come. Relationships will strain. Bodies will weaken. Plans will fail. Yet the invitation of Jesus is not first to escape the storm but to remain with Him in the boat. As we learn to trust His presence, His peace becomes more than a momentary comfort; it becomes the atmosphere in which we live our lives.

The One who speaks to the sea also speaks to the anxious heart. His command still carries the same authority today.

Day 3 | **What a Friend!** | 2 Corinthians 12:9

Lynette Fuson, Care & Counseling Director

In 2017, I had the privilege of leading a team of women on a mission trip in Spain to provide soul care for around 40 missionary women who were serving in Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa. It was an amazing opportunity!

While there, we each met with women who were struggling, grieving, questioning, and longing. They were convinced of their calling to serve Jesus, but life was hard and often didn't make sense, which led many of these women to ponder their relationship with God.

One woman had struggled with her identity, knowing in her head that she was a beloved daughter of God, but feeling in her heart that she was simply "too much." This sense of self had led her to some destructive behaviors.

One day, as we walked along the shores near Malaga, she poured her heart out. She could know and appreciate God as her Father. She saw Him as a disciplinarian and also as a loving Father who wanted what was best for her. But she could not see him as her Abba, her Daddy. He simply did not have enough space for her in his lap. She was too much.

Then there was Jesus... He was a friend to many, but not to her. She saw herself as needy, desperate, damaged, and basically annoying. There was no way that Jesus could find space for her.

As we walked, we talked about God's character, specifically His love. We talked about what her head knew to be true versus what her heart would not embrace. Over and over again, she said, "I'm just too much."

After a few minutes of silence, God brought to mind 2 Corinthians 12:9: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."*

At these words, she stopped abruptly and said, "If Jesus is enough for me, then maybe I can't be too much for Him. He sounds like the perfect friend." Slowly, a big smile came over her face, then she sat down on the sand and began to cry, not out of sadness, but from a place of relief.

For the first time, she was able to say with confidence, "I'm not too much, and I am enough, because Jesus is my Friend."

Can you say with confidence today that Jesus is your friend?

DAY 4 | **I Need to See** | John 20:24-29

Sharon Chapman, Freedom in Christ Ministries

What can we do with doubts? How can we reconcile our doubts with the belief that Jesus is who He says He is? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Jesus waited days before appearing to Thomas.

Have you been waiting a long time for Jesus to rectify a troubling situation in your life? Has that caused you to question His care for you? Have you, like Thomas, expressed the thought "I won't believe until I see?" Most likely, what you think you need to see is not really what you need to see. Jesus knows what you need to see. The long wait gives opportunities to wrestle with doubts, take them to Jesus, and choose to trust Him when you cannot see clearly what He is doing.

Soon after I gave my life to Jesus, someone challenged me with this devastating comment: "How can you be so stupid? I thought you had a brain." That was a painful experience for me. Even though Jesus had revealed himself to me in a life-changing encounter, I began to doubt. Maybe Jesus was not real. Maybe I had made it all up. I cried out to Jesus. He reassured me, "Without Me, you do not have life." I knew without any doubt that Jesus spoke the truth. I decided then I would trust him with the outcome of any future doubts.

Because I'm married to an unbeliever, Jesus has used a long wait to provide opportunities for me to wrestle with doubts. Over the years, this circumstance has occasionally caused me to doubt Jesus' love for me. During times of doubt, I have chosen to trust Jesus. He has repeatedly shown His care and love for my husband and me, so I keep choosing to believe He is who He says He is.

There have been many times when I asked Jesus to intervene in the life of my husband and children. Even though most of them still deny Jesus, I keep seeing Him do amazing things in their lives. Consequently, I choose to trust the One who continues to express His love for me. I used to think what I needed to see was my family being saved. I now believe that what I need to see is Jesus alive and at work in my life and theirs, for His glory. No doubt about it, He is my life!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | **Breath Prayers**

There are times when praying is hard; when there is a yearning in our hearts to recall and declare who God is and what we know to be true, yet the words are difficult to muster.

Romans 8:26-27 says, *“²⁶ And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷ And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”*

When these moments arrive, often unexpected and in ways that create a bit of chaos or instability in our soul, a “Breath Prayer” can bring us back to a place of remembering who God is and who we belong to.

Breath Prayers are short, predetermined prayers of 8 or so words or less (memorable!) that acknowledge your God and His truth. It is declaring who God is and who we are as His beloved. Following are some steps to help you create a Breath Prayer:

1. “Breathe in”... your name for God: Father, Abba, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Lord... What name for God is most personal to you?

2. “Breathe out”... who God is and/or who you need Him to be for you in that moment. Examples: “You are my strength”, “I need You”, “have mercy on me, a sinner”, “You are my joy”, “You are my help in time of need”, “You have called me, and I am Yours”.

Creating your Breath Prayer ahead of time allows you to access it whenever needed rather than anxiously trying to come up with a prayer in the moment. The beautiful thing is that the Spirit does intercede for us when we don’t have words to express what is going on in the depths of our souls. The tangible side of a Breath Prayer is that it allows us direct access to our God who already knows, who already sees, who already cares, and who already loves us beyond what our minds can comprehend.

1. Breathe in: _____ (Your name for God)

2. Breathe out: _____ (Your cry – who God is to you and what you are declaring of Him)

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

Read Matthew 16:13-20 out loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps

What are you going to do in response?

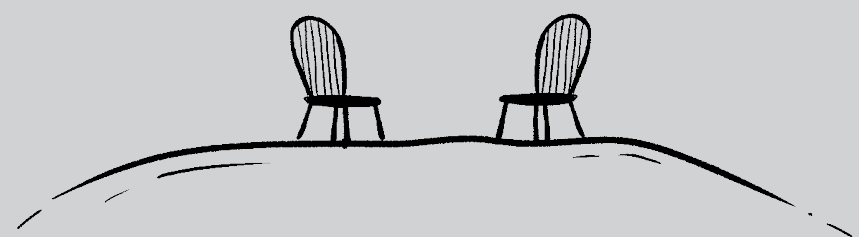
Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:

Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote – read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Three

03 | WHAT ARE YOU SO AFRAID OF?

SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:35-41
MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 41:10 - *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*
SONGS:
 Fear Is a Liar by Zach Williams
 Dragons by Drew Holcomb & The Neighbors

DESCRIPTION:
As the storm raged around them, Jesus asked his disciples a surprising question: "Why are you so afraid?" He wasn't minimizing the danger; he was inviting them to look beneath it. Fear often reveals more than the circumstances we face; it exposes what we treasure, what we're trying to control, and where trust has yet to take root. Rather than condemning our fears, Jesus meets them with holy curiosity, inviting us to explore what they're trying to tell us.

Emotions like fear are often invitations rather than obstacles, leading us toward places where God longs to bring healing and freedom. This week, we'll discover that Jesus doesn't simply calm the storms around us; he transforms the fears within us, teaching us to surrender what we cannot control and trust the One who never lets go.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: Psalm 46:1-11

¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.	⁷ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,	⁸ Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth
³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.	⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.	¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day	¹¹ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."
⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.	

SCRIPTURE STUDY | PSALM 46:1-11

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He's saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you're going to do in response to what you've read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

Looking back, I realize most of my life I've been bound by fear—fear of not being good enough, fear of bigger people, fear of being rejected, fear of failure. Those fears controlled many of the decisions I made. Because I didn't remain in God's Word, I drifted. Instead of trusting the Lord to guide my life, I relied on my own fears. I allowed ungodly behaviors into my life. Some of those choices resulted in addictions, and I found myself in and out of fellowship with God. I knew I needed something more than willpower—I needed Jesus to transform my heart.

Through the Counseling Ministry at Emmanuel Faith and a Christ-centered 12-step recovery program, God began changing my life. I realized that my sins and failures are not my identity. My true identity is as a son of God, covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Today I no longer live under the fear that I am not good enough or that I won't be able to contribute to God's Kingdom. I am following God's call to help others who are struggling. I know my worth is not based on my performance but on what Jesus has done for me. Because of His grace, I am free to trust Him, follow Him, and live with hope instead of fear.

-Dwight Eisenman

WEEK 3

DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **EXPLORE YOUR FEAR** | Mark 5:1-20

Ashley Carr, Writing Team

I’d like to begin by asking what you felt after reading Mark 5:1-20. Was it discomfort? Fear? Confusion? A need for someone to explain what it all means? Maybe it was excitement and awe over what God is capable of?

If I could hazard a guess, I think many people feel uncomfortable after reading this passage. But why is that?

Discomfort over this passage can probably stem from a variety of different things, but I wonder if it mainly stems from fear.

Did any of you think, “What if that were me?!”

I think some of us might venture this question because we inherently know that we have strongholds in our lives. And I think we also implicitly know that to address that bondage will come at a cost; a cost to our reputation, our image, to the way people see us. To the lifestyles we’ve built. Instead of focusing on how we can try to keep people from thinking we have strongholds in our lives, or beating ourselves up for not addressing the bondage and pretending like it’s not there, or by downplaying it, what if we explored our fear? Investigated it? Remember, we have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind.

First of all, what if we asked ourselves, “What exactly am I afraid of?” And from there, “Why am I afraid of _____?”

If you’re afraid of how people will see you if you “addressed the change” and if they “found out,” perhaps consider the following: “What would make it possible for me to share (perhaps even address) this bondage in my life?” Is it knowing there are safe people you can talk to? A community that will embrace you? Being confident that someone will stand by your side when they see who you really are?

Knowing that Jesus loves us in our sin (and that he can deliver us from it) is essential for growth, but knowing that tangible human beings around us will love us in the midst of it is also crucial. Our fellow Christians are His Body, after all, and what can be more comforting than the embrace of our Savior?

Rather than trying to cover for your strongholds, what can you do to make strides to find (or build) a community that you feel safe to change alongside, free of condemnation?

DAY 2 | **THE GIFT OF FEAR** | Proverbs 1:7, 9:1

Nate Keating, Modern Worship Director

Fear isn’t always the enemy.

There’s a kind of fear that is mercy. A holy interruption. The body’s alarm bell pushes us to necessary action when danger is near. Fear can make us pull a child back from the street, step away from the edge, and wake up to what we’ve been ignoring. In its proper place, fear is a gift.

But here’s the problem: Fear rarely stays in its proper place.

It spreads. It takes more ground than it was given. It moves from protection to possession. It stops being a warning and starts becoming a master. It tells us not to speak, not to try, not to confess, not to forgive, not to hope. It convinces us that safety is the same thing as wisdom, and that control is the same thing as peace.

You see, fear can keep us alive, but it cannot teach us how to live.

This is why Scripture says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Not fear of failure. Not fear of rejection. Not fear of loss. Not fear of the future. The fear of the Lord.

This kind of fear is different. It’s not the terror of a servant waiting to be struck. It’s the reverence of a child standing before a Father too good to manipulate, too holy to ignore, and too loving to abandon us. It’s the trembling realization that God is neither small nor ours to control.

This healthy fear puts everything else in its place.

When we fear the Lord, we don’t have to be ruled by every lesser fear. We can tell the truth in love because God is greater than our reputation. We can surrender control because God is wiser than our plans. We can confess sin because God’s holiness is matched by His mercy. We can step into obedience because God’s presence is more secure than our comfort.

Maybe the question isn’t whether we’re afraid. Maybe the question is: Which kind of fear is forming us? The fear that consumes and steals our lives, or the fear that gives them back?

So Lord, today and every day, teach us to fear You rightly, until every lesser fear loses its throne.

DAY 3 | **WHO DO I TRUST?** | Psalm 56:3-4

Judy Linscheid, Writing Team

"When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?" Psalm 56:3-4

When I read this, I hear a man declaring his trust in God. Yet I also hear him asking himself, "Why should I be afraid? What can man do to me?" He is using reason to conclude that God is trustworthy.

I believe God sometimes allows us to face frightening circumstances because it's the only way we'll discover who or what we truly trust. When life is going smoothly, it's easy to think we trust in God alone. But when we feel trapped with nowhere to turn, our faith becomes real. We're forced to use the same reasoning the Psalmist used.

Last year, I had thyroid cancer. One of my biggest fears (irrational, I know) was having to take thyroid medication. So when my doctor wanted to scan my thyroid and then do a biopsy, I was consumed with fear that it would have to be removed. One day, while I was quietly waiting before the Lord for the biopsy results, I sensed Him ask, "Can you trust Me with your thyroid?" I was startled. That was the million-dollar question.

The biopsy confirmed cancer. For months, I kept returning to that same question. I came face-to-face with both my faith and my lack of faith. It wasn't a simple process, but eventually I concluded that God is trustworthy in this area of my life. They removed only half of my thyroid, and thankfully, I still don't need medication. That could change someday, but the question has been answered. Yes, I trust Him with my thyroid.

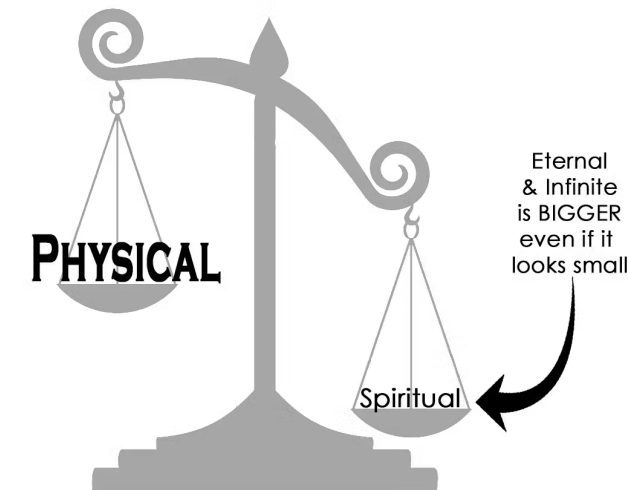
I believe that question will always be before each of us in one form or another. It may involve our health, our family, or our finances, but it always includes uncertainty about the future. We'll continue asking ourselves this question as long as we live because uncertainty is part of life on this side of heaven. But that's okay. If I trust in God, what is there to fear? And when I breathe my last breath, He will be there. I will have no reason to be afraid.

DAY 4 | **CALLED TO COURAGE**

Carol Hill, Lay Counselor & Prayer Team

In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes that God always leads us in victory in Christ. I said to God once, "If that's true, why am I not experiencing victory?" He said, "I'm leading, but are you following?" As humans, we tend to do our own thing and then ask God to bless it. We forge our own paths, try to work out our own problems, and ask God to reinforce our efforts.

In this passage of Joshua, God invites Joshua to follow His lead. This means faith and obedience. Although we're no longer bound by the Law, obedience still matters. When we go our own way, there's no promise that God is going to back us up. Even though



God is omnipresent, His promise of victory was contingent on obedience. (See the Battle of Ai, Joshua 7.) The invitation God extends is that we submit to Him as King and Loving Savior, and He will exert His power on our behalf to give us victory (Psalm 91 and John 14:15-15:11).

Our culture leans heavily on what we can observe with our five senses and what is testable through valid scientific experiments. And yet, the Bible boldly declares that what is physical is less than what is spiritual

the physical came from the spiritual (see Hebrews 11:3). God wants us to give more weight to the reality of His presence than to what we see in our physical circumstances. Faith is not just a matter of taking the Bible at face value, but of having experiential knowledge of God, interacting with Him in intimacy and trust, and seeing His hand at work in our lives. Faith is the ability to see the spiritual reality and give it more weight than our physical circumstances (2 Kings 6:8-19).

To assist Joshua in faith and obedience, God tells him to meditate on His Word. Filling our minds with Scripture will help us to give more weight to what He says is true than what we can

outwardly observe. Remember, no matter how big the things are on the physical side of the scale, the smallest bit of Truth about God tips the scale every time!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | **Visio Divina** | Storm on the Sea of Galilee

Visio Divina is a spiritual practice that can guide us toward a deeper understanding of the story and message portrayed through art. Translated from Latin, Visio Divina means “divine seeing.” It is a way of seeing God as we prayerfully invite him to speak to our hearts through gazing upon nature or an image. By incorporating art into prayer, Visio Divina invites us to bring our sense of sight, as well as our imagination, into our relationship with God.

Spend some time just being curious about the painting by Rembrandt called “Storm on the Sea of Galilee”. You can search for the painting by name, or type the following url into your browser:

bit.ly/4pwb7B6

Then, consider the following:

STEP 1: Quiet your soul in God’s presence.
Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.

STEP 2: Gaze at the image with openness, seeking to see God’s heart.
Notice the shapes, the colors, and the lighting.
Notice the detail of the background and the foreground.

STEP 3: Notice what stirs within you.
What responses, memories, or feelings does the image evoke?
How does the image connect to your own life?
Why do you think God is drawing you in this way?
Do you sense an invitation or a calling?
Don’t rush... take your time.

STEP 4: Notice each character.
What emotions do you notice in the expressions of each character?
Where are you on the boat - which character do you resonate with the most?
What do you notice in the characters in relationship to each other?
What feelings do you notice within yourself as you consider each character?

STEP 5: Talk with God about what you see and feel.
Name the emotions that are stirring within you.
To what is God calling you through this experience with him?
How will you respond to him?

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In
Get to know any new group members.
Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

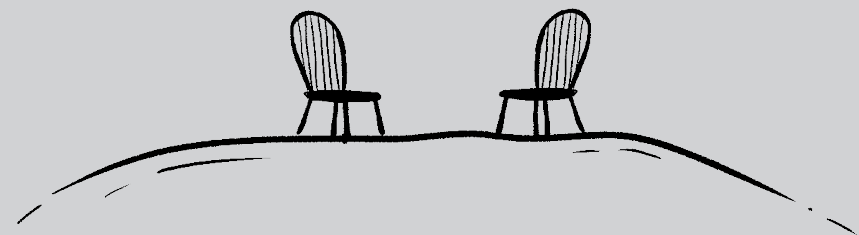
2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection
Read Matthew Mark 4:35-41 out loud as a group.
What words or phrases stand out to you?
What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support
What is Jesus saying to you?
How do you feel about what he is saying?
How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps
What are you going to do in response?
Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:
Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.
Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote - read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.
Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Four

04 | WHO CONDEMNS YOU?

Scripture: John 8:1-11
Memory verse: Romans 8:1 - *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ..."*
Songs:
 His Mercy Is More by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa
 Everything Sad Is Coming Untrue by The Gray Havens

Description:
After the accusers walked away, Jesus looked at the woman caught in adultery and asked, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" When she answered, "No one, Lord," Jesus replied, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." In one breath, Jesus offered both grace and truth. Think about it: he silenced the voices of condemnation without minimizing the reality of sin.

Many of us still live under accusations that Jesus has already settled, voices of shame, failure, regret, or never being enough. But condemnation and conviction are not the same. Condemnation says, "You are your worst mistake." Conviction says, "Come with me into freedom." Condemnation pronounced eternal judgment; conviction invites us to repentance. This week, we'll learn to recognize whose voice we're listening to and discover what it means to live from grace instead of shame.

Scripture study passage: Romans 8:1-11
 ¹ *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* ² *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.* ³ *For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,* ⁴ *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*
 ⁵ *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* ⁶ *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.* ⁷ *The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* ⁸ *Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*
 ⁹ *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.* ¹⁰ *But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.* ¹¹ *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."*

SCRIPTURE STUDY | ROMANS 8:1-11

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He's saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you're going to do in response to what you've read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

It was over a year ago when I found myself having made the wrong choice. Surrounded by people who I wanted to earn the respect of, I made a bad call. The fallout of this particular mistake ate away at me. Not only was my judgement called into question, but my character as well. The narrative that replayed in my mind was “your reputation will never recover from this.” I couldn’t shake the feeling that every interaction was being filtered through my failures. I carried the shame of this moment with me everywhere. I was on a mission to win over everyone I had disappointed. That list was long.

After becoming exhausted from constantly trying to prove myself, I shared with some friends about the shame I'd been carrying. Their reactions surprised me. Not one of them judged me for the choice I made, and no one was holding it against me. They knew me and they knew my heart. These friends who I felt I'd let down, restored me with the truth; my identity in Christ could not be damaged by a choice.

So, who condemns you? In my experience, the answer is nearly always only you.

-Kassie Lowe

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **THE AWESOME POWER OF OUR WORDS**

James 3:5-10

Madison Kaaman, Nursery & Early Childhood Coordinator

Growing up, people often told me I had a quick wit and a sharp tongue. In my family, that was almost a compliment. We were known for thinking fast, winning arguments, and always having the last word. I wore that reputation like a badge of honor.

The problem wasn't that my words weren't true. The problem was that I often used the truth to hurt people. I justified it by telling myself, "Well, it's true," as if that somehow made my words less harmful. Looking back, I realize I wasn't using my words to build others up; I was using them to tear others down.

In ninth grade, another student and I traded insults almost every day, trying to outdo each other with the sharpest comeback. To me, it was just a game. A few months later, a different student at my school died by suicide after enduring intense bullying. I didn't know him well, but his death shook me. That night, my mom said something I've never forgotten: "You never know what someone is carrying, or how deeply your words might affect them."

Those words changed me. From that day on, our daily battle of insults ended. I made a promise to myself that my words would leave people with hope rather than hurt.

James writes that the tongue is like a small spark that can set an entire forest on fire. I realized my words could either leave scars or offer hope. They could tear someone down or point them toward life.

I still feel the urge to have the last word. I still think of the perfect comeback long before I should. But now, before I speak, I ask myself a different question: Will these words leave this person feeling more loved or more wounded?

I don't always get it right, but I want my conversations to end with people feeling encouraged rather than defeated. I used to use my words to win. Now I pray God will use my words to give life.

DAY 2 | **WHOSE VOICE(S) ARE YOU HEARING OR LISTENING TO** | Romans 8:1-2

Kim Freels, Digital Media Specialist

Could you imagine if we all had a little cricket named Jiminy sitting on our shoulders, telling us what is right and wrong? An audible conscience that provided just what you needed to hear, just when you needed to hear it!

Unfortunately, Jiminy only exists in the fantasy of animation.

As Christians, we have a different kind of compass that comes built in when we accept Jesus as our personal savior, the Holy Spirit. He may not always speak audibly when we need Him to, but if we learn to tune out the world and dial into what God is calling us to do, that still small voice whispers to our hearts.

But what if it's unclear? What if you have trouble discerning whether it's God providing a closed door or Satan spurring you onto something that ultimately wouldn't be good for you?

I had a friend in this exact situation, only I didn't know this was where she was at in her heart; actively asking God to reveal if it was Him or if it was Satan. I knew what she was going through, and I was praying for her one day. I felt like I received a word from the Lord for my friend.

I reached out to her and said, "I hope this doesn't upset you, but this thing you're thinking of doing, I feel like the Lord is telling me to tell you to wait. Now is not the time."

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. It was the exact validation she was earnestly seeking.

Sometimes God will use the people in our lives as vessels to help validate His will. It is in community where we can be carried by people we trust, and lean on their wisdom when our hearts are blinded in a moment of desperation.

Do you have two or three people you could go to about anything? People following the Lord, so you know you can trust what they say? Lean on the community God has given you and don't try to walk this journey alone.

Sometimes that still small voice sounds like a friend's encouragement, wisdom, or validation.

DAY 3 | SPACE FOR DOUBTERS | John 20:26-28

Ryan Paulson, Lead Pastor

When people struggle with the claims of Christianity, where do they go? Where do you go when you doubt?

That's one of the most important questions you can ask because doubt rarely remains neutral. It always takes us somewhere. For some, doubt leads to cynicism. For others, it leads to isolation. Many quietly drift away from church and community, convinced they have to figure everything out before they belong. And, let's be honest, many churches don't have room for those who doubt.

I'm struck by the fact that Thomas chose a different path.

After refusing to believe the other disciples' testimony, Thomas made his doubts known. But then notice what John tells us: *"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them"* (John 20:26). Thomas hadn't resolved his questions. He hadn't seen Jesus yet; he was still doubting and unable to believe the resurrection had taken place, but he stayed with the community. He was still a part of the church.

That detail is easy to miss, but it may be the most important part of the story. In his book *After Doubt*, A.J. Swoboda writes that doubt is not a sign that faith has failed. In many ways, it is evidence that our faith is being stretched beyond easy answers. The real danger isn't in asking hard questions; it's believing we have to ask them alone.

Thomas refused to pretend, but he also refused to disappear. And it was there, in the middle of a community, still carrying unanswered questions, that Jesus met him. Jesus didn't shame Thomas for doubting. He invited him closer, saying, *"Put your finger here... Do not disbelieve, but believe"* (John 20:27). *Thomas' honest wrestling became the doorway to one of Scripture's greatest confessions: "My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:28).

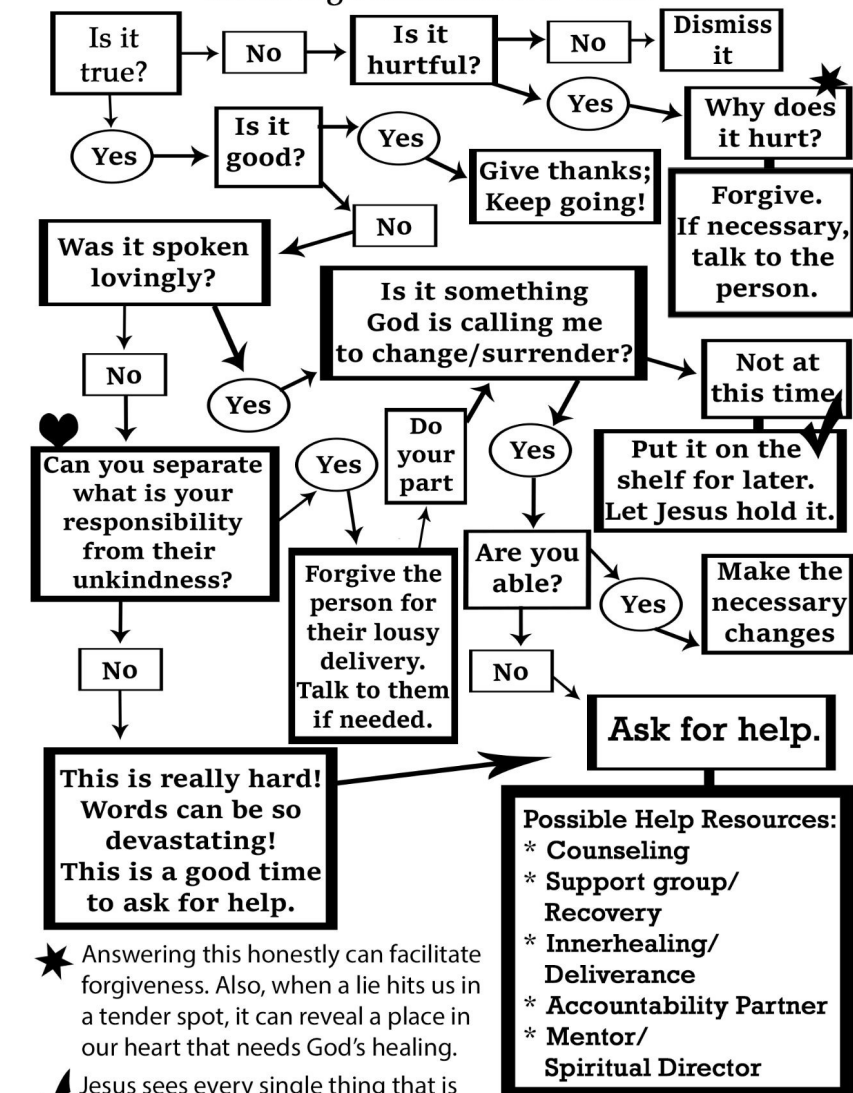
Doubt didn't define Thomas; Jesus did. If you're carrying questions today, don't assume you have to hide them or solve them before you belong. Bring them into the light. Share them with trusted followers of Jesus. Stay connected to the body of Christ. More often than we'd like, Jesus meets us not after we've figured everything out, but while we're faithfully remaining with His people.

Reflect: Where do you instinctively go when doubts arise? Do you move toward trusted community, or away from it? Are you a safe person for others to process their doubt and struggles with? What would it look like to stay in the room long enough for Jesus to meet you there?

DAY 4 | HONEST FEEDBACK? A KIND WHISPER (FROM A FRIEND)

Carol Hill, Lay Counselor and Prayer Team

Receiving Feedback Flow Chart



★ Answering this honestly can facilitate forgiveness. Also, when a lie hits us in a tender spot, it can reveal a place in our heart that needs God's healing.

✓ Jesus sees every single thing that is wrong with us, but He doesn't bombard us with everything at once. Sometimes people speak out of turn an issue He's not ready to address.

♥ Jonah probably didn't speak lovingly, but the Ninevites were still responsible for their actions. It's important that we can filter out condemnation/judgment and receive God's invitation to come to Him.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | **Practicing the Presence of God**

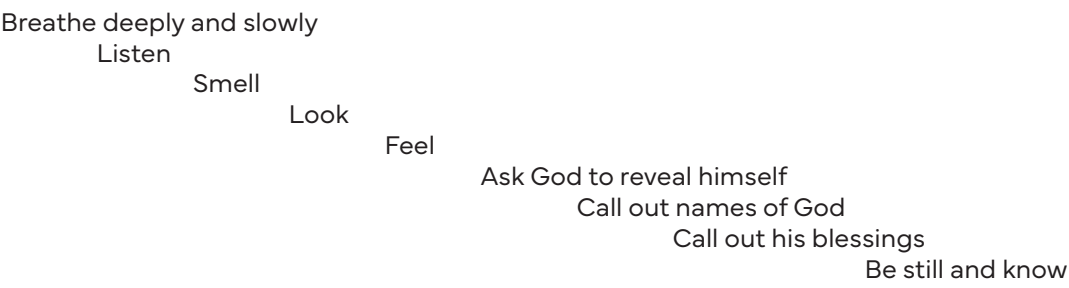
Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite monk, is one of the best-known voices on intimacy with Christ. He called this solitude of the heart “practicing the presence of God.”

He was not a priest or teacher, but a lay brother. Following a near-fatal injury during the Thirty Years War, he entered a Carmelite Monastery in Paris, crippled, and became their cook. While his daily routine included completing the mundane tasks of a cook, he did so with a passion to know and be known; for his Lord to be ever present in every part of every day. During his almost fifty years as a monk, he was sought out by monks and outsiders alike due to the beauty of his soul.

Consider the steps below as you practice engaging with God in every part of your life.

Notice: Noticing draws our attention to the creation that surrounds us and the Creator who has formed a beautiful tapestry of goodness, mercy, and grace right before our very eyes. Noticing takes our attention off of ourselves and invites us into the presence of the Almighty.

Go for a walk outside. Try not to think about anything in particular – just notice.



Practicing God’s presence means, “discerning and developing habits for discerning and awareness of God’s presence.” The Bible uses phrases such as “abiding”, “remaining in Christ”, “walking with God” and “keeping in step with the Spirit”. The following images portray what it means to practice God’s presence: not once-and-done actions, but ongoing practices. Choose one to read, ponder, and practice each day.

Abide: John 15:4-5
Set your mind: Romans 8:5-6
Walk (in step with the Spirit): Galatians 5:16, 25
Rejoice: Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16
Give thanks (in all): 1 Thessalonians 5:18
Run (with perseverance): Hebrews 12:1-2
Remember: Deuteronomy 8:2-3

Love: Matthew 22:37-40
Pray: 1 Thessalonians 5:17
Set your heart: Colossians 3:1-2
Press on: Philippians 3:12-14
Dwell: Philippians 4:6-8
Offer yourself: Romans 12:1-2

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

Read Matthew John 8:1-11 out loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps

What are you going to do in response?

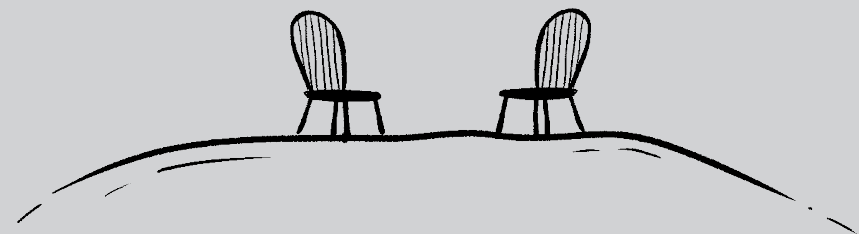
Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:

Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote – read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Five

05 | DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?

SCRIPTURE: John 5:1-17
MEMORY VERSE: Romans 12:2 - *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*
SONGS:
 Wasteland by Needtobreathe
 The Wound Is Where The Light Gets In by Jason Gray

DESCRIPTION:
For thirty-eight years, the man by the pool had lived with the same reality. Then Jesus asked a question that seems almost offensive: "Do you want to get well?" The question seems to have an obvious answer... of course he did. Maybe. Jesus understood that healing isn't only about changing our circumstances; it also requires a change in us. It requires us to release old identities, familiar patterns, and the stories we've come to believe about ourselves.

True healing begins when we're willing to face what's within, not just the circumstances that surround us. Sometimes the hardest part of healing is embracing the new life that comes with it. This week, Jesus invites us to consider where we've grown comfortable being stuck and whether we're ready to trust him with the freedom, responsibility, and transformation that real healing brings.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: Ephesians 4:17-32
 ¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.
 ²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
 ²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.
 ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

SCRIPTURE STUDY | EPHESIANS 4:17-32

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He's saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you're going to do in response to what you've read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

For anyone who has been sick with a bad head cold, you know the relief that feeling better brings. You don't even ask the question, "Do I want to get well?" Of course you do!

But what if you are emotionally unwell? I stayed in that place for a long time.

I was married to a toxic drug addict for years. I landed in the comfort of my co-dependency, doing things like enabling and living in my denial. Did I want to get well? You wouldn't think so, watching how I stayed in such toxicity. But the truth was... I was scared. When I finally filed for divorce, I knew I couldn't get better on my own. I went on an intentional journey of healing.

The hardest part about healing is that it takes time! Sometimes that's why we don't choose it. It's too much! I had to put in the internal work to become emotionally well. A lot of it was outright painful. I didn't want to feel the deep hurt of processing old wounds. But I'm here to tell you that it was worth it.

How did I get well? Intentionally... over time. You got this!

-Kim Freels

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN**

Jeff Worsham, Strength for the Journey Leader

It lingers. It is irrepressible. Unforgettable. It is relentless.

Living with chronic pain or illness is a different form of trial. This is no “dark night of the soul,” nor a trial. Those end, and most anything can be endured if you know it’s temporary. When your enemy is unconquerable, it changes your perspective. Winning is no longer the goal; it never was an option.

If you have this burden, please hear my message. If not, you should hear it too. Hope? Its radiance dulled. Prayers go unanswered. Every day is a struggle. “Why is this happening to me?” Or maybe, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Psalm 22:1)

There is such darkness in my words, but they need to be said, and truthfully. What I write is woefully insufficient to express the level of pain that some endure. So, what can be done then? When hope feels lost, and when you feel abandoned, what is there to do? To some, these are not general or rhetorical questions. They are part of life, asked and answered, over and over, again and again.

I cannot provide a perfect answer, but I can tell you what I believe, which helps me, and I hope it will help you, too. Remember! Jesus Himself was *“a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief”* (Isaiah 53:3). He understands physical suffering. He walks beside you with compassion, not condemnation, and He invites you to bring every frustration, fear, and tear to Him. Do this! Be honest, be open, pray, and lament. We are closer to Him because of the pain. We are given the gifts of perseverance, compassion for others who suffer, humility, and a deeper relationship with God. These are not easy gifts, but they are precious ones.

God does not delight in our suffering. Rather, He promises that His grace will meet us in it. When our strength is exhausted, His is not. When pain limits what we can do, it cannot limit what God can accomplish in us. Our worth is not measured by our productivity, our health, or our independence, but by the unchanging love of Christ.

I have taken my pain, my diagnosis, and I wield it as a weapon. The Devil thought he was tormenting me, and he surely was, but no more. Now I fight against him with what he thought would kill me. I use it now, enabled by the empathy it provides, honed with hope for His kingdom, and forged with compassion.

Through me—within me—His grace—His love. It lingers. It is irrepressible. Unforgettable. It is

relentless.

DAY 2 | **ADDICTIONS IN CHURCH CLOTHES**

Philippians 2:7-9

Amber Moen, Inner Healing Prayer Leader

Growing up, the idea of addiction felt distant, scary, and confined to those living in serious sin and brokenness. Surely addiction would never be a part of my story. Yet, it has been. Not the easy-to-identify type of addiction, though. One far more masked.

Early on in life, I experienced the “high” of people’s approval. It gave me significance and worth. If I started feeling insecure or not enough, I’d figure out a way to maintain approval. On the outside, I wanted to portray a hard-working, confident, fruitful missionary, but on the inside, I was feeling confused, tired, unmotivated, and disconnected. I was desperately chasing worth through validation that would never satisfy.

Believing the lie that I’m not enough apart from the approval of others has been very costly. Not only to me, but also to those I care about deeply and to our ministry. It’s led to behaviors such as striving, control, comparison, and deceit. This broken part of me hasn’t been experiencing the liberated, joy-filled life that is already mine.

It seems Paul could relate. In Galatians 1, he says, “Am I trying to please people?” I can imagine his long list of accomplishments and accolades in Philippians 3:4-6 had felt exhausting! He had lived a life of striving, working hard to attain righteousness and the approval of others.

But then Jesus met him!

Paul’s encounter with the living Jesus (Acts 9) began to change everything! He began to understand his true identity. We learn more about Paul’s process in Philippians 3:7-9.

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...”

Paul went from striving to receiving. From people pleasing to serving Christ alone.

As I’ve taken time to meet with Jesus through inner-healing prayer and spiritual direction, he’s been replacing the lies I’ve come to believe with the truth of his love for me and of who I really am. My addiction to approval is losing its power as Jesus does his work of restoring my true identity, and as I extend grace and care to the broken parts of me that are being healed. More and more, I’m experiencing the liberated, joy-filled life that is mine.

DAY 3 | **DON'T LET PRIDE RULE THE DAY** | 2 Kings 5:1-14

Carol Hill, Lay Counselor & Prayer Team



Naaman goes to Israel to seek God for the healing of his leprosy, and he almost misses the healing because it doesn't take the form he wants or expects. In the pride of his position, he goes straight to the king and expects to be served. He wants no part of humility or submission. He doesn't care about coming into a right relationship with God Almighty.

This isn't just Naaman's story, but a human story. The Holy Spirit has definitely convicted me of praying in a similar attitude. I don't just ask God to intervene, but I tell Him how I want it done. Like Naaman, I might even reject the work God wants to do in me. After all, I'd be fine if only this situation were resolved. When we do this, aren't we saying, "I'm not the problem. I'm fine. Everybody and everything else is the problem"?

When we ask for God's help, if we really want His intervention, we need to have the humility to accept His methodology.

Sometimes we miss the healing God has for us because we refuse to submit. We love our pride more. But God isn't just looking at physical circumstances. He sees us as whole people: body, soul, mind, spirit. He wants to bring healing to our whole person. Remember, His character is not dependent on circumstances. His love, joy, and peace are unfazed in the face of evil and are unending and never failing. If we're losing sight of peace, then we are missing something of God in our lives. If we're having trouble loving someone, we're lacking God's heart. We need a real encounter, and that's what He seeks to resolve.

Naaman wasn't thinking of meeting God Almighty, but God knew Naaman's problem ran deeper than his skin. In choosing to submit, Naaman returned to worship and acknowledge God as the One True God. Naaman's story invites us to choose humility also and see what God will do.

DAY 4 | **ABIDE** | John 15:5

Greg Mizel, Executive Director

Jesus gives one command in John 15 that changes everything: Abide.

In this familiar passage of Scripture, the Greek word translated as "abide" is *menō*. It appears in the present imperative mood. Why does this matter? Because "abide" is a command. That means it's something we can and must choose to do. The present imperative also calls for continual, ongoing abiding. Followers of Jesus are to keep abiding. The call is not for occasional moments of connection but for continual dwelling, staying, and remaining with Christ.

Abide in Me.

So... Sunday-only Jesus misses the mark.

Sunday and Wednesday night, Jesus comes up short, too.

Even Sunday, Wednesday night, and pre-dawn daily quiet time with Jesus is not enough

Continuous union is the goal, not intermittent check-ins. Disciples must intentionally remain connected to Jesus from the moment they wake to the moment they fall asleep. As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, we are to pray, rejoice, and give thanks without ceasing. Scripture paints a clear picture: we are to cultivate a continual rhythm of God-consciousness and ongoing inner communion with Him as we strive to live in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus.

Whoever abides in Me and I in Him

While the language of John 15:5 is strong, it's also an incredible invitation to experience God in a radically new way. Religious life no longer centers on ethnic heritage, the temple system, or the nation of Israel. Under the New Covenant, believers are called to abide in Jesus. The command to abide shifts the motivation for obedience from duty to attachment. Jesus inverts the equation: good deeds are no longer a way to earn God's favor but the natural byproduct of living in communion with Him.

This mutual indwelling—we in Him and He in us—transforms both our relationship with God and our relationships with others. Through abiding, we follow Jesus in community and on mission, living out both the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-38) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

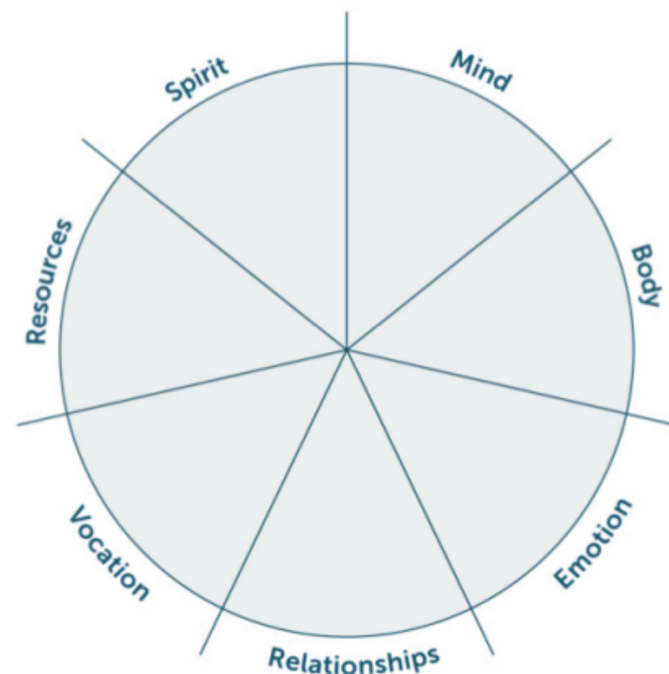
John 15:5 concludes with a sobering warning: "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." The emphasis, however, is not on failure but on dependence. The Christian life is not about trying harder but remaining closer. So lean in... there is a deeper, richer reality ahead. One where, as C.S. Lewis described it, the inside is larger than the outside.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | Wholeness Wheel

God created us as whole beings, designed to fully experience all aspects of life, serve him with our whole being, and live in the abundance that he has provided through Jesus. When one or more areas of our lives are out of balance, it affects the whole. This does not mean that we should constantly strive for perfection but rather seek the Lord's guidance, embrace the counsel of others, and do the hard work of willingly looking at our lives while asking God to move us towards greater health.

The Wholeness Wheel is a visual tool that helps us honestly consider our own personal health or wholeness. As you consider these different areas of your life, which are lacking? Does something stir within you that desires to live in a place of greater health? Is there an area in your life that needs healing? Do you want to be healed? Do you want to change? Do you want to let go of old patterns? Do you want to grow?

Start by spending a few minutes in silence, asking God to reveal to you your overall health in seven different areas of your life: Spirit, Mind, Body, Emotions, Relationships, Vocation, and Resources.



1. Based on honest reflection with the Lord, shade in each portion of the pie according to your health in each area.
2. Identify 1-3 areas where you feel weak and desire to grow.
3. Identify your area of greatest strength and celebrate that!
4. Share with your Connect Group or someone you trust - people you are willing to be honest with and both give to and receive accountability from.

Reflect on the following descriptions and Scriptures. Celebrate where you are healthy! Then read through and meditate on the areas below that are a struggle.

SPIRIT: Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength impacts everything. Starting with your spiritual health makes balancing the wheel much easier because you know who you are and whose you are. God longs to spend time with you! Your relationship with him grows through prayer, worship, and experiencing and resting in Him.

REFLECTION: How do you spend time with God? Is your relationship with God a priority? Do you honestly believe that God loves you and longs to be with you?

READ: Ephesians 3:14-19

MIND: A healthy mind is alert and active. We can stretch our minds by exploring new responsibilities and experiences, and by striving to be a learner. Keeping every thought captive is crucial for a healthy thought life.

REFLECTION: Is your mind being challenged? How are you being stretched to grow and learn? What do you spend time thinking about?

READ: Philippians 4:8, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

BODY: We are marvelously created by God; fearfully and wonderfully made! A healthy body requires exercise, nourishment, and rest. Honor your body as a gift from God.

REFLECTION: How are you doing physically? Do your daily activities prioritize or discourage exercise, healthy nourishment, and rest?

READ: Psalm 139:13-18

EMOTIONS: Emotional health requires feeling the whole range of human emotions and expressing them appropriately. Self-awareness is the first step. Recognizing, naming, and honoring your own and others' feelings, then honestly sharing them with others and with God, will help you live the abundant life that God has designed for you.

REFLECTION: What are you feeling - really? Are you being honest with yourself? With others? With God?

READ: Psalm 13

RELATIONSHIPS: We were created by God to be social beings, living in community and instructed to help and love each other. Relationship is at the core of who we are. Wholeness longs for healthy relationships with family, friends, and coworkers. Relationships require love, unity, time, sacrifice, and possibly forgiveness.

REFLECTION: Are you taking the necessary time to nurture healthy relationships? Are you willing to sacrifice your desires and serve others? Is there someone you need to forgive?

READ: Ephesians 4:25-32

VOCATION/CALLING: Living out who God created us to be creates a healthy sense of calling. Those who are vocationally well are faithful stewards of their talents and abilities and find opportunities to build and use them.

REFLECTION: Do you understand your calling? Are you aware of how God has gifted you, and are you using those gifts to the best of your ability to honor him?

READ: Ephesians 4:1-6

RESOURCES: We are called to steward God’s blessings. Healthy financial stewardship is making decisions based on values, evidenced in the way we save, spend, and share. God has also blessed us with time, energy, and other resources which we are expected to manage. Good stewardship embraces resiliency, sustainability and generosity.

REFLECTION: How are you using your resources?

READ: 2 Corinthians 9

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

Read Matthew John 5:1-17 out loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps

What are you going to do in response?

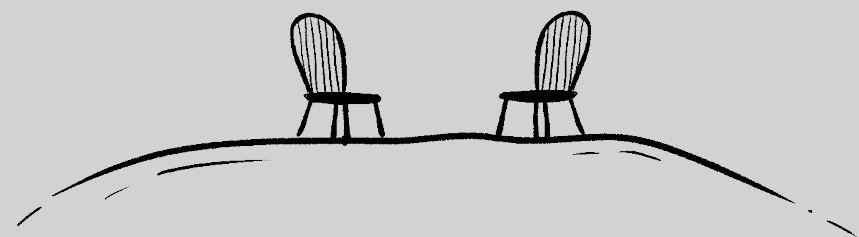
Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:

Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote - read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Six

06 | ARE YOU GOING TO LEAVE TOO?

SCRIPTURE: John 6:60-71
MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 73:25-26
*²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.
and my portion forever.*
SONGS:
Even If by MercyMe
Stand By Me by Ben E. King

DESCRIPTION:
When Jesus’ teaching became difficult, many who had followed him decided they had heard enough and walked away. Instead of softening his message or chasing after the crowd, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “You do not want to go away as well, do you?” It was an invitation to choose.

Every disciple eventually reaches moments when Jesus is confusing, costly, or doesn’t meet our expectations. In those moments, faith isn’t sustained by convenience or even agreement, but by trust. Peter’s response still echoes today: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Following Jesus isn’t about understanding everything; it’s about believing there is no one else who offers the life and hope that he does. This week, we’ll wrestle honestly with what keeps us following when faith becomes difficult

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: John 15:1-11
¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruit-ful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | JOHN 15:1-11

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He’s saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you’re going to do in response to what you’ve read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **KEEP GROWING!** | Romans 5:1-5

Lynette Fuson, Care & Counseling Director

Following Jesus is hard. Whether sharing the gospel in an unfamiliar culture, loving a difficult co-worker, teaching a Kids Sunday School class, or even working on a church staff... serving God can be hard.

Do any of these resonate with you?

As a school teacher, I’ve stood for truth when students cheated, and parents wanted me to bend the rules.

I’ve stood for truth when a co-worker was acting against Scripture –even when I wasn’t fully believed.

I’ve seen money that was given to the Lord used for personal gain.

I’ve watched well-intentioned people misunderstood and undervalued. I’ve felt the same.

I’ve known the truth, but had to keep it close for the sake of the whole.

I’ve poured my energy into an event only to receive complaints about insignificant details.

I’ve watched friends leave.

I’ve cried with people grieving a loved one or a broken relationship.

I’ve received hurtful words when all I could do was listen, knowing that it came from a place of stuckness. Hurt people hurt people.

I’ve received criticism, then had my eyes opened to see it as an opportunity to grow.

I have not received the job that I thought I wanted... then realized that God was preparing me for something better.

I’ve asked for answers, and instead grown in patience.

I’ve watched dreams fade... then saw God start to reveal a new dream... and new hope.

Paul talks about this hope in Romans 5:3-5: *“There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!”*

Following Jesus is not easy, but if we are willing, growth will happen. Author Tod Bolsinger, in his book *Tempered Resilience*, says, “A teachable learning mindset leads to a greater capacity for staying in a difficult position,... because there is an inherent assurance that if all else fails this trial will –if nothing else –lead to further growth.”

What trials have you faced in serving Jesus? Ask God to give you eyes to see how He has or will use those difficulties to produce growth. He will!

DAY 2 | **GOD IS STILL WRITING YOUR STORY**

Madison Kaaman, Early Childhood Coordinator

When I read the story of the prodigal son, I used to think it wasn’t about me. After all, I had grown up in church and had always known Jesus. Then I realized I had more in common with him than I expected.

I grew up at Emmanuel Faith. My earliest memories are from the Children’s Ministries Caterpillar Room, where my faith began to take root. Yet somewhere along the way, I treated Jesus like a passenger in the back seat, someone I knew was there but rarely invited to lead. Looking back, I realize He wasn’t just riding along. He was patiently guiding me home.

After my parents divorced, our family stopped attending church regularly. My dad stopped going, and my mom spent years searching for a church that felt like home. But God never stopped pursuing me. A friend invited me back to Wednesday nights at Emmanuel Faith, where leaders still remembered my name. Somehow, both of my parents ended up living within walking distance of my childhood church, making it possible to keep coming back. Even then, God was making a way.

As I got older, I drifted again. I convinced myself I was too busy and didn’t need God the way I once had. Then my husband and I experienced the heartbreaking loss of our first baby. In my grief, I questioned God and stepped away even further. Months later, on our baby’s original due date, we learned we were expecting Tommy. God didn’t erase our grief, but He met us in it and reminded me He was still writing my story.

When Tommy was nine months old, I began looking for a job. Everywhere I turned, someone mentioned my church was hiring. I ignored it until one day I prayed, “God, if You really want me here, give me a sign.” At that moment, I drove past the church and saw the sign: “EFCC Is Hiring.” I laughed, applied that night, and was hired.

I worried I had been gone too long and had turned away from God too many times to be worthy of serving in His church. But the father in Luke 15 never asked his son where he’d been or made him earn his way back. He simply ran to meet him with open arms.

I spent years thinking Jesus was just a passenger in the back seat of my life. Looking back, I realize He was gently guiding me home the whole time. My story is about discovering that every time I wandered, He was faithfully there. And maybe He’s doing the same for you.

DAY 3 | **WHEN FAITH IS HARD—HONESTY**

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Judy Linscheid, Writing Team

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, And there are no grapes on the vines; Even though the olive crop fails, And the fields lie empty and barren; Even though the flocks die in the fields, And the cattle barns are empty, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!” (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

I love celebrations! Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays—any chance to gather with friends and family and enjoy God’s blessings. For me, these moments have always been about remembering His goodness. But honestly, I struggle to celebrate when uncertainty hangs over my head.

Last year, my health was in question for months. I celebrated three of my children’s birthdays, two of my grandchildren’s birthdays, Easter, and our 35th wedding anniversary, all without knowing what the future held. Even heading into Christmas, uncertainty lingered. To be honest, I felt a little angry at God.

Yet I’m reminded of Abraham. Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and peace, brought him a celebratory meal after God promised him a son. Sarah had been barren, and now both were well past childbearing years. God told Abraham to count the stars—his descendants would be more numerous. Through this son, all nations would be blessed. They celebrated not what had already happened, but what God promised would come. They celebrated in faith.

God is teaching me that enjoying celebrations amid uncertainty is an act of faith. It’s hard for me, and He knows it. I suspect it’s hard for most of us if we’re honest. But He wants this for us because He already holds our future. We can rejoice in Him even when we don’t see the full outcome.

Unlike Abraham, we may not receive a specific promise. Like the prophet Habakkuk, we may not know how things will turn out. Yet Habakkuk ended his lament in chapter 3 by affirming his trust in the Lord no matter what. Things looked bleak—no figs, no grapes, empty fields and barns. Still, he rejoiced because he knew his God.

I’m learning to do the same. In seasons of uncertainty, I can choose joy and celebration as an offering of faith, trusting that God is good and my future is secure in Him.

DAY 4 | **RUN WITH ENDURANCE** | Hebrews 12:1-3

Carol Hill, Lay Counselor & Inner Healing Prayer Team

When the road is long and difficult, how can we have the endurance to keep going? Conventional wisdom—whether it’s climbing a mountain, running a marathon, or persevering through natural childbirth—is to only think of the immediate next step, not how much longer or how much further we have to go. But what if the journey is lifelong? What if the goal is never to stop climbing, never stop pushing in deeper? What could give us enough drive for this kind of life?

For me, it’s Jesus, and I think the author of Hebrews agrees. I don’t think “fixing our eyes on Jesus” is just metaphorical for having a goal and focusing on it. He IS the goal. Because He is alive, we can know Him and walk with Him. The more we pursue Jesus, the more we know Him, and the more filled and satisfied we are. The more we know His perfect love and amazing goodness, the more we want to know, the more we want others to know also. His glory and majesty exceed by far any bucket list experience we could have on this earth. His power lights up our lives, and we have everything we need to go further and do more than we ever dreamed possible.

However, sometimes we have problems connecting with Jesus. This is common, and there is help. It’s often easier to connect with Him while worshiping and praying with others, so join in community. Reading the writings of generations of saints who have gone before can also be a great encouragement. In my personal time, I ask the Holy Spirit to show me if anything is keeping me from Him. I invite Him to search my heart. He is always faithful! He wants to be with me even more than I want to be with Him. Whether it’s unrepentant sin, unforgiveness, or He’s asking for new trust and obedience, I’ll give what He asks. The discomfort of surrender is never as bad as the discomfort of feeling distant from Him.

Pursuing Jesus is not a life without pain or hardship, but it is a life of constant reward because He’s always eager to give of Himself. We have immeasurable joy set before us; let’s throw off everything that keeps us from it!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | **Practicing Relinquishment**

Hold out your hands in front of you and clench your fists as tight as you can.
Hold that for 10 seconds.
Release your hands – how does it feel?
This is a physical demonstration of relinquishment.

Practicing Relinquishment is not a one time event. It is daily surrendering our hopes, dreams, and plans, our good (and selfish) intentions, our desires, our deepest longings, our entire being... to our loving Father.

Relinquishment is trusting God over our own human understanding. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

- Relinquishment requires humbling ourselves and surrendering our fears and anxieties. (1 Peter 5:6-7)
Relinquishment means offering every part of us in worship. (Romans 12:1-2)
Relinquishment means denying self and walking in faith in Christ. (Galatians 2:20)
Relinquishment is saying, “here I am – I am your servant.” (Luke 1:38)
Relinquishment is saying to God, not my will but yours. (Luke 22:42)

Relinquishment brings us to a place of inner freedom as we align ourselves with God’s perfect will and surrender to His abounding love.

READ: Luke 9:23-26

²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels

PRACTICE

Sit with the Scripture and simply listen to what God is saying to you.
Rewrite the Scripture out in a journal or write it out in your own words.
Circle words that stand out to you.
Ask him to show you why particular words or phrases jarred or soothed your spirit.
Write out what you feel God inviting you to do in response to the Scripture.
Consider: Where is your will preventing you from experiencing the fullness of God? What are you holding onto? What is God asking you to relinquish to him?
Share your insight with a spiritual companion, a trusted loved one or friend.

CONCLUSION

Write your own Prayer of Relinquishment to God.

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

Read Matthew John 6:60-71 out loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps

What are you going to do in response?

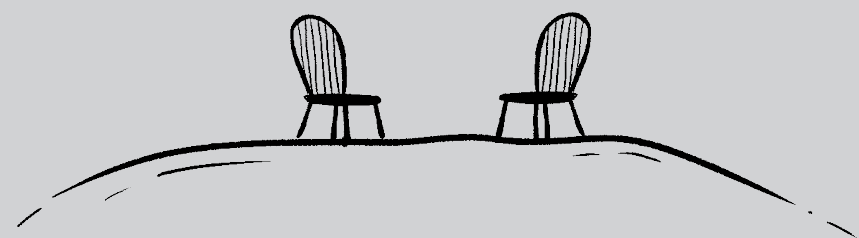
Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:

Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote – read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Seven

07 | WHY DO YOU CAL ME ‘LORD, LORD’ AND DO NOT DO WHAT I SAY?

SCRIPTURE: Luke 6:37-42
Memory verse: John 14:15 - *If you love me, keep my commands.*
Songs:*B*
 Build My Life by Pat Barrett
 Everybody Wants to Rule the World by Tears for Fears

DESCRIPTION:
Jesus’ question is direct. You can almost feel it hanging in the air, being returned with blank stares from his would-be disciples. He isn’t looking for impressive words or sincere intentions; he’s inviting wholehearted obedience. It’s possible to admire Jesus, sing about him, and even call him “Lord” while resisting the very things he asks us to do.

However, discipleship isn’t measured merely by what we know or believe, but by the degree to which our lives are shaped by his voice. As Dallas Willard often reminded us, grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Obedience isn’t a way to gain God’s love; it is the natural response of those who trust him. This week, we’ll examine the gap between our confession and our conduct, asking where Jesus may be inviting us to take our next faithful step.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: James 1:22-25
² *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*
²³ *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

SCRIPTURE STUDY | JAMES 1:22-25

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He’s saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you’re going to do in response to what you’ve read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

For years I struggled with anger. I did everything a good Christian would do: I prayed. I memorized Scripture. I sought counsel and went to seminars. I was accountable in community. I tried to live by the Spirit and grow in the fruits of the Spirit. I repented over and over.

The anger kept getting worse. There was a constant tension in my body and soul. I was angry at the whole world, including myself. My kids were suffering under my dictatorship. In desperation, I humbled myself before the Lord and made a solemn vow: "Whatever You say, my answer is 'yes,' only please take this anger from me."

God started prompting me to take steps forward, and as I obeyed, the miracle I needed began to unfold. God was healing deep wounds, releasing bitterness and unforgiveness, changing my heart and mind, and healing relationships. At the same time, God started doing miracles in the lives of those He called me to pray for and minister to. He broke my chains and multiplied my joy.

All that time I was trying to follow Scripture, God was just waiting for me to say "yes" to Him.

-Carol Hill

WEEK 7 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **TRUST AND OBEY** | Romans 10:11

Judy Linscheid, Writing Team

I grew up singing an old hymn in Sunday school called Trust and Obey. The chorus goes like this:

Trust and obey,

For there’s no other way

To be happy in Jesus,

But to trust and obey.

It’s a comforting song that embodies a life of simple, childlike faith. But how do we know if we have that kind of faith? As an adult with years of life experience, I’m discovering just how crucial it is to trust.

Adults know too much. We’ve studied how things work and gained so much human knowledge that simple, childlike faith can be difficult. In the text, Simon knew how to fish. It was his profession. If he couldn’t catch anything after an entire night of fishing, letting down the nets in the morning would surely be a waste of time. But Jesus told him to do just that, so he did. We know how the story ends. There were so many fish that the boat nearly sank. Simon trusted Jesus. He probably didn’t understand or expect much, but his obedience demonstrated trust.

Obedience requires trust. Sometimes the Lord calls us to do things that seem foolish or counter-intuitive. But his understanding is complete, while ours is limited. Our interpretations often contain biases, false notions, and fears. Or, like Simon, we may even be correct in our understanding of how things work. The difference is that God is in charge of the outcome.

“Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced” (Romans 10:11).

I love that verse. It assures us that we can trust Him even when we don’t understand. Yet trusting the Lord in some areas can feel like standing at the edge of a cliff and jumping off. He understands this, which is why I believe He wants us to stay close to Him. He is always for us. He always has our back.

The call to obedience is really a call to greater trust. The older I get, the more I sense the Lord asking, “Do you trust Me?” He isn’t asking me to ignore what I know, but to surrender it to Him. The Christian walk is all about relationship. He leads, we follow. He provides, we receive. Never fear—only trust and obey.

DAY 2 | **DOING VS. HEARING** | James 1:22-24

Greg Hill, Emmanuel Faith Elder

I’ve spent a lot of time reading apologetics books, listening to apologetics podcasts, and talking to other Christians about apologetics. In all that time, I came up with many different good ideas, strategies, and tactics to minister to people outside the Christian faith. But there was something missing from all of my achievements — actually talking to people outside the Christian faith.

It only took one question from a non-Christian I was not prepared for to see that all my time reading and hearing about apologetics did not actually make me an apologist. James 1:22-24 comes to mind when I think about that interaction. I was like the man who looked in the mirror but forgot what he looked like. I thought for sure I had studied hard enough, but when the test came, I couldn’t remember what I looked like.

When I’m honest with myself, the same is true for the words of Jesus. I can read His beautiful words, take them to heart, and stop there. In doing so, I miss the mark of living in His way, with His heart. I may understand that I’m supposed to love my neighbor, but we don’t speak the same language, so I don’t step into that space. I may understand that I’m supposed to turn the other cheek, but my pride gets in the way of practicing the humility Jesus modeled.

I deceive myself when I think my faith is about me being a better person or behaving in a pious way. I (and we) are called to be disciples who make disciples. To do that well, we have to live near people who may or may not make it easy to practice His way with His heart. But in being a doer, not just a hearer, James 1:25 says, “But the person who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and goes on with it, not being a hearer who forgets but a doer who does the deed — such a person is blessed in their doing.” (Bible for Everyone, translated by NT Wright)

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to show you one way to be a doer and not just a hearer, and as James said, there will be blessing in your doing.

DAY 3 | **WHY NOT?** | Acts 8:26-40

Josh Rose, Family Pastor

Two questions stand out when we read Luke 6:46 and Acts 8:26-40 together. Jesus asks, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). This question exposes a problem. The second will reveal the solution.

In Acts 8, an Ethiopian official is traveling home from Jerusalem, reading the prophet Isaiah. God sends Philip to explain the Scriptures to him, and Philip shows him how Isaiah points to Jesus. As they travel, the man believes the good news and puts his faith in Christ.

Then they come across some water.

At that moment, the Ethiopian could have asked many questions. “Do I really need to do this?” “Shouldn’t I wait?” “What will people think?” “What if I’m not ready?” Instead, he asks a completely different question:

“What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” (Acts 8:36)

Many of us approach obedience asking, “Why should I?” The Ethiopian asks, “Why not?”

His question reveals a heart that has already settled the bigger issue. Jesus is Lord. Therefore, obedience is not something to be debated, postponed, or negotiated. It is simply the next step.

That is why the Ethiopian’s question is such a fitting answer to Jesus’ question in Luke 6:46. The problem is rarely a lack of clarity about what God wants us to do. More often than not, we’re looking for reasons to delay. We ask, “Why should I obey?” The Ethiopian asks, “Why not obey?”

Whether the issue is baptism, forgiveness, generosity, serving, sharing our faith, or another step God has made clear, the posture of a disciple is not to search for excuses but for opportunities.

Today, consider the areas where God has already spoken clearly. Instead of asking, “Why should I obey?” ask the Ethiopian’s question: “What can stand in the way of obedience?”

DAY 4 | **WHAT IS OBEDIENCE?** | James 4:17

Ashley Carr, Writing Team

How many times have you known you should have done something, but didn’t do it? Too many times to count?

Yeah, me too.

According to James, this means we’re sinning every time we do this. Does this have to feel like a crippling reality, or may I attempt to reframe the severity of James’ admonishment?

Before I do so, let me provide some context. I’ve been making my way through Unspoken Sermons by Scottish author George MacDonald, with a friend over coffee for the last few months. MacDonald was a 19th-century author and pastor who heavily inspired the work and theology of C.S. Lewis. We recently read his controversial sermon, The Truth In Jesus, and here’s the part in it that completely reframed the way I think about obedience:

“Tell me something you have done, are doing, or are trying to do because he told you. If you do nothing that he says, it is no wonder that you cannot trust him... Obedience is not perfection, but trying... He knows that you can try, and that in your trying and failing he will be able to help you, until at length you shall do the will of God even as he does it himself. He takes the will in the imperfect deed, and makes the deed at last perfect” (MacDonald, Unspoken Sermons, “The Truth In Jesus,” 195).

I love this because he reinforces what I’ve been seeing emphasized more clearly than ever before in God’s word the past year or so: as Christians, our business is in the trying.

God has no grand, elaborate formula or script for the Christian life that you must follow to be His. Obedience is not in the monumental, epic gestures of faith, but in the trying—the doing of the next right thing.

“But if we fail to do that, we sin.” What of it? Aren’t we told, again and again, that there is grace for our sin (past, present, and future)?

James’ words are a reminder, not a death sentence. He’s not asking us to tally up all the times we’ve failed to “do the right thing”; he’s simply reminding us that we’re being held back from the richness of a life found in the trying (and the failing).

There’s no script, friends. Simply do the next right thing, knowing God is with you.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | **Lectio Divina “Scripture Reading”** | James 1:19-27

Lectio Divina or “Scripture Reading” is slowly reading through a passage of Scripture, setting aside our own agendas, and listening for God’s voice. This practice encourages conversational intimacy with God, taking us through five steps that encourage our spiritual formation and connection to our Creator over simply gaining information.

1. SILENCIO (SILENCE): Make yourself comfortable in a place that is free from interruptions. Begin with silence, humbly asking your Heavenly Father to quiet your heart and make you aware of His loving presence. When you are ready, begin reading.

2. LECTIO (READ): In this first reading, read the passage slowly and prayerfully, allowing short pauses between sentences. Follow with silence as you listen for God’s Spirit.

James 1:19-27: ¹⁹ *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry,* ²⁰ *because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.* ²¹ *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*
²² *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* ²³ *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror* ²⁴ *and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.* ²⁵ *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*
²⁶ *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.* ²⁷ *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

3. MEDITATIO (MEDITATE): During the second prayerful reading, listen for a particular word or a phrase through which God wants to speak to you. Silently meditate on that word or phrase. Reflect on why God would highlight this for you today, ask Him questions that come to mind, and note things that seem important as you meditate on what He has given you.

4. ORATIO (PRAYER): In the third prayerful reading, listen for your Father’s invitation, and respond from your heart. Is the invitation to let go of something, or to take hold, to do, or to be? Following the reading, continue listening, then respond from an honest heart.

5. CONTEMPLATIO (REST): The fourth prayerful reading is to simply rest in your Father’s love. Let the words wash over you, allowing the Spirit to draw you close and fill you with His love, grace, and peace. Linger in this place of deep connection as you are filled and refreshed for your continuing journey. Take the God-given word, phrase, or image with you as you go throughout the day, reminding you of your Father’s infinite love.

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In
Get to know any new group members.
Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

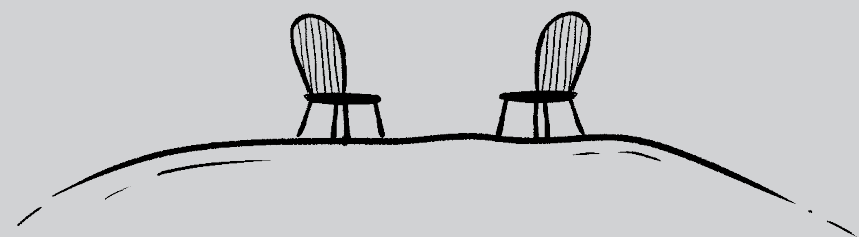
2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection
Read Matthew Luke 6:37-42 lout loud as a group.
What words or phrases stand out to you?
What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support
What is Jesus saying to you?
How do you feel about what he is saying?
How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps
What are you going to do in response?
Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:
Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.
Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote - read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.
Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Eight

08 | HOW MUCH BREAD DO YOU HAVE? DO YOU STILL NOT UNDERSTAND?

SCRIPTURE: Mark 8:1-20
MEMORY VERSE: Philippians 4:19 - *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*
SONGS
Do It Again by Elevation
Multiplied by Needtobreathe

DESCRIPTION:
Faced with an impossible need, the disciples focused on what they lacked. Jesus began somewhere else: “How many loaves do you have?” He didn’t ask for what they wished they had or what they thought they needed to feed everyone; he asked what they had. He was calling them to trust him with what was already in their hands. They did, and Jesus miraculously multiplied it to fill the need that was in front of them.

After miraculously feeding the crowd, Jesus later confronted their lingering anxiety with another question: “Do you still not understand?” Their greatest problem wasn’t a lack of resources or information; it was forgetting what they had already experienced. We often do the same. We fixate on what’s missing while overlooking God’s past faithfulness and the gifts he’s already entrusted to us. This week, Jesus invites us to stop measuring our limitations and start offering what we have, trusting that the One who has been faithful before will be faithful again.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: Exodus 4:1-5
¹ *Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’?”*
² *Then the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?”*
“A staff,” he replied.
³ *The Lord said, “Throw it on the ground.”*
Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. ⁴ *Then the Lord said to him, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.” So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.* ⁵ *“This,” said the Lord, “is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.”*

SCRIPTURE STUDY | EXODUS 4:1-5

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He’s saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you’re going to do in response to what you’ve read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

During a nationwide economic downturn, I was leading a mission trip for our high school students. As I looked at the amount of money we needed to raise, I assumed there was no way we could reach our goal. I immediately began scrambling. I spent all kinds of time researching cheaper alternatives, developing backup plans, and even considering canceling the trip.

Looking back, Jesus' questions in Mark 8 could have been directed at me: "How much bread do you have?" and "Do you still not understand?"

Like the disciples, I was focused on what we lacked in the moment rather than remembering that God had always been the one to provide. I spent countless hours worrying and working on solutions that were never needed. Through the generosity of His church, God provided every dollar we needed... and then He provided even more.

I had been operating with a mindset of scarcity, but God reminded me that His resources are not limited by our circumstances. When He calls us to something, He can provide what is needed to accomplish His purposes. My responsibility is not to panic, but to trust Him.

- Josh Rose

WEEK 8 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **WHAT’S IN YOUR HAND?** | Exodus 4:1-5

Ryan Paulson, Lead Pastor

Most of us think we’re one improvement away from being useful or successful. If I had more time... more money... more confidence... more training... then God could really use me. We think we need more to do more. Because of that conviction, we spend a lot of energy focusing on what we don’t have and minimizing what we do.

Moses had the same approach. When God called him to confront Pharaoh and lead Israel out of slavery, Moses immediately began listing his objections. He wasn’t convincing enough. He wasn’t qualified enough. What if no one believed him? Instead of answering all of Moses’ excuses, God asked a simple question: “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2). Moses replied, “A staff.” It was nothing special, just a shepherd’s staff he carried every day. Yet that ordinary piece of wood would become the instrument God used to display His extraordinary power.

God often works that way. He doesn’t usually begin with what we wish we had. He begins with what He’s already placed in our hands. Your “staff” may not look impressive. It might be the ability to encourage people. A home where you can practice hospitality. The ordinary tasks of raising the kids God has given you. The workplace to go to every day. A skill you’ve developed over the years. Your story of God’s faithfulness through suffering. A willingness to serve when no one else notices.

Whatever it is, don’t underestimate it. The question isn’t whether what you have is enough. The question is whether you’re willing to place what you have in God’s hands. See, the miracle was never in the staff; it was in the God who chose to use it. And the same God still delights in using ordinary people who surrender ordinary things. Don’t wait until you have everything you think you need. Faithfulness starts right where you are by offering what you already have.

Spend a few moments and reflect. Do you tend to focus on what you lack or on what God has already given you? What’s one thing already “in your hand” that you could offer to him today?

DAY 2 | **WHO WILL JOIN ME?** | Matthew 10:1-8

Amanda Ainsworth, Counseling Coordinator

God uses imperfect, ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes.

One of the most encouraging truths in Scripture is that God often chooses the people the world least expects. He calls ordinary, imperfect people and equips them for extraordinary purposes.

That’s exactly what we see in Matthew 10:1-8. After teaching, preaching, and healing, Jesus sends His disciples to continue His work. He didn’t choose the religious leaders or the most educated scholars. He chose fishermen, a tax collector, and other ordinary men. Their power didn’t come from their qualifications; it came from their relationship with Jesus. He gave them His authority and sent them to share the good news.

Have you ever heard of “impostor syndrome”? It’s the belief that you’re not qualified or capable, even when God and others have shown that you are.

If I’m honest, I’ve wrestled with those feelings myself. I didn’t grow up at Emmanuel Faith. I attended a small Lutheran church, drifted away during my early 20s, and spent those years becoming a wife, building a career, and raising a family while quietly longing for a church home.

In 2013, after living around the corner from Emmanuel Faith for five years, my husband and I decided to visit. We quickly knew it was where our family belonged. If someone had told me then that I would one day serve on staff in the Counseling Ministry, I wouldn’t have believed them. It wasn’t part of my plan, and I certainly didn’t feel qualified.

But that’s often how God works.

My story reminds me of Matthew 10. Jesus didn’t call people because they had the perfect story. He called ordinary people, gave them His authority, and invited them to trust Him. Their effectiveness wasn’t based on their qualifications but on their willingness to follow Him.

There’s a quote often attributed to Mother Teresa: “If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.” It’s a reminder that real change begins with the people God has already placed in front of us.

God isn’t looking for perfect people; He’s looking for willing people. When we stay close to Jesus, He empowers us for whatever He calls us to do. Maybe changing the world begins with simply saying yes to the place and the people He has already entrusted to you.

DAY 3 | **OUT OF OUR HANDS**

Kassie Lowe, Young Adults Lead

This Scripture passage is one of those stories I remember hearing in Sunday School growing up, typically using some object lesson of Goldfish and Ritz Crackers. The miracle Jesus performed always read to me like a party trick. My brain at the time couldn’t understand how any of it was possible. Looking back as an adult, the how of the miracle is still challenging, but the question is different. It’s less about “How did Jesus actually do this?” and more about “How do I participate in this?”

As a self-proclaimed control freak, I have always found surrender difficult. I want to be involved in the process and accurately predict the outcome. The tough part about that, though, is that God rarely works that way. Faith requires us to move before we know where we’re going

What we know about this crowd is that they’ve been following Jesus because they’ve seen him do miracles. They have faith because they have the evidence. So when this dilemma arises, I’d suggest they’re not skeptical that Jesus can perform another miracle.

I bet the kid who gave Jesus his lunch wasn’t thinking far enough ahead to predict the miracle. Yet, he gave Jesus what he had and let him control the outcome. This boy’s fish and bread were necessary for the miracle, but he couldn’t have multiplied them on his own. I think this boy somehow knew that his food was better off in Jesus’ hands than in his own. Surrender isn’t about return on investment; it’s about acknowledging that everything is better in God’s hands, not ours. This scene teaches us a few valuable lessons about what surrender in the Christian life actually looks like.

The outcomes are not ours — We have to allow Jesus to work without also trying to control the outcome.

Surrender isn’t complacent — The boy had to physically give up what was his in order for Jesus to multiply it.

Surrender often feels like loss — Before seeing or experiencing the abundance, we have to sit in the loss. The gifts we have now are most often a loan.

What would it look like if we loosened our grip on what we believe is ours? What would it look like if we surrendered our futures, jobs, finances, relationships, and families and let God do the rest?

DAY 4 | **SATISFIED** | Psalm 63:4-5

Judy Linscheid, Writing Team

*“Your unfailing love is better
Than life itself.
How I praise you!
I will praise you as long as I live,
Lifting my hands to you in prayer.
You satisfy me more than the
Richest of fare.
I will praise you with songs of joy.”*
Psalm 63:4-5

The people who came to see Jesus the day He fed the 5,000 had been there a long time. I picture men, women, and children sitting together, hanging onto every word our Lord spoke. They didn’t want to leave His presence. His words were life to them. The only food available came from a boy with five loaves and two fish. Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread, and distributed it to over 5,000 people. They ate as much as they wanted. He satisfied their hungry souls and their bellies. Isn’t that what He does for us, too? He is so good.

As humans, we don’t always know what we need most. We chase wealth, prestige, or power. Life experience often shifts that longing to security or safety. We know we need love, yet that need can show up as pride or a desperate search for approval. We swing between self-glorification and self-loathing. But at the core of our humanity, we long to be seen, known, and loved with an unfailing love. The longer I live, the more I realize how deeply I need this.

Only God’s unfailing love calms my fears and lifts my head. In His love, I have nothing to hide and nothing to prove. What others think of me—or even what I think of myself—matters far less. His unfailing love is better than anything our hearts desire because our hearts were created to desire Him. The gospel declares that He alone has the authority to accept us because He paid the price. He died to declare us holy, pure, and acceptable in His eyes. In Him we find a love we will never find anywhere else. This is the ultimate satisfaction. No amount of gourmet food, wealth, houses, cars, clothing, human praise, or self-love can compare to the unfailing love of our God.

I believe it was the presence of this amazing love that kept the crowd with Jesus that day, even when their bodies.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | Practicing Gratitude

Practicing gratitude is similar to practicing the Examen. It is looking back over your day, week, month or more and noticing blessings that God has bestowed in your life and the lives of others. Yet, having a heart of gratitude does require practice. As you ask yourself, “how much bread do you have?” and whether or not you understand what God is doing in your life, consider stepping into the following practices which will illuminate God’s provision and faithfulness. Practicing gratitude brings us to a place of recognizing where Jesus is inviting us to stop measuring our limitations and start offering what we have, trusting that the One who has been faithful before will be faithful again.

1. **PRAY ALOUD A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING:**

Psalms 7:17, 28, 30, 44:4-8, 57, 69:29-36, 89, 92, 95, 111, 138

2. **MAKE A HABIT OF REMEMBERING: (Psalms) 77:11**

“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.”

3. **SHARE WITH OTHERS ABOUT THE BLESSINGS YOU HAVE RECEIVED: (Psalms 105:2)**

“Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.”

4. **KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL: (Psalms 103:2)**

“O my soul, bless God, don’t forget a single blessing!”

Name a highlight in your day - Where did you see God at work?

What made you smile today? - What made you grateful?

What are you learning about yourself? - What are you learning about God?

Recall a time when you felt encouraged - Recount an answered prayer.

What do you love most about your spouse? Family? Friends?

What luxury are you thankful for?

What challenge have you overcome?

Recall a favorite childhood memory.

What is your favorite song? Food? Place to find rest?

What attribute of God is most significant to you?

5. **PRAY FOR A GRATEFUL HEART.**

Ask God to help you to notice - open your eyes to his blessings.

6. **NOTICING:**

Noticing draws our attention to the creation that surrounds us and the Creator who has formed a beautiful tapestry of goodness, mercy and grace right before our eyes. Noticing takes our attention off ourselves and invites us into God’s presence.

Go for a walk outside - just notice

Breathe deeply and slowly

Listen... Smell... Look... Feel

Ask God to reveal himself

Call out names of God

Call out his blessings

Be still and know

Group Questions

1. **Welcome & Check-In**

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. **FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection**

Read Matthew Mark 8:1-20 lout loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. **IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support**

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. **ON MISSION: Next Steps**

What are you going to do in response?

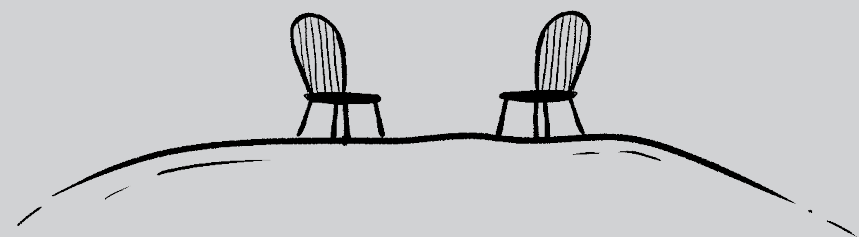
Who will you share this with?

5. **PRAYER:**

Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote - read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!



Week Nine

09 | DO YOU LOVE ME?

SCRIPTURE: John 21:15-25
MEMORY VERSE: Matthew 22:37-39 - ³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest command-ment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
SONGS:
Run to the Father by Cody Carnes
All of Me by John Legend

DESCRIPTION:
After Peter’s greatest failure, Jesus didn’t begin with correction or condemnation. Instead, he asked a simple, searching question: “Do you love me?” Three times Jesus invited Peter to reaffirm his love, not to shame him, but to restore him. It’s a fitting conclusion to the journey of discipleship. In the end, following Jesus isn’t primarily about getting everything right or proving our devotion through flawless performance. It’s about love.

Love is what fuels obedience, sustains faithfulness, and transforms us from the inside out. Every other question Jesus has asked ultimately leads here, because it’s all about love. Beneath our fears, doubts, failures, and desires lies one final question: Do you love him? This week, we’ll consider not only what we say with our lips, but what our lives reveal about the One we treasure most

SCRIPTURE STUDY PASSAGE: 1 John 4:7-21
⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.
God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love
¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | 1 JOHN 4:7-21

Response:

Engage the Text
Reflect on what word, words, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text, then write them down. What do you learn about God and humanity?

Sit with Jesus
1. What is Jesus saying to you?
2. How do you feel about what He’s saying?

Trust and Obey
Write down one thing you’re going to do in response to what you’ve read and what Jesus has said .

Teaching Notes

Years ago, if you had asked me if I was following Jesus, I would have said "yes." It was a time of ministry and serving at Emmanuel Faith as the Children's Director. I was following Him. But then a challenge came during a Sunday sermon by Dr. Bruce Wilkinson entitled "The Three Chairs." He asked if we wanted to be "first chair Christians" –all in and willing to follow Him in every area of our lives. It touched me deeply, and with tears, I told the LORD that I wanted to be in that first chair. That commitment led me to places bigger than I had ever imagined.

For years I had been blessed with the joy and privilege of serving and teaching children, but now God was calling me to something much bigger. I found myself teaching believers around the world about God's heart and deep love for children. For the next 10 years, I "followed Him" on five different continents, teaching thousands of children's workers. I continue to be amazed that God called an old lady from Escondido to that mission! You too might be amazed at what He calls you to do if you choose to follow Him.

-Francie Overstreet

WEEK 9 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS** | LUKE 14:25-33

Claire Williams, Executive & Welcome Coordinator

When we follow Jesus, we are asked to trust Him, take up our cross, and surrender everything to Him. This includes our relationships and saying goodbye to our past. The cost is real, causing suffering, pain, and persecution, but what we gain in Christ is far greater than anything we leave behind.

I was introduced to Jesus in high school at a running camp on Catalina Island. I was immediately captivated, and Jesus had my heart. But I was a new believer with no direction, and I did not yet understand the depth of His grace or the steadfastness of His love.

After college, I met a guy and his family who modeled God's unconditional love. Until then, my life had been marked by abandonment, verbal abuse, and rejection. My mother had always struggled to love herself or anyone else. When I publicly proclaimed my faith, her hostility only increased, and for years she belittled my beliefs and tried to undermine my relationship with Christ.

I spent years trying to earn my mother's love, only to discover that the love my heart truly needed had already been given through Jesus. His love is unwavering, limitless, and freely given by grace.

As my relationship with God grew stronger, I had to count the cost. Like the king Jesus describes, who carefully considers going to war, I had to decide what my relationship with Christ was worth. I knew I could not continue in a relationship that continually pulled me away from Him, so by God's grace, I chose to end that unhealthy relationship.

What I expected to bring heartbreak instead brought peace. God faithfully filled the place in my heart that longed for a mother's love with His perfect love, and He surrounded me with a godly family who encouraged me and helped shape my faith.

Following Jesus cost me a relationship with my mom that I desperately wanted, but God knew better what I needed than I did. I gained the assurance of a Father who will never leave me, a Savior whose love never fails, and the peace that comes from trusting Him completely. The cost of discipleship is real, but Christ is worth every sacrifice. He will fill the holes left behind with something far better.

What has following Christ cost you, and how has Christ responded?

DAY 2 | **THE POWER OF GATHERING** | Hebrews 10:24-25

Judy Linscheid, Writing Team

"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

COVID was a difficult time for people, especially for churches and groups that relied on human contact. I was fortunate to be an "essential" worker as an ER nurse, but I watched as my husband and daughter were forced to work from home. It took its toll on them emotionally. The church was supposed to close for two weeks, but two weeks turned into many months. We watched online during that time. I tried to sing along in my living room, but it just wasn't the same.

Fast forward to today. The world has reopened, yet one thing we learned during the pandemic time period was how to gather through Zoom and other online platforms. That's a wonderful option for those who are ill, homebound, or caring for young children. When my daughter had babies, getting to church was difficult, and I often stayed home to watch with her. The messages were just as good on TV as they were in person. But something was missing.

There is power in corporate worship. Some Sundays, I confess I'm just not feeling it when I drive into the parking lot. But as I sit down and begin to worship, I sense God's presence. My heart is touched in places I didn't know needed it. During communion, healing takes place, and I know it's not just me. I look around and see people meeting with Jesus. It's a beautiful thing. When I leave, there is a sweetness in the air. There may be no earth-shattering manifestation of power, but God is moving through His people.

Of course, fellowship is much more than attending Sunday services. It happens when we meet someone for coffee and share our hearts. It happens in small groups. It happens when we serve together. For me, helping with VBS is one of the highlights of summer. God's presence is there among those rambunctious little kids just as surely as it is on a Sunday morning.

I don't believe the mark of a faithful Christian is measured by church attendance or involvement in Christian activities. But I am discovering the richness that comes through genuine fellowship.

DAY 3 | **RAISED UP TO NEW LIFE** | Romans 6:4

Rodger Keester, Emmanuel Faith Elder

Growing up, I did not realize the significance of baptism. My first baptism was when I was eight days old. I grew up a believer and was later baptized by full water immersion in the church’s warm baptism pool. The space was safe and secure. The words from Romans 6:4 were spoken during the baptism, but I never realized the significance of really being identified in Jesus’s death and then Resurrection.

It was not until I was on a mission trip in Egypt that I began to realize the implications of and the meaning of baptism. On that day in Egypt, I watched believers from another Middle Eastern Muslim country who were refugees in Egypt show they had nothing but their faith in Jesus. I witnessed them studying the Bible in the morning and then preparing for baptism. It was explained to me that these believers were rejected by their families and would face death if they went back to their home country.

These bold believers lined up, willingly entered the waters, were submerged in them, and identified with Jesus’ death; then they came up into a brand new life with Christ.

Well, these brave brothers had been forsaken by much of their family because they left Islam to follow Christ, but I saw a reunification with several of them with their families. One brother was baptized by his earthly brother, and another husband baptized his wife, reunifying their families.

I was awestruck in wonder at the faith of these believers. But I’m always amazed at God’s love for us that, as Romans 5:8 says, “God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for our sins,” but living and providing an example for us through His own baptism.

These courageous brothers were not entering the water already worthy. They were coming out of it to walk in new life with Christ

DAY 4 | **THE PERKS OF “STEPPING OUT”**

Ashley Carr, Writing Team

If you talked to any of my close friends or family, you’d probably find out that I’ve been doing some pretty uncharacteristically “Ashley” things at the time of writing this.

I’d be happy to share more over a cup of coffee (if you’re curious about the details), but the point I’d like to make by mentioning this is that by “stepping out of the boat,” I’ve been learning quite a lot about myself, and, more importantly, quite a lot about God.

I think it’s wonderful that being Christians means we can focus on growing and not on results, though we often fall into the lie that results or “arriving” somewhere is somehow the point of being Christ’s. It’s not! He just wants to beckon us further up and further into Himself. Always and forever.

Another thing that my family and friends would probably tell you is that I’ve been camped in Romans chapter 8 this year. And would you know, a verse stuck out to me for the first time reading this passage again today? Here’s the part that jumped out at me: “Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them — living and breathing God!”

People love to point out that Peter began to sink when he got afraid, and how he “dropped the ball” after having such an epic moment of faith that allowed him to do the unthinkable — walk on water (and remind us we shouldn’t be like him when he faltered). But, with Peter and Abraham, it’s actually encouraging to me that both of them “failed” (and not once, but many times). Why? Because this means there’s hope for me if I fail, too. I think the main point is that they believed. And because they acted on that belief (poorly at times, and stumbling along the way), they learned.

We can only begin to see that God is with us if we get out of the boat. If we take that step, and give something we’re scared to do a try, does that mean everything will go perfectly? Does it mean we won’t fail or mess up again? Unfortunately, no. But as we “trust God’s action” in us, we’ll begin to see, more and more, “God’s Spirit is in [us].”

And isn’t this the Christian life, friends? Growing in trust and faith that God is with us, always and forever?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Over the last eight weeks, we have engaged in multiple different spiritual practices: The Examen – noticing where God has shown up in your day, Breath Prayers – declaring who God is, Visio Divina – seeing God through art, Practicing the Presence of God, The Wholeness Wheel, Practicing Relinquishment, Lectio Divina (Scripture Reading), and Practicing Gratitude.

Spiritual Practices are simply tools to help us grow. They are intentional disciplines that open our souls to God; to hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, to deepening our desire to spend time with Jesus, to coming to a deeper understanding of who God is and who He created us to be.

While good and necessary, Spiritual Practices are not limited to prayer or reading your Bible.

Spiritual Practices are intentional ways that we choose to engage every day with our Creator.

Following is a list of Spiritual Practices. These are just a few, but if you would like to explore more, we recommend the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Calhoun. Some of these hardly seem like “disciplines”, but when practiced with a heart to follow Jesus, they will help form you more and more into the likeness of your Savior.

As a “Next Step” following the Honest to God series, determine to practice one new Spiritual Practice each week until the end of the year.

PRACTICES OF WORSHIP

Celebration
Gratitude
Communion
Sabbath
Visio Divina

OPENING OURSELVES TO GOD

Contemplation
The Examen
Journaling
Rest
Retreat

RELINQUISHMENT

Confession
Detachment
Discernment
Silence
Solitude

LIFE WITH OTHERS

Accountability
Community
Discipling
Hospitality
Service
Life/Connect Group

HEARING GOD’S WORD

Bible Study
Lectio Divina
Meditation
Memorization
Praying Scripture
Witness

INCARNATE CHRIST’S LOVE

Encouragement
Compassion
Forgiveness
Humility
Stewardship

PRAYER

Breath Prayers
Fasting

Group Questions

1. Welcome & Check-In

Get to know any new group members.

Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?

Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

Read Matthew John 21:15-25 1out loud as a group.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

What questions do you have?

Identify and discuss other Scripture that was mentioned during the sermon and how it pertained to the focus of the message.

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

What is Jesus saying to you?

How do you feel about what he is saying?

How can your group support you?

4. ON MISSION: Next Steps

What are you going to do in response?

Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER:

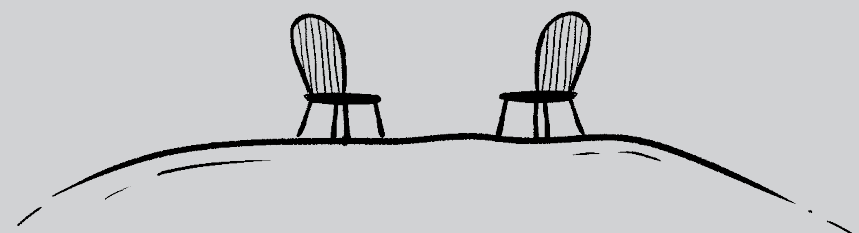
Revisit and add to your prayer list, then pray for one another.

Sometimes the pastor provides a prayer that an author wrote – read the prayer out loud, pausing to consider the significance of the words.

Pray from your heart! You have the privilege of having a conversation with your Creator!

Reflection

Take some time and prayerfully consider what Jesus has done in your life over the last nine weeks. How has He grown you? Where are you still being stretched? What are you thankful for? What do you sense your next step might be?



Appendix

Appendix

Icebreaker Questions

LIGHT & FUN

What’s your go-to comfort food after a long day?

If you could instantly become fluent in any language, which would you choose and why?

What’s a hobby you’ve always wanted to try but haven’t yet?

What’s your favorite place you’ve ever visited?

Coffee, tea, or neither, and how do you take it?

What’s a movie you can quote by heart?

What’s the best meal you’ve had in the last year?

What’s one thing that made you laugh this week?

If you could teleport anywhere for 24 hours, where would you go?

What’s one item you always have in your car?

NOSTALGIC & PERSONAL

What was your favorite toy or game growing up?

Who was your childhood hero?

What’s a memorable family tradition you had as a kid?

What’s the first concert you ever attended?

What’s a book that shaped you when you were younger?

LIFE & PERSONALITY

Are you more of a planner or a go-with-the-flow person?

What’s one thing that energizes you?

What’s one thing that drains you quickly?

What’s a small habit that’s made a big difference in your life?

What’s your ideal day off?

FAITH & FORMATION

Who first introduced you to Jesus or made faith real to you?

What’s one verse or story in Scripture that has stuck with you lately?

What spiritual practice has been most meaningful in this season?

What’s something God has been teaching you recently?

Where do you feel most aware of God’s presence?

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

What’s one thing you appreciate about this group?

What’s a recent moment when you felt encouraged or supported?

What kind of people help you feel safe and known?

What’s one area of life where you’d love to grow this year?

What’s something you hope to experience or learn through this group?

Resources for Further Study

Holy Curiosity by Winn Collier

Questions Jesus Asked by Megrey R. DeVega

Healing What’s Within by Chuck DeGroat

On The Road With Saint Augustine by James K. A. Smith



