



Speak Truth. Believe Truth. Live Truth

Kelly Collier

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Him; and you will grow to be like Him—this is the inevitable result of life in the Son. If I am not growing, this is where I will find the breakdown—in my relationship with Christ.

Be a follower and a learner. This is the essence of discipleship. There is always more to learn about our Lord. In fact, Revelation 19:11-12 tells us that Christ has a name that only He knows:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

Even in eternity we will still not know all there is to know about Him. He is that great! And yet, our great God graciously invites us to draw near to Him through our relationship with Jesus Christ. May you always take advantage of this gracious gift to *Consider Him!*

Dear Friend,

I was on my way back to America, starting the first leg of a long day of air travel. It was early in the morning—one of the first flights of the day—and I was seated next to an elderly Polish gentleman. My well-worn travel Bible was out on my lap, and I was reading in the book of Luke, snatching a few moments with the Lord in between the bustle of people boarding and getting settled. He politely interrupted me, “Excuse me, but is that a Bible?” That question led to a very interesting conversation. He was “Catholic” in name but, having grown up under the reign of communism, he had long since left off really believing in any god at all. He looked at my Bible with interest, like he hadn’t seen one in a very long time. He seemed puzzled that I would carry it with me, and even more, that I would read it. I told him, “This is my greatest treasure; it tells me about Jesus, who came to save me from my sins.” When I inquired if he would like to know more about this Jesus, he very politely refused. He was content to live with his own ideas about religion, content to remain in spiritual blindness.

The Bible recounts the story of a man who was blind both spiritually and physically. But he was not content to remain in that condition. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he cried out in desperation, “Jesus, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped. He heard and answered the cry of this man. That day Bartimaeus received his sight and immediately began following Jesus. This blind beggar knew who Jesus was and what He could do for those who came to Him in faith.

Jesus came to earth to “seek and to save” the lost. And He still delights in hearing and answering those who cry out to know Him. The gospels were written to show us Who Jesus is and what He is like. And like Bartimaeus, when we seek Him, our lives are changed forever.

I am glad that you have committed to study the Bible. Your desire to see Christ shows that you understand the immense value of searching the Scriptures for yourself. The value is increased even more when the sharpening influence of other Christians is added. I trust that you will grow spiritually in the coming months as you study the words and ways of Christ and then interact with others around our greatest treasure. God promises that we will be changed in eternal ways when we *Consider Him*.

Lovingly in Christ,

Kelly

For a new angle, look for the impact of Christ's teaching in the New Testament epistles. Expect the teachings of Christ to appear in the writings of Peter, John, James, and Paul—they learned this from Him!

- **Consider His Suffering:**
How did our Lord face suffering? Where was His focus in the face of distressing circumstances, betrayal, and death? What did He teach His disciples about suffering?
- **Consider His Serving:**
How was Jesus an example of a servant? Whom did He serve? How did Jesus use His time?
- **Consider His Union with the Father:**
Christ is one with the Father. Christ draws those who are united to Him by faith into fellowship with Him and, thereby, into fellowship with the Father. All that we have seen about Him in the gospels, He shares with us. We are not merely servants (although this is a high privilege indeed!), but children, friends, and fellow heirs. Read through the gospel of John and look for what Christ calls His followers. Record everything you learn about how He welcomes us into relationship with Him. What did He teach about our union with Him? Ask God to help you value and delight in this relationship just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit delight in one another.

The list of ideas could go on and on. Here is the point: *never stop beholding Jesus.*

Growing in Christ is not so much about putting on the individual character qualities of Christ (i.e., working on devotion, obedience, love, mercy, etc.), but rather, putting on a *Person*. Christ is the new man described in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3. We grow and change in and through our relationship with Him. Christ is called our *sanctification* (1 Cor. 1:30) because sanctification finds its source in Him alone. United to Christ, we share in His righteousness. Like a tulip bulb which holds all of the DNA for the bloom to come, the process of growth is simply “the unfolding of Christ’s own character within the believer’s life.”⁴ Behold Him, know Him, love

⁴ James Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, (Harper & Row, 1853), p.153.

Ideas for further study:

- Revisit an earlier lesson and spend more time studying a specific aspect of Christ's character, life and ministry—maybe one that caught your attention the first time you studied it. This time, read through an entire gospel. Each lesson introduction includes footnotes with recommendations for which gospel account to read for that particular subject.
- Do a simplified version of this study with a new believer, someone new to Bible study, or a child. Teach them how to get to know Christ through reading the gospel accounts together. Read a small portion of Scripture and write down anything you learn about Jesus. Talk about it. How can you apply what you are learning about Christ to your everyday life? Pray and ask God to help you grow to be more like Jesus.
- **Consider His _____.** You fill in the blank. Get creative. What interests you? Study an area of your life in which you need to grow in His likeness. Here are some ideas to get you started:
 - **Consider His Wisdom:**
Jesus Christ is the all-wise God. He taught with perfect wisdom and applied knowledge perfectly in His earthly life and ministry. Observe the gracious wisdom with which Christ answered opponents and enemies. Read His sermons. Sit beside the disciples as they listen to Jesus' teaching. What did Jesus teach? What impact did His teaching have on others? His wisdom is inexhaustible. Choose one category of His teaching from the list below. Next, choose a gospel to read through looking for this aspect of His teaching. Journal what you learn. Ask God to enable you to apply His wisdom to your daily life.
 - *What did Jesus teach about eternal life? What did He teach about heaven and hell?*
 - *What did Jesus teach about sin and its consequences?*
 - *What did Jesus teach about discipleship?*
 - *What did Jesus teach about prayer?*
 - *What did Jesus teach about possessions and wealth?*
 - *What did Jesus teach about hospitality?*
 - *What did Jesus teach about righteousness and the Law?*

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Before You Begin

Have you ever thought about what it would be like if God had not given us His Word? If we knew nothing about the Creator of the universe, the Sustainer of our lives? God designed every human being with an innate understanding that there is something more than just the physical world (Eccl. 3:11). If we are honest enough to admit it, we know deep down that this life is not all there is. We know there is a God. But to know there is a God without knowing what He is like—that is a terrifying thought. How would we ever hope to know how to please Him or to understand our purpose for being created? But He *has* told us. He *has* given us His Word. We can know God.

What is even more humbling to consider is that God doesn't just want us to know about Him. He wants us to know Him—to have a relationship with Him. The God who made the universe (Ps. 102:25), the God whose “greatness is unsearchable” (Ps. 145:3), the God who is beyond our comprehension (Job 37:23) is the God who graciously reaches out to sinful mankind and invites us to come to Him.

We can learn much about God's awe-inspiring power, gracious care, and sovereign control just by looking at the world He made (Ps. 19:1). But in an act of divine grace, God chose to reveal Himself in an even clearer way: He gave us His written Word. The Bible is all about Him. Every page of Scripture reveals His character. Open your Bible and behold His glory on every page. But even this priceless gift of divine revelation was not all God intended to share about Himself. He made Himself known by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, to live among us. John's gospel testifies:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14)

The apostle John declares that we can see the unseen God, because Jesus Christ has “made him known” (Jn. 1:14, 18). Through the life of the Son, we can come to know the Father, whose image Jesus perfectly represents (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). Jesus Himself said that those who have “seen Me” have “seen the Father” (John 14:9). As we open our Bibles, we can behold “the glory of God in the face of Jesus

that would be written” (Jn. 21:25).³ Even John, one of Christ's closest disciples who could claim to know Him better than any other person, understood that there was more—much more—to behold about his Savior.

If you have walked through this study, then you already have a wonderful start on your *Biography of Jesus*. But in each lesson we have only dipped into selected passages of Scripture to observe various aspects of Christ's Person and work. Like John and the other disciples, we can make the study of Christ a lifelong pursuit—and never exhaust the Subject!

Before setting this study on the shelf, consider taking some time to review what you have learned about Christ. Identify one or two key truths that impacted your life. What aspect of Christ's character has become more precious to you through this study? What spiritual truth became a part of your thinking as a result of your time in the Word? What changes has God worked in your heart and life as a result of beholding your Savior? Increase the blessing by sharing what the Lord is doing in your life with another believer. Give thanks to God for using His Word in your life and humbly seek His enabling grace to continue growing in these areas.

You may want to continue this study on your own in the future—perhaps taking one or two of the ideas below to study on your own for the next few months. Or you may want to move on to a new study and come back periodically to this one just to keep what you know about Christ fresh in your thinking. Whatever the case, it is my prayer that you will continue to grow in the knowledge of Christ every day and that you will continue to look diligently for Him as you read the Bible. He is on every page of Scripture. And He delights to reveal Himself to those who seek Him with all their hearts.

³ Jeffrey Kranz, *Word Counts for Every Book of the Bible*, (May 29, 2014); <https://overviewbible.com/word-counts-books-of-bible/>.

like his master (Lk. 6:40). In other words, the end goal of discipleship is for the disciple to bear the image of his teacher.

Closely related to the word “disciple” is another word often translated as “follow” (this word is used more than 92 times in the New Testament). The word “follow” is made up of two words: *union* and *road*. To follow means to unite with someone on their road and become a fellow-traveler. Jesus uses this word in John 10:27 when He says, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they **follow** me.*” In this case, Jesus is saying that a characteristic of all true sheep is that they will keep on following the Shepherd. Discipleship is an active, ongoing event (see also Jn. 15:8; Eph. 5:1; 1 Thess. 1:5-8). One author summarized it this way:

“The goal was for them not only to know what their teacher knew, but also to be like their teacher, to walk in his ways. They weren’t learning a subject; they were learning a person, if we can put it like that—his knowledge, his wisdom, his whole way of life. This is in part why ‘learners’ often followed their teacher around. They not only listened to their teacher’s words, but saw his words in action in his life, and sought to learn that way of life by being with him constantly.”²

A disciple is a learner who follows Jesus. Following Christ is how the disciples learned Jesus. So, although *discipleship* and *following* aren’t identical, they do go hand in hand.

Being a “learner of Christ” identifies us not only as His disciples, it also identifies one of our main functions as disciples: to continually learn of Christ. This is our task as long as we remain on this earth. Keep learning Christ. Keep following Christ. Keep beholding Him in the Word. Approach your time in the Word as a learner, eager to hear and apply what your Savior is showing you about Himself. And what is the end goal? A life that brings glory to God because it reflects the image of the Master.

At the end of his gospel account, after writing 15,635 words about the Person and life of Christ, John says this, “*Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books*

Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus came so that we could know God.

Who are we and what are we here for? How can we have a right relationship with God? We find the answers to life’s most important questions by looking to Jesus. By observing His life, we learn how to live. Christ shows us what it means to be truly human. He perfectly lived out the purpose for which each of us is created. Through His teaching, our hearts are exposed and we learn the true source of our problems and the only possible solution to fix them. He teaches us how to resist temptation, what it means to live in whole-hearted devotion to God, how to love our neighbor, and how to live a truly blessed life. Most importantly, He shows us the way to God. In fact, He is the way to God. We find everything we need by looking to Jesus. In his gospel, John continually invites his readers to *come* and *see* Jesus (Jn. 1:39, 46; 4:29). Through this study, I invite you to do the same.

A Biography of Jesus

This study is designed to help you get to know your God by helping you get to know Jesus Christ, His Son. It is simply a tool for you to begin your own “biography of Jesus.” Like an investigative journalist seeking to learn everything there is to know about a person, you can seek to know Jesus. Ask, *What do I know about Christ?*¹ and then find the answer as you read Scripture with an intentional focus on Him.

Consider Him is what you might call a “plow” study. Like a farmer covering large sections of ground in a field, our study on the life of Christ will move us through large portions of Scripture, fairly quickly. Since our goal is to gain a big picture view of the topics we are considering, we won’t stop to dig deep in every passage. As we look for various aspects of Christ’s life and ministry, the breadth of our study will help us build our biography of Jesus. By the end, we will have a more accurate picture of Who He is, what He is like, and what He came to do. The key to successful plow work is to prayerfully look for something or Someone as you read.

¹ Similar to the Bible study developed by Mardi Collier: *What Do I Know About My God?* (JourneyForth, 2006).

² Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project*, (Matthias Media, 2016), p.65.

Our reading will concentrate mainly in the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and in Acts. These 5 books of the Bible contain rich accounts of the life of Christ: His words and ways, what He taught and how He lived, and, most importantly, how and why He died.

The Bible gives us the wonderful promise that as we behold Christ we are gradually transformed into His very image (2 Cor. 3:18). It is through knowing Christ and growing in our knowledge of Him that we are given not only abundant grace and peace but also everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:2-3). *Everything*. What a promise!

Each lesson will lead you to consider a different aspect of Christ’s life, seeking to answer questions like *How did Jesus spend His time?* and *How did Jesus show His devotion to God?* As you read the assigned portion of Scripture and find an answer to your question, simply note the specific Scripture reference and then **journal** what you learn about Him. Stop along the way to make personal **application** to your life.

Consider the following example. Here is what your journal page might look like when reading Mark 1:14-15 while asking *How did Jesus spend His time?*

Journal Example:

Mark 1:14-15—Jesus constantly preached the “gospel of the kingdom of God.” He called people to repent and believe the gospel.

Application: Just as Christ spent His time telling others about eternal truth and their need to turn to God from sin, I need to use my time to tell others about the gospel. Set aside time to pray specifically for lost people I know. Ask God daily to make me alert to opportunities to share His truth.

After finishing your personal study, take time to **respond to God**. Writing out your prayer to the Lord, in response to what He has shown you in His Word, is a wonderful heart-habit to cultivate. For the journal example above, a simple response to God might look like this:

KEEP CONSIDERING HIM

Conclusion

One of my favorite narratives in Scripture is the account of the two disciples traveling together on the road to Emmaus. As Luke recounts the story, you can almost see them—walking side by side in the waning light of day, in hushed conversation, commiserating over the terrible tragedy they had just witnessed in Jerusalem.¹ Just days earlier, they had been convinced that the Teacher from Nazareth was the Messiah. But then they had witnessed the events of that fateful day: they had seen His violent crucifixion, and they had witnessed the moment when He drew His final breath. They couldn’t get the image of His lifeless body out of their minds.

Confused and fearful, they walked quickly, eager to get back to the relative safety of home. Along the way, another traveler joined them on the road. He just happened to be going the same way and casually entered into their conversation. Seemingly unaware of current events, the two friends share all the news with their new companion, little knowing His real identity. Can you picture the scene as it unfolded that afternoon? The risen Lord, the very author of Scripture Himself, provided a traveling theology lesson. How had they missed it? No doubt these two were well-versed in the Old Testament Scriptures, but they had missed seeing Christ there. They imagined only a Messiah who would come in triumph and glory, not a Redeemer who would come in humility to sacrifice Himself as a Lamb. Imagine the impact of that afternoon’s conversation! Forever shaped by Christ opening their understanding that day, every time they interacted with the Scripture in the future they would see their Savior.

One reason why I love this story so much is because it gives us a perfect picture of what discipleship is all about. The word “disciple” simply means a student or learner. Like a student, a disciple receives and follows the instruction of a teacher. Like an apprentice, a disciple is joined to a master craftsman to learn a trade. Jesus taught that the end goal of a disciple was for the one learning to become

¹ Luke tells the story in his gospel account, Luke 24:13-35.

Responding to God: Lord, you know how I tend to get consumed in my “own things” to the neglect of the spiritual needs of people around me. Please forgive me for not telling others about you. Help me to be alert and ready to take the opportunities for sharing the gospel with others. Help me to see people as eternal souls.

Finally, each lesson will provide you with an opportunity to **share** what you are learning with others. Take time to prayerfully think through the group discussion questions at the end of each lesson. Sharing with others not only helps cement truth in your own heart, but provides helpful accountability as well. God designed our growth to take place in community with other believers. *Speak truth, believe truth, live truth*—together.

Each lesson will follow the same pattern: search, apply, respond, share. It’s that simple. A Bible, a journal², something to write with, and this study guide—that’s all you need. It’s that simple.

One reason I love this study is because it is so simple. Simple enough to use with a child³, and yet, if we were to study for a lifetime, we could never learn everything there is to know about our wonderful Lord. In the same way, this study can easily be adapted to your skill level. New to Bible study? This study is for you. Seasoned studier? This study is for you. Regardless of how you view your ability, God promises to bless the humble efforts of those who seek to know Him.

Knowing God Takes Time

Any effort worth pursuing will require time and intention. Knowing God—the pursuit of a lifetime—is the same way. Bible study takes time and sacrifice. But when you consider the Treasure you are pursuing, it is no sacrifice at all! However, we all experience seasons of life when unexpected circumstances threaten to crowd out our daily time with the Lord. In those times, please prayerfully consider how you can stay faithful in your pursuit of God.

² Or print off pre-designed journal pages (available as a free download at beholdglory.org) to create your own journal.

³ This study is easily adapted to use with children of all ages.

Questions

In our family we like to say, “there is always a way to obey God.” Get creative. In an effort to make this study adaptable, each lesson will provide key passages under the study heading. If you don’t have time to read through an entire book of the Bible, simply read these suggested Scripture passages.

A variety of other suggestions for adapting this study are provided below. Experiment until you find what works best for you.

- Set aside an extended period of time during the week to read the assigned passage(s) or an entire gospel in one or two sittings. You will find this is time well spent!

Book	Chapters	Estimated Time ⁴
Matthew	28	2 hours
Mark	16	1 hour
John	24	2 hours
Luke	21	1½ hours
Acts	28	2½ hours

- Use a Bible App to listen to the assigned portion of Scripture while you read along in your Bible. This means of taking in Scripture engages your mind on multiple levels and may help you better concentrate. This is how believers in the first century learned about Christ. Before copies of God’s Word were available, they heard the Word of God read aloud.
- If you are a mom, consider doing this study with your children.
- If you have extra time and want a deeper challenge, try using a harmony of the gospels which puts all four gospels side by side.
- You may want to purchase a single-volume commentary on one of the gospels or a good study Bible to refer to when you run up against something that is difficult to understand.

⁴Time estimates taken from *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* by Mark Dever (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2005).

Responding to God

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Keep it Simple

Please don't be overwhelmed by this study. Keep it simple, as it is intended to be. As you read, ask God to give you a teachable spirit and spiritual understanding. Allow the power of Scripture to work in your life. David Helm gives this helpful encouragement in his book, *One to One Bible Reading*:

At one level, if you know how to read then you know how to read the Bible. The Bible is not a magical book, or a book that uses language in a completely different way from all other books in the world. All the normal 'methods' we use for reading things every day are the same methods we use for reading the Bible—noticing the context of what we're reading, observing the words and sentences and what they're saying, coming to a conclusion about the overall meaning, and then considering what implications it might have for our lives.

We do this naturally and without thinking about it when we read a newspaper article, a blog, a novel or a business report. Sometimes, however, we subconsciously leave these basic reading skills behind when we come to the Bible—perhaps out of reverence, or because we think that the Bible is in a different category of literature and not subject to the normal conventions of reading.

Now, of course, the Bible is a very different book. Its author is God himself, and its contents are utterly unique. All the same, God chose to communicate his divine truth to us in human language, and his words are written in a book that uses the same tools and conventions of language as any other book. ...The only necessary key to understanding the Bible is to approach it with a humble and contrite heart softened by the Holy Spirit, ready to listen to what God says, and just as ready to obey him.⁵

God wants you to know Him. That is why He gave us His Word and that is why He came to dwell among us. But getting to know God doesn't happen by accident. It requires intentional effort. It requires discipline of mind and time. It requires humility. This is God's will for you. And He supplies all the grace you need.

⁵ Helm, David, *One to One Bible Reading* (Matthias Media, 2011), pp. 41-42.

Application: If I believe this about Christ, how will I live?

Lined writing area consisting of approximately 35 horizontal dotted lines.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

- Hebrews 1:1-2a, 2:1 -

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him.

- Hebrews 3:1-2a -

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Hebrews 12:1-2 -

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

- Hebrews 12:3 -

How does Jesus manifest God's glory?

A series of 25 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

themselves to could go on and on. But each object of devotion is actually just a variation on the theme of devotion to self.

Devotion is not primarily an activity (although devotion will come out in the way someone lives) but, rather, an attitude of the heart. Devotion expresses itself in the thoughts dwelt on in the mind, the desires nurtured in the heart, and the decisions made in the will. The toddler thinks about the lovey. The toddler desires the lovey. The toddler acts on her desire by crying uncontrollably until the lovey is found. While we certainly mask our responses more effectively as adults, our devotion expresses itself in much the same way. The attitude of our hearts will always be expressed in observable ways in our lives.

We can expect to find a similar pattern in the life of Christ, with one exception: Christ's devotion was always well-placed. Since God is the only One worthy of whole-hearted devotion, we would expect to see Christ, in His earthly life, living out an attitude of loving loyalty to His Father. Christ never lived apart from this relationship. He was always consciously aware of His Father, always nurturing the godly desire to fellowship with and please His Father, and always making decisions that would honor His Father. In Christ we behold supreme devotion to the right Person. The attitudes and commitments of His heart were expressed in His life.

Let's consider His devotion.

Journal Pages

CONSIDER *His Glory*

(LESSON TWELVE)

Lesson One: STUDY

PREPARE

Because the Bible is unlike any other book, we must approach it unlike any other book. Math is often hard to understand. But a gifted teacher, combined with a willing learner, can usually overcome obstacles to understanding when they arise. When it comes to the Bible, however, simply “working harder” to wrap our minds around a truth we don’t understand is not a sufficient response. We need a teacher, and we need a willingness to learn.

Because of His great love for us, God has graciously provided the resource we need. He gave us the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to understand the truth of God’s Word. Isn’t it wonderful to know that the Lord actually wants us to understand what we are reading in His Word? He came to reveal Himself to us in order that we could know Him. He isn’t hiding or trying to make getting to know Him difficult.

Multitudes of people followed Jesus during His three years of public ministry. While thousands audibly heard His teaching, very few actually understood what He was saying. They were unable to hear with the ears of their hearts. They went away not understanding or embracing what He taught. They failed to ask the right questions. Although slow learners, we find a willingness to learn on the part of Jesus’ true followers. When the multitudes drifted away, “those around [Jesus] with the twelve asked him about the parables.” And Jesus was only too willing to explain “everything” and open the ears of their hearts to receive His truth (Mark 4:10; 34). We can follow their example by asking the right question: “Lord, what do you mean?” And our Teacher will graciously explain the meaning of His words to us too. God reveals the meaning of His Word to those who really want to know.

Do you want to know? God has provided the Teacher. You must provide a teachable heart. Approach your time in the Word with a spirit of dependence. God always blesses humility!

Before you open your Bible, you can pray something like David in Psalm 119:18, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”

SEARCH

Prayerfully read through the following suggested passages.¹ You may enjoy using a Bible app to listen to each passage while you follow along with a printed text of Scripture. Reading and listening at the same time can help you stay attentive.

The gospel accounts give us a window into the life of Christ. Through the following glimpses of His life, we can put together a more accurate portrait of a life lived in deep, loving, loyal devotion to God. Remember that these are not one-time events, but the continual, ongoing practice of His life.

As you read each passage, search for the answer to the question: How did Jesus show His devotion to God? Stop along the way to journal anything you learn about Christ in this specific area. Try to focus on the three areas of devotion highlighted in the passages below. There is so much to learn from Christ about His relationship to the Father! So much, in fact, that we will need to consider other aspects of His devotion to God in later lessons (especially regarding His devotion to God expressed in prayer and His commitment to Scripture).

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you understand what you are reading. You can also write your questions down to bring up later in your group discussion time.² Don't be afraid to let others know that you are confused or struggling to understand something. Chances are, someone else in your group is struggling in the same way. Everyone in your group will benefit from your humble transparency.

¹ If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of Luke and gain an even fuller picture of Christ's devotion to God.

² The pre-designed journal pages mentioned earlier include a sheet for writing down your questions.

3. The Father will answer Christ's prayer for His people recorded in John 17. He will bring us to Himself so that we can *see His glory*, and He will make us like Himself so that we can *share His glory*. How does knowing the heart of Christ toward you—even now as you struggle to grow—help you in your current battle with sin?
4. Our Savior entered His glory through suffering and promised that His children would also pass through suffering on their way to glory. Share a way you have seen glory forged out of suffering in the life of another believer (present or past). In what ways does this biblical theme of *suffering, then glory* help you in your current experience of suffering?
5. Use the space below to write down a few of your favorite words or phrases from John's description of Christ's glory in the book of Revelation. As a group, discuss how these glimpses of future glory should impact how we live today.

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. From the passages above, what aspect of Christ's glory impacted your heart and mind the most? In what ways is this truth changing you?

2. For believers, glory isn't a thing to pursue; it's a Person to know. How does God intend for believers to pursue that glory now?

In what ways could you involve your church family to better equip and encourage that pursuit of glory?

For Personal Reflection: What does this pursuit of God's glory currently look like in your life? Write down a way you could better behold and reflect His glory in your life.

Devoted to His Father's worship:

- Luke 2:40-52
- Luke 4:14-16, 31, 43-44
- Luke 6:6
- Luke 13:10
- Luke 19:45-48
- Luke 20:1
- Luke 21:37-38

Devoted to His Father's glory:

- Luke 3:21-22
- Luke 4:1-12
- Luke 5:17-26
- Luke 7:11-16
- Luke 13:10-13

Devoted to His Father's mission:

- Luke 4:40-44
- Luke 8:1
- Luke 9:11
- Luke 13:22
- Luke 18:31-33
- Luke 19:10, 28
- Luke 22:22, 37, 42
- Luke 23:33-46
- Luke 24:1-8, 13-27, 36-48

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Turn the questions on yourself now:

- *If I truly believe this about Jesus Christ, then how will I live?*
- *As I consider His devotion, how does my life compare?*
- *In which aspects of Christ's devotion to the Father do I most need to grow?*
- *What steps can I take, by God's grace, to more accurately reflect His devotion to God?*

Be specific, not general, in your application. For example, you might write, "I need to be a better witness." While such a statement is probably true, it likely won't translate into life-change. However, a more specific statement such as, "By God's grace, I will pray weekly

for my unsaved neighbors and invite them to come for a meal in order to build my relationship with them,” provides practical, intentional steps in which obedience can flourish. Take the time to write down any specific action steps you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God, praising Him for Who He is and asking for His help to grow and change in the areas where the Spirit has convicted you. Don't skip this step. Whether or not you choose to write out your prayer, this important step prompts you to respond to God by expressing your dependence on and gratitude to the Lord.

SHARE

Questions for group discussion are provided on the following page. Prayerfully speaking truth into each other's lives is the essence of discipleship. As we speak truth with and to one another, our faith is strengthened, and we grow in our desire and ability to live out what we believe in our everyday lives. Speak truth. Believe truth. Live truth.

For your times of group discussion to be most effective, please remember to speak to the entire group, rather than just addressing the group facilitator. This actually takes a lot of practice. Please make an effort to draw in every individual person in your group as you discuss what you are learning together. Don't waste time by staying on the surface. Dare to “go deep” with one another. This will require humility—not only to be transparent, but also to receive input and encouragement from others. It feels vulnerable to open our lives and hearts to others, but it is really a gracious gift from God when others speak truth into our lives.

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe that all glory belongs to Jesus Christ, then how will I live?*
- *Do I divert glory from God by seeking glory for myself in some area of my life?*
- *In what area of my life is God showing me that I need to more accurately reflect His glory?*
- *What action step might God want me to take that would demonstrate greater value of His glory?*

Take the time to write down any specific action steps you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer and praise for Him for His glory, His supremacy, His *firstness*. Thank Him for inviting you to share with Him in all that He is and all that He possesses—both suffering and glory. Ask for His enabling grace to live according to His promises—abounding in the hope of glory, a promise as secure as your union with Christ. Pray for your heart to grow ever more committed to pursue the right kind of glory, by beholding the glory of Jesus Christ in His Word. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following pages. Please be ready to share what you are learning.

Fully aware of the glory He possessed, Christ refused to seek glory for Himself:

- Matthew 16:27; 24:30; 25:31
- Luke 4:5-8
- John 5:41
- John 8:48-54
- John 17:1-5, 20-24
- Luke 24:13-27, 36-49

The glory of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension:

- Matthew 28:1-10
- Luke 24:1-12
- Luke 24:50-53
- Mark 16:1-8
- John 20:1-18
- Acts 1:1-11

The disciples' witness to the glory of the risen Christ:

- Acts 2:22-36
- Acts 3:1-16
- Acts 5:27-32
- Acts 7:54-60
- Acts 13:13-39
- Acts 9:1-6; 22:1-21; 26:1-23

The glory of Christ revealed in Revelation:

- Revelation 1:4-18
- Revelation 5:1-14
- Revelation 7:9-17
- Revelation 11:15-18
- Revelation 12:10-12
- Revelation 17:14
- Revelation 19:6-16
- Revelation 21:1-4, 22-23
- Revelation 22:1-5

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. Jesus is God, and yet He was constantly tending His relationship with God the Father while He was on earth. What was most impacting to you as you observed Christ's devotion to God?

2. The Old Testament Connection: Read Psalm 27:4 and 65:4. After reading about the devotion of Christ in Luke's gospel, do these Old Testament passages carry new meaning for you? In what ways is Christ the ultimate fulfillment of David's prayers?

3. What was Jesus Christ decidedly not devoted to? Is there something to which you are currently devoted that distracts from a whole-hearted devotion to God? Help each other as a group consider how these obstacles may be overcome, by God's grace.

4. Jesus calls His disciples to a life of whole-hearted devotion to the Father. (Read Luke 9:23-26, 17:33, and 18:22-30.) He honors those who display this kind of Christ-like devotion in their lives. When reading about the culmination of His devotion in His crucifixion and death, we might be afraid of what such a life of devotion will cost us. What does Jesus Christ promise His children, that—if we choose to believe His words—will alleviate our fears?

5. We can take courage from the lives of the disciples. Often wavering in their love and loyalty, we see the disciples at the end of Luke living in a very different way. Read Luke 24:50-53. Where do you find the disciples? What are they doing? How does this remind you of the way Christ lived?

6. Can you think of any other examples in Scripture of people who either did or did not live whole-heartedly devoted to God?

Like the disciples, we can also grow in loving devotion to our Lord. Take time to pray for one another.

³A few stand-out examples from Luke's gospel can be found in 2:25-38; 10:39-42. Devotion to self is also prevalent, especially in the lives of the Pharisees and the rich, young man in Luke 18:18-23.

One day we will fulfill our creation purpose and give God the glory He deserves. Picture this: a redeemed people, gathered together around His throne, singing glory to the Lamb who was slain. Believers will spend eternity gazing on and delighting in the glory of God. But we don't have to wait until *that day* to begin beholding His glory. We can start our pursuit of glory right now. As we open the Bible to behold the glory of God, the Spirit works in us to change us into the very image we are beholding (2 Cor. 3:18). We learn that glory isn't a thing to pursue; it's a Person to know. He shares His own glory with us because of our union with Jesus Christ. This is the glory we were ultimately designed to desire and pursue.

As you prayerfully read through the suggested passages below, look for references to His glory.⁷ As you work through the passages, consider:

- *How did Jesus manifest His glory during His earthly life and ministry?*
- *How will He manifest His glory in the future?*
- *What did Jesus teach about His glory?*
- *What difference should Christ's glory make in the lives of those who are united to Him?*

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. You can always write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time

Glory at Christ's birth and in His life (proclaimed, yet veiled):

- Luke 2:8-14
- John 1:14-18
- John 2:1-11
- John 12:37-43
- Luke 9:28-36

⁷If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire book of Revelation to gain an even better understanding of Christ's glory.

have seen condescending to touch an unclean leper, to comfort a grieving mother, to extend mercy to a prostitute...is the Lord of glory revealed in Revelation.

Not only did God reveal His glory through Christ, but He is also determined to reveal His glory in and through His people, the church (Eph. 1:3-14; 5:27). Why? Not because we are so glorious, but because it brings glory to His name.⁵ Glory belongs to God. He is the owner and source of all glory. He has declared that He will not share His glory with anyone other than the Son (Isa. 42:6-8; 48:11). And yet, remarkably, He shares it with His people.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for His followers and all who will believe in Him in the future:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:22-24)

Jesus prays in union with His Father's will, knowing that "far from hoarding his glory, the Father gives it, freely and fully to his Son."⁶ And because of His great love for the Son, He shares His glory with all who are united to Him by faith.

This promise of glory sounds wonderful...because it is! But the path to glory runs parallel to the path of suffering. Scripture we find suffering and glory paired together, like traveling partners on a common road. Many of our most beloved Bible stories carry this theme, but none more so than the life of Christ—who entered glory through suffering. Isn't it interesting that throughout eternity Christ will still be identified as "the Lamb who was slain" (Rev. 5:12)? It turns out His humility is His glory. United to Christ, the promise of being glorified *with Him* comes only after the promise of suffering *with Him*. Take heart, believer, your suffering leads to glory too.

⁵ "Though man is the recipient of God's great love in salvation (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4), he is not the ultimate concern of God's saving grace, God himself and the glory of his name are uppermost in God's affections." MacArthur and Mayhue, p.487.

⁶ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, (InterVarsity Press, 2012), p.70.

Journal Pages

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CONSIDER *His Devotion*

Responding to God

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Questions

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Lesson Two: STUDY

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God's truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. You might borrow David's words:

*Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my
salvation; for you I wait all the day long. (Psalm 25:4-5)*

SEARCH

Prayerfully read through suggested passages below. In the first lesson, we searched for the answer to the question: *How did Jesus show His devotion to God?* In this lesson, we want to explore this question further and look at the very heart of Christ's relationship with His Father. Specifically, *How did Jesus nurture His relationship with God through devotion to His Word and prayer?*

As you read through the first set of suggested passages, keep a careful eye out for any references to the Old Testament. In most Bibles, you can find cross references in the margin. This will help you get a fuller picture of just how devoted Christ was to Scripture.

As you read through the second set of suggested passages, pay attention to the kinds of things Jesus prayed about. When did He pray? What major events follow Christ's prayers? What do you learn about Christ's attitude towards His Father by the way He prayed?

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. Please don't get stuck and give up. If you are struggling, simply write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time and move on to the next reference.

²If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of Luke and gain an even fuller picture of Christ's devotion to God.

Journal Pages

CONSIDER *His Humility*

(LESSON ELEVEN)

Devoted to His Father's Word:

- Luke 4:1-13
- Luke 4:14-30
- Luke 4:31-32
- Luke 6:1-5
- Luke 7:20-23; 24-28
- Luke 20:9-18; 27-47
- Luke 22:37
- Luke 24:13-35; 44-48

Devoted to communicating with His Father:

- Luke 5:15-16
- Luke 6:12-19
- Luke 9:18-20
- Luke 11:1-13
- Luke 18:1-14
- Luke 22:31-34
- Luke 22:39-46
- Luke 23:32-49

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe this about Jesus Christ, then how will I live?*
- *As I consider His devotion, how does my life compare?*
- *What steps can I take, by God's grace, to become a better listener? What needs to change in my life so that I grow to think, value, and live by God's words like my Savior did?*
- *What steps can I take, by God's grace, to become better at talking to God through prayer? What needs to change in my life in order to make prayer a centerpiece of my relationship with God?*

Take the time to write down any specific *action* steps you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God, praising Him for Who He is and asking for His enabling to grow and change in the areas where the Spirit has convicted you. Express your dependence on the Lord. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Thoughtfully consider the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning with other believers. These times of discussion and fellowship around God's Word fulfill an important discipling role in one another's lives.

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. Jesus is God, and yet He constantly tended His relationship with God through **prayer**. Jesus is God, and yet He never lived apart from **God's Word**. What was most impacting to you as you observed these aspects of His devotion to God?
2. *The Old Testament Connection*: Read Psalm 119:9-16. All 176 verses of this beautiful psalm reflect on the glorious nature and value of God's Word. Verses 9-16 provide a portrait of a person whose heart is fully engaged with Scripture—mind, desires, and will. How do these verses remind you of Jesus and what you observed about Him in the gospel of Luke?
4. Describe the difference between *doing* acts of service and *being* a servant. With this difference in mind, what do you think it looks like practically to become a Christlike servant (i.e., living with the mindset that *God is all, self is nothing, and others are more important*)?
5. Peter was in the upper room on the night Jesus took off His outer garments and wrapped Himself in the clothing of a servant (Jn. 13:4). And in the hours that followed, Peter watched as the One who is highest and greatest took the lowest place. Read 1 Peter 5:5-7 with the backdrop of John 13 in mind. What do you think clothing yourself in humility looks like in a twenty-first century context? Consider both your relationship to God and others—especially those who are in the body of Christ.

End your time together thanking Christ for all that His humility brought to you. Pray for the heart of John the Baptist to be yours: *He must increase, but I must decrease* (Jn. 3:30).

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. From the passages above, what aspect of Christ's humility impacted your heart and mind the most? In what ways is this truth changing you?
2. We can easily fear taking the low place because of what it might cost us. What did Jesus teach about humility that encourages you to embrace the position of a servant?
3. What connection did Jesus make between humility and faith? Why do you think Jesus most often used little children to illustrate this connection? Write down one suggestion to share with your group about how a believer might become more like a child in her relationship with God.
3. Christ lived by God's words—every thought, desire, and action governed *by* His Father's thoughts, desires, and will. One day we will perfectly reflect our Lord's whole-hearted devotion. But for now, this is something in which we must intentionally grow. Take a few minutes to brainstorm—can you think of any Bible characters who fit this category? People whose lives were consistently governed by God's Word? Write their names in the space below. What about their lives particularly encourages you? ³
4. When tempted by Satan, Christ responded firmly and confidently, "It is written," and then applied relevant Old Testament Scripture to each specific temptation. What temptation(s) are you currently facing? What specific truth(s) from God's Word do you need to apply to meet that temptation with grace?

³ Paul learned to imitate Christ in this way. In fact, Paul uses the same words as Jesus, "It is written," 35 times in the New Testament. It was said of John Bunyan that, if you pricked him, he would "bleed Bible." I think this could be said of the Apostle Paul too. He constantly referenced Scripture. He took to heart the words of Christ, "man shall not live by bread alone." I wonder if he knew Psalm 119 by heart. I am sure Christ did!

5. Prayer was a central feature of Christ's life and ministry. Write down some ideas (based on what you observed in Christ's life) about how you can intentionally make prayer more of a central feature of your life. Share ideas as a group, then choose one you plan to personally implement.
6. A friend approaches you with this request: "I want to grow in my relationship with God, but I don't really know how. Can you help me?" How can you use what you learned from observing Christ's relationship with God to help disciple her?⁴

- Mark 14:53-65
- Mark 15:1-47

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *How will I live if I truly believe in and value the humility of Jesus Christ?*
- *How does Jesus' teaching on humility reveal pride in the way I think and live?*
- *What steps do I need to take to become more like a child in my relationship with God?*
- *How can I better live out the reality that God is all, self is nothing, and others are more important?*

Take time to write down any specific action steps you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer and praise for the humility of our Savior. Because Jesus came in humility, lived humbly for the glory of the Father, and humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross, we can become children of God! He took the lowest place, in order to give us access to the highest place. Rejoice in the grace brought to you through His humility. Thank Him for giving you His humble mind through your union with Jesus (Phil. 2:5). Ask Him to enable you, by His grace, to become more like your humble Lord. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning.

⁴ Maybe your "friend" is a child. Be careful not to underestimate the ability of a child to relate to God. Our Lord invited children to come to Him (Mt. 19:14). A simple resource for teaching children about relating to God can be found at beholdglory.org (*What Does God Say About Growing in My Relationship with Him?*).

- John 12:20-28
- John 15:4-5
- John 15:13

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...

- Luke 4:5-8
- John 5:19
- John 5:30
- John 5:41
- John 6:38
- John 7:28-29; 8:28, 42
- John 8:50
- Matthew 11:25-30
- Matthew 21:1-5
- John 1:1-5; 13:1-17

But emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men...

- John 1:9-18
- Matthew 1:1-25¹⁸
- Matthew 2:1-23¹⁹
- Luke 1:26-56
- Luke 2:1-20

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by coming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross...²⁰

- Mark 8:31-33
- Mark 9:30-32
- Mark 10:32-34
- Mark 14:32-50

¹⁸ Notice especially the **people** listed in Christ's genealogy. With what kinds of people was Jesus identified in his birth?

¹⁹ Notice especially the **places** with which Jesus is associated in his birth and life. The common sentiment of the day was reflected in Nathanael's skeptical comment: *Can anything good come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:46).

²⁰ For another view of the same story, read the gospel according to Isaiah, written centuries before the events recorded in the book of Mark. See Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Journal Pages

CONSIDER *His Devotion*

(LESSON TWO)

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God’s truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. In Isaiah, a book that speaks so clearly and beautifully about our humble Lord and Savior, we are given a precious promise from God:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

(Isaiah 57:15-16)

Pray that God will use this study to humble you. Ask him to enable you to value the humility of Jesus Christ as much as He does. For humility opens the door to the greatest blessing of all: dwelling in the presence of God!

SEARCH

If we are going to consider His humility, then we have to know what we are looking for. What is humility, exactly?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, humility is “the quality of not being proud because you are aware of your bad qualities” and “the feeling or attitude that you have no special importance that makes you better than others.”⁷ The Oxford Dictionary concurs, defining humility as, “a modest or low view of one’s own importance.”⁸

But if you think of these definitions in relation to Christ, they are found wanting. After all, Christ, the perfect Son of God, doesn’t have any bad qualities. And having a low view of His importance would not be virtuous since it would be entirely wrong. Because Jesus Christ is God, He is of supreme importance.

⁷ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/humility>

⁸ <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>

Lesson Three: INTRODUCTION

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What is love? Have you ever tried to put into words a simple, concise answer to that question? Give it a try and you will discover that love is surprisingly difficult to define. Like trying to define “life”—we know what it is because we observe it all around us and even enjoy it personally—and yet, we just can’t quite put into words exactly what it is. Our first-century friends had a hard time defining love too. In fact, biblical love is so vastly different from the sensual, emotion-driven love we most often refer to as humans that the writers of the New Testament created a whole new word for it: *agape*.

Perhaps rephrasing the question will help us define love more accurately. We should ask, “*Who* is love?” When trying to tell us what love is, the gospel-writers show us a Person. John says that God’s love is revealed to us through His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 4:9). So, to define love, all Paul had to do was describe the way Jesus Christ lived (1 Cor. 13).

From observing the way our Savior interacted with others, we get a front-row seat to observing the disposition of God toward us. Love encompasses an attitude of benevolence, good will, and affection. But love is more than an attitude. It also involves words and deeds, self-giving and sacrifice. Putting all of these ideas together, we get a full-orbed picture of love: *giving of self in order to benefit another*. Christ Jesus gave of Himself to the ultimate degree in order to benefit us to the ultimate degree.

From this description, we can see that love must involve more than one person. Love is relational. It always has an object. Good-will and affection must have an outlet. As you read through the suggested passages for this lesson, consider the specific objects of Christ’s love. He loved individuals. And He loved them, not because of who they were or what they could do or for any love they might return to Him. He loved out of His own initiative. He loves because He has chosen to love. His love is “uncaused and undeserved.”¹

¹ Tozer, A.W., *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Harper & Row, 1975), p.104.

A new commandment I give to you...

What Jesus taught about love:

- Mark 12:28-34
- Luke 6:27-36
- John 13:31-35
- John 14:15-24
- John 15:9-17

While we were yet sinners...

Recipients of His love:

- Mark 7:24-37
- Mark 8:22-26
- Mark 9:14-27
- Mark 10:13-16
- Mark 10:17-34
- Mark 10:46-52
- Luke 7:36-50
- John 11:1-44

“Love with shoes on” to the ultimate degree:

- Mark 14:22-72
- Mark 15:1-39
- John 19:23-30

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe this about Jesus Christ, then how will I live?*
- *As I consider His love for others, how does my life compare?*
- *What steps can I take, by God’s grace, to better reflect His love to others—in attitude, word, and action?*
- *Who does God want me to move toward in relationship in order to showcase His love to them?*

Journal Pages

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CONSIDER *His Emotions*

(LESSON TEN)

Take the time to write down any specific *action steps* you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God, the altogether lovely One. Praise Him for His abounding, never-ending, *personal* love. Ask for His enabling to grow in reflecting His love to others. Express your dependence on the Lord. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning. And you don't have to wait until your next group meeting. Open up to a family member, phone a friend, engage a neighbor—share something that impacted you about Christ and His love.

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. Do you find that sometimes your most unloving actions and attitudes are directed toward those you actually love the most? What did you learn from observing Christ's interactions with His closest followers? Identify one way you can begin applying what you learned to a close relationship in your life.
2. What did Jesus teach about love that stood out to you? Is there an aspect of His teaching that you find difficult to believe or obey?
3. List several ways that biblical love (agape) differs from what our culture defines as love. As a group, discuss what it might look like to live out this kind of love toward an unsaved family member, neighbor, friend, or co-worker.
7. The more mature a Christian becomes, the more stable she will become emotionally (not in the depths of despair one day, euphoric happiness the next). Greater consistency mirrors the stability of Christ. What did you learn in this study that might help you lovingly challenge and encourage an emotionally unstable person?

4. Think through your own emotional responses over this past week. *In what did you delight? Over what did you sorrow? What provoked your anger? What did you fear? In what did you rejoice?* What do your emotions reveal about your values?

5. If the Lord revealed an ungodly emotional pattern in your life, He wants to help you change. Use the space below to write out several specific actions steps you need to begin taking to change by God's grace.

6. What cultural views about emotions do you think you are better prepared to counter because of what you have learned about Christ (*e.g., I can't help how I feel or I must follow my heart*)?

4. The gospel accounts show Christ demonstrating love to a whole variety of people. Which of these accounts resonated the most in your life? Why?

5. Just as Christ revealed God's love to us, God makes His love visible to the world through our love (1 Jn. 4:12). Is there anyone you find difficult to love? Do you think this individual has learned an accurate picture of God's love by the way you treat them? Use the space below to apply the example of Christ to this relationship.

6. In and of ourselves, we could never hope to live up to the standard of love described in 1 Corinthians 13. But united to Christ, we have every hope of being able to grow to become more like our loving Lord. What step(s) can you take to nurture that growth?

7. In his first epistle, John spells out the purpose of Christ's love: that we might live through him (1 Jn. 4:9). His sacrificial death resulted in life for those who trust in Him. Love is costly. But like our Lord, death to self nurtures life in others. In what way do you believe God wants you, in your current season, to nurture life in others by dying to yourself?

8. Love is one of the most frequently mentioned attributes of God in Scripture but also the aspect of God that we most often question when we suffer. After giving of Himself to the fullest degree, is it right to require Him to do more to prove His love for you? Using what you learned in this lesson, discuss how to practically help shepherd someone who chronically doubts God's love. How can they move from fearful insecurity to humble rejoicing in the truth of God's unfailing love?

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. Take a few minutes to glance back through your journal notes. As you do, write down any truths about the emotions of Christ that impacted your heart. How are these truths changing you?
2. How has your view of emotions in general changed or been enhanced by studying the emotions of Christ?
3. What connection did Christ make between feelings and faith? Why is it so important that we understand this connection as we seek to grow in Christlikeness?

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *How should understanding the sinless emotional life of Jesus change how I live?*
- *What connection did Christ make between feelings and faith? What does this teach me about the role of God’s Word in cultivating and expressing righteous emotions?*
- *Is there an ungodly emotion I need to put to death and a righteous emotion I need to cultivate in its place?*

Take the time to write down any specific *action steps* you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer. Express your worship to the Lord, who lived before us with truly healthy, Spirit-filled emotions. Marvel at His fear of God, compassion toward others, tears over sin and death, and delight in His people. Rejoice in the grace of the gospel—humbly admitting your need of forgiveness for your own disordered emotions and asking for His enabling to become more like Jesus. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning.

Journal Pages



CONSIDER *His Love*

(LESSON THREE)

Responding to God

experienced and displayed the full range of human emotions without any sin.”⁵ His emotions always accurately reflected His godly thoughts and values.⁶ He walked through fearful situations. He faced great losses. He knew great joy. And in the life of Jesus, we see the proper emotional response in every circumstance. He was angry about the right things. He delighted and rejoiced in the right things. He cried about the right things. He never cried selfish tears or nurtured a spirit of jealousy or bitterness. His heart went out in compassion to the needs of others, never self-absorbed by His own suffering and pain. The Lord of peace never gave in to the temptation to fear or be anxious. He despised the shame heaped upon Him by others. In the face of deep distress He was stable, confidently trusting His Father. He always experienced the proper degree of emotions—in perfect balance. As one author so aptly put it: “He was not only the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, but he was also the man of joy, acquainted with delight.”⁷ Every day of His earthly life, as “*the image of the invisible God*” (Col. 1:15), our Lord experienced and displayed proper, God-imaging emotions.

What do you laugh about? What sparks fear in your heart? What stirs anger in you? What brings tears to your eyes? Emotions express the things we value, care about, and for which we hold deep loyalties. We are tempted often to think of emotions as manufacturers, but it seems more accurate to think of them as reflectors of our hearts. But it is also important to understand that emotions aren’t just something we feel. They are also something we do.⁸ Emotions were designed by God to be a catalyst to action. Godly anger moves us to act in response to injustice. Proper fear prompts us to flee danger. Godly compassion motivates us to relieve the suffering of others. However, if our emotions are not aligned to God’s truth, then the actions prompted by our emotions will also be out of line with what God says is good and right. In Jesus we see the perfect aligning of His inner man with the truth of God’s revealed

⁵ Ibid, p.149.

⁶ There is a distinction between our *emotions* and *affections*. Affections refer to our desires, the things we cherish deeply in our hearts, formed by our beliefs and eventually expressed in our wills. While affections are not emotions, they are emotionally charged.

⁷ Ibid, p.154.

⁸ Borgman, p.103.

“The feeling, sovereign God of the Bible has revealed his glory to us in his Word so we would not simply know him and think his thoughts after him, but also feel his feelings after him.”² Learn to feel like God feels? Yes! This is possible for the believer. As with our other studies in this series, we can look to Christ to show us the way. He is “man as man ought to be.”³ By considering His emotions, we can see more clearly where our emotions don’t align to God’s righteous character. And because of our union with Him, we can embrace His grace to put ungodly emotions to death and apply His grace to cultivate emotions that look like Jesus.

² Ibid, pp.206-207.

³ Ibid, p. 149.

Emotions add color to our lives. Without them, we would lack an important quality of responsiveness that enables us to interact with God, each other, and the world around us.¹ God designed our capacity to *feel* as a way we image His likeness. And yet, the fall of man in the Garden corrupted *every* part of us—including our emotions. Joy, peace, delight, hope—emotions that marked an unspoiled creation—gave way to fear, anger, shame, sadness, jealousy.

You have likely walked through seasons when you experienced debilitating emotions. Controlled by sadness, hopelessness, sinful anger, or fear. Like my son, we might ask, “*What is wrong with me?*” “*Why am I such an emotional wreck?*” And in the face of overwhelming feelings, we often do things we might never have thought possible just to escape and find relief. We look in all the wrong places to regain our peace and joy, we take delight in the wrong things, we set our hope in things other than God. At times, our emotions are so strong, it feels like we have no choice but to indulge them. But this is not true. Emotions are real, but they are not ultimate and they do not have the final say in the life of a believer. Believers are not allowed to live by their feelings.

Somewhere along the way, the Christian community began accepting the narrative that our emotions belong in a separate category—relegated to a far corner of our lives where God’s Word and God’s Spirit don’t reach. We think, even if subconsciously, that our emotions are somehow exempt from God’s care and beyond the scope of His transforming grace.

The Bible doesn’t teach this. The gospel transforms lives, not in part, but wholly, making all things new—and that includes our emotions. Just like every other part of our personhood, we have hope that our emotions are in the process of being redeemed. In fact, as we grow in Christlikeness, we can also expect to more faithfully reflect the emotional life of our Lord.

¹ In his book, *Feeling and Faith*, Brian Borgman uses the following definition: “*The emotions are an inherent part of what it means to be a person; they express the values and evaluations of a person and influence motives and conduct.*” (Crossway, 2009); p.26

CONSIDER *His Identity*

Lesson Four: INTRODUCTION

History abounds with fascinating characters: Hannibal, Alexander the Great, Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Napoleon, Billy the Kid, Benedict Arnold. Too many books to read and so little time! My husband and I enjoy reading biographies, mostly because we have discovered that truth is indeed stranger than fiction. One of our recent favorites: the 1152-page tome by Andrew Rogers on the life of Winston Churchill. When writing *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*, Rogers was granted access to a host of archived documents never before available to biographers of Churchill’s life. As such, he was able to capture Churchill’s life as never before—from his birth on November 30, 1874 to his death on January 24, 1965.

One account from Churchill’s early school days reads like a piece of modern-day prophecy. At the age of 16, Churchill and his schoolmate, Muirland Evans, discussed what they thought the future might hold for them. Sir Evans recalls his friend declaring,

“Well, I can see vast changes coming over a now peaceful world; great upheavals, terrible struggles; wars such as one cannot imagine; and I tell you London will be in danger—London will be attacked and I shall be very prominent in the defense of London.”

“How can you talk like that?” I said; ‘we are for ever safe from invasion, since the days of Napoleon.’

“I see further ahead than you do. I see into the future. This country will be subjected somehow, to a tremendous invasion, by what means I do not know, but [warming up to his subject] I tell you I shall be in command of the defences of London and I shall save London and England from disaster.”

“Will you be a general then, in command of the troops?”

“I don’t know; dreams of the future are blurred but the main objective is clear. I repeat—London will be in danger and in the high position I shall occupy, it will fall to me to save the Capital and save the Empire.”¹

¹<https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/shall-one-save-london>, accessed on October 11, 2022.

Amazingly, this conversation happened in 1891, before Nazi Germany even existed. Churchill went on to live a very colorful life of dedicated service to his country. He pursued his chosen destiny with fervor. As implausible as it might seem, his school-day predictions eventually came true.

For all the famous and fascinating people in history, not one of them compares with Jesus Christ. Unlike Churchill, Jesus didn't walk with destiny; He created His own destiny—something no other human being can claim. He was never uncertain about His mission. He knew who He was and what He was born to do. And thankfully, we don't have to wade through historical archives to piece together a portrait of the life of Jesus. He tells us plainly who He is—not in vague terms, but in clear, objective statements found in His Word.

Who is Jesus? One could argue that this is the most important question we could ever ask. John, one of Christ's closest apostles, agrees. This question arises throughout his gospel—in a variety of settings and from a variety of people. John wants us to ask and answer this question...because Jesus Himself wants us to ask and answer this question. There's a lot at stake. Our eternity depends on getting the answer right.

A well-written history draws the reader in, inviting him to know the subject of the book more intimately. Like an excellent biographer, John summons his readers to draw near in order that they might know—and come to believe in—the Subject of his book. But rather than simply telling us who Jesus is, John allows Jesus to speak for Himself. In fact, Jesus says so much about Himself, we are going to have to split this question into two lessons.² First, we will focus on several key passages where Jesus clearly identifies Himself. And then, in the next lesson, we will consider various witnesses that authenticate His testimony about Himself.

Unless a reader is willfully blind, they can't possibly miss what Jesus says about himself in the gospel of John. Jesus tells us plainly who He is, what He is like, and what He came to do.

² If you want to go deeper on this one question, consider reading through the entire gospel of John to further explore the identity of our Savior.

CONSIDER *His Emotions*

Lesson Ten: INTRODUCTION

Were you assigned *Where the Red Fern Grows* in your fourth grade reading class? Without a doubt, this classic by Wilson Rawls was my favorite book as a young girl. I read it over and over again. And even though I knew the ending by heart, I cried again, every time I read it. A few years ago, I decided it was time to introduce one of my sons to Billy's world in the Ozark mountains and one of the best stories ever written of love and loyalty between a boy and his dogs. As we neared the end of the book, my son—not usually given to emotion—began to fight back tears. As Billy lost first old Dan, and then little Ann, it became too much for him. Between choked sobs, he accusingly asked, "Why did you read this book to me?!" (As if I was the worst mother to read him a book that would break his heart.) We cried together, finished the book, and then wanted to read it again. Some books are just that good.

It was quite a different story when I got a hankering to revisit *Anne of Green Gables*. With three boys, my home has more dirt than drama. And we certainly never talk about being "kindred spirits." So, I shouldn't have been surprised by the reaction of this same son as we settled in to watch this movie from my childhood together. Initial confusion quickly morphed into increasing consternation at the hysterical red-headed girl on the screen. Never again will I think of Anne as I regarded her in my pre-teen years; my view of her forever changed by the running commentary of my nine-year-old son: "What is wrong with her?" "Why is she acting that way?" "Why is she so dramatic?!" The emotional life of girls was a complete mystery to him. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do before he is ready for marriage.

Our favorite books and movies make us laugh, and they make us cry. A good story draws out our emotions as it connects us to the larger stories of life: courage in the face of overwhelming circumstances, hope displacing grief, good triumphing over evil, loyal friendship enduring when all else fails. Isn't it interesting that we are inherently drawn to stories that make us feel something deeply? No one can deny we are emotional creatures.

As you consider this question, don't miss the heart of God in the revelation He has given us—He *wants* us to know who He is because He *wants* to have a relationship with us. And Jesus is the door into that relationship. If we are to know God, we must first know Jesus Christ. *Come* and see Jesus for yourself in the gospel of John!

How did Jesus demonstrate mercy?

[Dotted lines for writing]

Journal Pages

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CONSIDER *His Identity*

(LESSON FOUR)

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. You can always write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time.

“He has visited and redeemed His people...”⁵

- Luke 1:46-55
- Luke 1:67-79
- Luke 4:14-21

“Those who are well have no need of a physician...”

- Luke 5:12-13
- Luke 5:27-32
- Luke 7:11-17
- Luke 7:18-23
- Luke 7:36-50
- Luke 8:26-39
- Luke 8:40-56
- Luke 9:37-42
- Luke 13:10-17
- Luke 18:35-43
- Luke 19:1-10
- Luke 23:32-33, 39-43
- Matthew 15:21-28
- Luke 5:1-11; 22:31-34, 54-62; John 21:1-17

“Because of the tender mercy of our God...”

- Luke 18:31-34
- Luke 23:13-38, 44-46

“Blessed are the merciful...”

- Luke 6:27-38
- Luke 10:25-37
- Luke 17:3-5
- Matthew 5:7
- Matthew 9:13 (*also 12:7*)
- Matthew 18:21-35
- Matthew 20:1-16
- Matthew 23:23

⁵ God gloriously displays His mercy by fulfilling His promise to send a Savior to rescue the world from sin and its terrible consequences. In the words of Isaiah, God “exalts himself to show mercy” to His people (Isa. 30:18).

we also “must believe that God’s mercy is boundless, free, and through Jesus Christ our Lord, available to us now in our present condition.”² Individuals who ask for mercy receive it. “*Lord, have mercy on me!*”³ He never turns a deaf ear to such a cry.

Jesus had much to say about mercy. His teaching on the subject of mercy exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day. And it will expose our hearts too, if we will let it. While the religious leaders of that time emphasized outward conformity to a set of man-made standards, Jesus called His disciples to repentance and transformation in the inner man. His preaching in itself was an act of mercy, for as He warned, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Lk. 13:5). But we can take it one step further. He didn’t just command, “Love your enemies.” He lived it. Jesus obeyed His own preaching. And through our union with Him, we are enabled to live it too.

If you are His child, then you are a debtor to His mercy. Enter into the following passages with fresh eyes. Put yourself in the place of the miserable people who needed His healing touch. Marvel at His heart toward sinners. Reflect on His willingness to absorb the cost of your sin, exacting no payment in return. Remember your own salvation. Be renewed in your mind and transformed in your life as you *consider His mercy*.

Prayerfully read through the suggested passages below.⁴ As you work through the passages, consider:

- *How did Jesus demonstrate mercy to individuals during His earthly life and ministry? What did He do for them?*
- *To whom did Jesus demonstrate mercy? What types of people received His mercy?*
- *What difference did Christ’s mercy make in the lives of those who received it? (Consider both the physical and spiritual implications of His mercy.) What does Jesus call recipients of His mercy to do in response?*
- *What stands out to you about His interaction with them?*
- *What did Jesus teach about mercy?*

²Ibid, p.98.

³Luke 18:38

⁴If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of Luke to gain an even better understanding of Christ’s mercy.

CONSIDER *His Identity*

Lesson Five: INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a conversation with someone you thought you knew, only to realize part way into the conversation that you had mistaken them for someone else? That can be a rather embarrassing experience. Growing up in a military family, I spent a lot of time around men in camouflage uniforms. I think I must have been around six or seven years old when I had my first memorable experience of mistaken identity. From my miniature vantage point of 45 inches, the field behind our house was a sea of legs—all clothed in army green. One of those pairs belonged to my father. Various families were milling about, enjoying a battalion picnic. Venturing into a group of officers, I grabbed one of those legs with great confidence, only to look up and discover it belonged to the wrong dad.

No doubt we all have stories about our own embarrassing experiences of mistaken identity. This memory sticks in my mind because of my panic when I realized I didn’t know where my dad was. But my problem was easily remedied—someone taller than I helped me find the right pair of legs.

Often, however, experiences of mistaken identity result in consequences much more serious than simple embarrassment. Just read the story of Adolf Beck (1841-1909). Mistaken for a former prisoner by the name of John Smith, Beck faced multiple felony charges for crimes he never committed. Witness after witness testified that he was indeed the man who had swindled them—identified by his distinctive mustache and gray hair. Subsequently convicted, Beck was sentenced to seven years in prison. Though many people fought on his behalf, no appeals process was available in England in 1896. So, Beck dutifully served out a sentence for John Smith—even receiving Smith’s old prison number as his official identification. Beck earned an early parole due to his good behavior, but less than three years later he found himself back in the courtroom facing new accusations of fraud. Identified positively by the accuser, the jury once again declared Beck guilty. However, before his second sentencing, Beck’s pleas of innocence were finally believed when the real culprit—also with gray hair and a distinctive

mustache—was arrested just a few days later. For Beck, a case of mistaken identity stripped him of his reputation, his rights, and his freedom.

Proper identification is even more important when it comes to our relationship with God. A few years ago, a pair of young ladies made their way to my front door. They came from the Jehovah's Witness congregation just a few blocks from my home. I engaged them kindly, took the opportunity to share the true gospel with them (after all, they did show up on my doorstep!), and warmly invited them to "come and see" Jesus Christ as He truly revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Over the course of several conversations in subsequent weeks, I challenged them to read the gospel of John and write down everything Jesus said about Himself. I invited them to come back to talk about it after they finished. Sadly, they did not return. What a tragedy! Misplaced religious zeal led them to proclaim a false gospel—a message without hope or substance—all because they got the identity of Jesus wrong.

Who is Jesus? In the previous lesson, we considered some of the claims Jesus made about Himself. His claims were astonishing to those who first heard them and, if accurate, have profound implications for our lives—both now and for eternity. But how do we know these claims are true? In this lesson, we will consider various witnesses presented in John's gospel who authenticate Christ's testimony about Himself.

Come and see—this is one the main themes of John's gospel (e.g., Jn. 1:39; 1:46; 4:29). Remember why John invites us to come see Jesus: because he wants each one of us to become believers. On several different occasions, Jesus posed a pointed question: "Who do you say that I am?" John's gospel encourages you to face this same question. You can answer accurately as you "come and see" Jesus Christ in the pages of Scripture. *Who is Jesus?* Open your Bible and read the eye-witness testimony for yourself: from the Scriptures, from God the Father, from His closest followers, and from Christ Himself.

Upon hearing this word, a first-century Israelite would harken back to the stories they heard passed down through the generations—of a fledgling people living in great misery under the oppression of slavery. In bondage to a ruthless Egyptian pharaoh, the people cried out to God for deliverance. God saw their misery. He heard their cry. And He raised up a leader to redeem His people (Ex. 3:7-10). Every good Israelite revered Moses as the greatest hero in Israel's history.

But Zechariah understood that the freedom God's people needed was far more than physical. He knew that another, better Hero was needed. God's rescue from slavery in Egypt served simply as a foreshadowing of another rescue to come. Zechariah clung to God's promises—scattered throughout the Old Testament—that He would send a Redeemer who would rescue His people from their greatest danger: slavery to sin.

With the birth of Jesus Christ, that time of promised visitation had come. Mercy came as a Person, delivered to a miserable world "because of the tender mercy of our God." Luke fills the pages of his gospel with living illustrations of that mercy in action: the heart of God on full display in the life of His Son. The miserable condition of sufferers and sinners elicited His compassion, not judgment. Jesus never had a harsh word for a repentant sinner. He offered favor in place of shame, forgiveness in place of condemnation, healing in place of brokenness, freedom in place of oppression—and none of it deserved. This is a key component of real mercy—it is *unmerited* favor given out of the generous benevolence of the giver. We may be tempted to think that mercy is a new thing that started with the coming of Christ. But the Old Testament is packed full with references to the merciful nature of our God. It is precisely because He is merciful that He sent Jesus.

"Mercy is the goodness of God confronting human suffering and guilt."¹ Isn't it astounding to know that God feels this way about you—full of compassion and pity, moved by your suffering? And just as God took the initiative to send a Redeemer, Jesus Christ takes the initiative to draw near to those bound up in misery and sin. He moves toward the undeserving. He extends mercy to His enemies. Like those in Luke's gospel who received the mercy offered to them,

¹Tozer, A.W., *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Harper & Row, 1975), p.97.

Lesson Nine: STUDY

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God's truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. As you consider His mercy, you can humbly pray, "*Lord, teach me Your way*" (Ps. 25:4). He delights in answering this prayer. You can grow to better image your merciful Lord. He can open your eyes to see the miserable condition of those with whom you interact every day. You can allow His compassion to work through you, compelling you to action. You can draw near to others, with the courage and kindness of Jesus. Pray for His enabling grace to obey His command:

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

SEARCH

In the first chapter of his gospel account of the life of Jesus Christ, Luke refers to an Old Testament concept with which his first readers would have been familiar. We find it in Zechariah's prophecy, just after the birth of his son, John:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people. (Lk. 1:68)

Just a few verses later, as Zechariah concludes his divinely inspired proclamation, he mentions this same idea again:

...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Lk. 1:78-79)

Zechariah declared that, in the coming of the promised Messiah, God had visited His people. This word pulsates with significance. To visit carries the image of a humanitarian aid worker, flying into a foreign country, moving into a refugee camp, carefully assessing needs by going tent to tent, listening to stories of suffering and need, doing triage on the sick and wounded, and then generously extending resources—water, food, medicine, education—to those who could never repay. It is a word full of sweat and sacrifice. Compassion with shoes on. Mercy.

Lesson Five: STUDY

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God's truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. Borrow John's purpose statement for writing his gospel as a prayer for God to strengthen your faith in Christ:

...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

SEARCH

Believe. This word (along with *witness* and *testimony*) is a central theme in John's gospel. From the passage above we learn that John's main goal for writing his gospel was to produce belief. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus made "faith" a central feature of His teaching. But his teaching on "faith" wasn't subjective and intangible, as we often think of faith in modern experience. Christ called people to exercise faith in a specific object: Himself. John records many of these invitations with very exact terminology—specifically, in the prepositions Jesus used. In the Greek language, to believe "in" or "on" Jesus means to believe "into" Him. John uses this preposition 35 times in his gospel. Here are just a few examples:

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes [into] him should not perish but have eternal life.*

John 6:29 *Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe [into] him whom he has sent."*

John 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes [into] me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes [into] me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

This idea of believing into someone or something is unique to the Lord's teaching. Instances of this use of the language are absent from Greek literature of the day. John—or more accurately, Jesus—

created a whole new way of thinking about faith. Jesus taught that faith actually moves a person into Himself so that the believer becomes one with Jesus—the object of his faith.

John wants us to see that salvation is “more than a prayer or giving credence to certain facts intellectually. Salvation begins with movement. Movement of the inner man away from what it has always been pursuing.”¹ Movement out of Adam and into Jesus. To move out of Adam requires us to recognize our sinful condition and to humbly admit we need a Savior. Repent: turn away from anything else we might attempt to rely on to gain a right standing with God. Believe: trust in Christ as the only Savior. We move out of Adam and into Christ through repentant faith.

Who can enter into Christ? John helpfully provides the answer throughout his gospel. This offer is available to anyone who is willing to abandon their self-effort and law-keeping and trust entirely in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Think of the kinds of people to whom this applies: Peter, Nicodemus, a woman from Samaria, Zacchaeus, a demon possessed man, a Gentile woman, a Roman centurion, a dying thief. Adulterers, harlots, murderers, thieves, cheats, liars, extortioners, gossips, worriers...people like us. Consider the kinds of people to whom Jesus extends His invitation of salvation. He only justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). Praise Him! That includes each one of us.

Prayerfully read through the suggested passages below.² As in the previous lesson, be on the lookout for the word *believe* (or any variation of this word). Also be alert for words like *testify* and *witness*. Like a lawyer in court, John presents his readers with witnesses to testify about the true identity of Jesus. As you read each passage, consider:

- *Who does John place on the witness stand?*
- *What does this witness tell us about Jesus' identity?*
- *How did the hearers in John's gospel respond to this testimony about Jesus' identity?*

¹ Minnick, Mark, from his sermon *Union with Christ in Death* from Romans 6:3-5; preached at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, March 19, 1993.

² If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of John and gain an even better understanding of Christ's identity.

gospel. You sat beside him on the airplane; you walked past her on the sidewalk; she served your meal; he bagged your groceries; you drove by her playing out in the yard. People all around us live in their own Mathare Valleys of suffering. Their stories are fundamentally the same as the names and faces we meet in Scripture, just with a twenty-first century twist.

And spiritually, suffering is literally at your door: family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors. Sin, and the suffering caused by living in a sin-cursed world, is devastating the lives of people with whom you rub shoulders every day. Some of them have hurt you. Deeply. Some of them are doing everything they can to hide their hopelessness and despair. Are you like the two who passed by, pretending to be unaware, too busy, too important to stop and sacrifice your time, your money, yourself? Or will you allow the Spirit to use your time in the Word to make you more like Jesus Christ who, because of His great mercy, drew near to you in order to meet your greatest need?

Consider His mercy. Receive His mercy. Rejoice in His mercy. Then go, and extend His mercy to others.

suffering every day: bombed out apartment buildings and hospitals in Mariupol, Ukraine; haunted faces of women and children among the millions of souls fleeing Syria; whole communities decimated by earthquakes in Haiti; scattered bodies lying in the street in the wake of suicide bombings in Afghanistan. Images so horrifying and, yet, so far away. Images that stir a feeling of compassion in our hearts. We want to do something. We feel sad, but we reason, “What can we do about it?”

Think of the difference between simply being aware of suffering and actually doing something to relieve suffering. Like the difference between three travelers on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho in the parable Jesus told centuries ago. Each one passed a man who had been beaten, robbed, and left for dead, but only one—whom we affectionately know as the “Good Samaritan”—did something about the suffering he encountered that day. He “showed him mercy” (Lk. 10:37). Jesus Christ is the ultimate Good Samaritan. He is not unaware of our suffering. He is not distant and unconcerned. He sees. Our suffering elicits His compassion and moves Him to action.

But Jesus Christ didn’t just come to relieve *physical* suffering—as prevalent as that is in our world. Miserable conditions come in a whole variety of shapes and sizes. The merciful heart of our Lord moved Him to relieve the *spiritual* misery of others. The gospel writers set His mercy on display through His interactions with all kinds of people with all types of needs. But don’t miss the significance of those who benefited most from His mercy: *His enemies*.

And this is where it really hits home for us. Serving a meal in a soup kitchen, sacrificing financially to help a neighbor in need, even going on a mission trip to a developing country—these are easy compared to the level of mercy-giving Jesus called His followers to. “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return” (Lk. 6:35). Draw near to those who have intentionally hurt you and freely, generously extend the mercy God has given to you. This is hard. No. This is impossible, without the enabling grace of Jesus Christ.

Suffering is closer to home than we realize. But in our prosperous society, wealth masks the misery. It’s harder to see. You have met hundreds of people just like the people we will encounter in Luke’s

Of course, even verified, trustworthy witnesses are not always believed. But in this case the fault lies with the unbeliever, not the truthful witness. Consider the warning throughout the gospel of John for rejecting the clear testimony about the identity of Jesus Christ.

Because this theme is so prominent in John’s gospel, there are more suggested passages to look up than in previous lessons. Simply do what you can. If you only have time for one section of verses, please give priority to first one: the witness of Jesus. And as you read through the selected passages, remember not to get bogged down—stay focused on the particular question this lesson seeks to answer. The power of plow study is in the overall impact of a theme presented in the larger context of Scripture.

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. You can always write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time.

Witness of Jesus (His word and His works):

- John 3:1-21
- John 4:4-26, 39-42
- John 5:2-18, 19-27
- John 5:31-36
- John 7:14-31
- John 7:37-52
- John 8:12-19
- John 8:21-32
- John 8:48-59
- John 10:22-26
- John 12:32-48
- John 18:1-9
- Mark 14:55-65
- John 18:33-38

Witness of the Father:

- Matthew 3:13-17
- John 3:32-35
- John 5:37-38
- Matthew 17:1-8
- John 12:20-30

Witness of the Scriptures:

- John 5:39-47
- John 7:38
- John 13:18-19
- John 17:12
- John 19: 23-24, 28-37
- John 20:1-9

Witness of Man:

- John 1:1-37
- John 1:38-51
- John 3:22-36
- John 4:28, 39
- John 5:33-35
- John 6:66-69
- John 10:40-41
- John 11:17-27
- John 15:26-27
- John 20:26-31
- John 21:24-25

Warnings about unbelief:

- John 3:12-18, 36
- John 6:28-9
- John 15:18-25

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe that Jesus Christ is who He says He is, then how will that affect how I live?*
- *Do I take the warnings in Scripture regarding the sin of unbelief seriously? How do these warnings impact the way I relate to those who have not yet believed in Jesus?*
- *What steps can I take, by God's grace, to better equip myself to join my voice with these witnesses to the identity of Jesus Christ?*
- *Who do I need to invite to "come and see" Jesus?*

CONSIDER His Mercy

Lesson Nine: INTRODUCTION

I wept as I walked through Mathare Valley. For one thing, the stench was almost unbearable. But that isn't what caused the silent tears to pour down my face. Everywhere I looked, there was brokenness. A whole community built on top of a garbage dump. No fields of green grass, no pleasant spaces in which to find rest. Even the river running through the valley bore the reek of decay. But hundreds of thousands of people call this valley "home." The outcasts of Kenyan society joined together by mutual suffering, scraping out a meager existence, just trying to survive.

We wove our way through the labyrinth of makeshift streets—closely lined on either side with shacks literally made out of trash. Tin cans pounded into flat sheets, pieced together with discarded wood, to create walls and a roof, like a colorful patchwork quilt of garbage. Open doorways revealed tightly-packed dirt floors where children squatted next to emaciated adults, bearing the signs of AIDS and other ravaging diseases. Large, hungry eyes looked out, pleading for relief from their suffering.

As we walked deeper into the valley, a gentle rain turned the path under our feet into a stream of sludge. We had a destination—something our guide wanted us to see. In the heart of the slum, we found it: light in the darkness. A small band of believers, willing to risk the dangers in the Valley in order to bring the hope and healing of the gospel of Jesus Christ to broken, outcast people.

Seeing the suffering of others moved this small band of believers to action. Compelled by compassion, they had to do something. And so, they drew near: distributing food to alleviate hunger, teaching school to educate otherwise directionless children, and most importantly, preaching the gospel to call those in darkness to come into the light.

While we've seen pictures of this kind of suffering, it's difficult to truly understand what it would really be like to live in a place like Mathare Valley. We are just so far removed from this reality in our comfortable, first-world existence. Our news feeds show us

Who is Jesus? God gives each one of us the opportunity to answer this question in our lifetime. And each of us who knows Jesus—as He has truly revealed Himself—is responsible to share the truth of His identity with others. Like the early disciples, we too must invite others to “come and see” our wonderful Savior.

Take the time to write down any specific *action steps* you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer and praise. Thank Him for providing an abundantly clear witness about His true identity. Ask Him to give you both the courage and compassion to invite others to “come and see” Him. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning. This news about the true identity of Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves. Look for opportunities to invite others to “come and see” Jesus.

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. From the passages above, what aspect of Christ's obedience impacted your heart and mind the most? In what ways is this truth changing you?

2. The righteousness of Christ is one of the most encouraging truths in all of Scripture. Read both Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 2:1-2. What do these passages teach about the practical difference Christ's righteousness should make in your daily life?

Have you personally embraced the gift of His obedience?

What do you think it means to rest in the righteousness of Christ?

Questions

Dotted lines for writing answers to the questions.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer and praise for Him for sending His Son to live a perfect life, to bear the punishment of death that you deserved, and to raise triumphant over sin and the grave. Rejoice in the grace of the gospel—that God has credited Christ’s perfect record of obedience to your account. Ask Him to enable you, by His grace, to become more like Jesus—delighting to do His will. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning.

- Luke 23:39-41
- Luke 23:44-47

Obedient to the point of death:⁵

- Matthew 26:36-46
- Matthew 26:47-56
- John 18:1-19:42
- Luke 24:1-9⁶

What Jesus taught about obedience:⁷

- Matthew 5:6
- Matthew 5:19-20
- Matthew 5:21-48
- Matthew 6:1-4
- Matthew 22:36-40
- John 13:10; 15:3; 17:15-19
- John 14:15-17, 21-24
- John 15:9-17

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe in the absolute sinlessness of Jesus Christ, then how will I live?*
- *Christ came to do the will of His Father; how can I better image His joyful obedience to God in my own life?*
- *How can the obedience of Jesus remove Satan’s claim on my life for the sins I have committed?*
- *How does Jesus’ teaching on obedience reveal disobedient thinking or living in my life?*

Take the time to write down any specific *action steps* you need to take to become more like Christ.

⁵ Philippians 2:8

⁶ The resurrection of Christ was proof of His innocence and of God’s acceptance of His substitutionary sacrifice, as well as a fulfillment of Psalm 16:10.

⁷ For further study, consider: Lk. 11:37-44; Mt. 7:12-27; 12:9-14, 33-37; 13:41-42; 15:1-20; 18:7-9; 19:16-22; 21:28-32; 23:1-36.

CONSIDER *His Presence*

Lesson Six: INTRODUCTION

When my youngest son broke his leg just before starting first grade, I asked the doctor if he would be more likely to break that same bone in the future, thinking it would always be more fragile. I learned something that day: broken bones grow back stronger than before. However, he went on to tell me that he would likely be seeing us again. “Why?” I asked. His reply: “Because your son is the adventure-seeking, risk-taking type of kid who breaks bones.” We probably need to start an emergency fund just for him.

I don’t relate. Growing up as one of four girls, my family was less on the thrill-seeking side and more on the “how far away from danger can we stay” side of things. Truth be told, I was an extremely fearful girl. It started at an early age—jumping into bed at night to avoid the hands of the monsters under my bed reaching out to snatch my feet. My closet door had to be shut “just so” in order to keep a group of bad doctors from getting into my room and doing surgery on me during the night. Even in broad daylight I struggled to walk down our long hallway past a darkened room with an open door. But as I grew older, my childish, irrational fears grew up with me, multiplying and diversifying into all kinds of other fears. I feared failing. I feared people’s bad opinion of me. And I especially feared that I didn’t have a right standing with God. As a result, I feared death.

We live in a difficult world. Reasons to fear abound because there are so many things that can legitimately hurt us. Sickness, disease, divorce, cancer, hurricanes, accidents, other people’s bad choices... our list could go on and on. Scripture does not minimize the difficulty of life in a sin-cursed world. Rather, it addresses the list of things we have to be afraid of with candor and transparency. But it doesn’t stop there. Scripture also provides the solution to our fears—both rational and irrational, legitimate and fantastical.

To find the solution, we must first think about the first time the concept of fear occurs in the Bible. In Genesis 3:10, Adam replies to God’s inquiry, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” This is a new

emotion for Adam, who before had only known peace and joy as He walked in perfect fellowship with God in a place of perfect safety and security. *Sin* introduced fear into the world. Sin produces fear because sin separates us from the presence of God. Adam hid from God. This is our instinctive response when we sin, is it not? In our sinful state, God's presence brings dread, not comfort.

God saw Adam, even as he attempted to hide without success. And instead of judgment without mercy, God gave Adam—and all of mankind—a bold, hope-filled promise. Speaking directly to the serpent, God declared:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:15)

As Scripture unfolds, we learn that God's promised offspring is none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus came, obedient to His Father's will, to put an end to the reign of sin and death, making the way for our relationship with God to be restored. God, in His abundant mercy, provided the cure—by dealing with the root of all our fears. Jesus came to deal the death blow to sin—and, in so doing, He removed the separation from God caused by sin and all the fear it breeds. No more distance. No more hiding. No more dread. His presence brings us peace.

Fear is only one of many of the terrible consequences we experience as a result of sin. While the presence of Jesus addresses our fear, this is not all it does. More importantly, the presence of Jesus is about restoring our relationship with God. Because Christ drew near to us, we can draw near to Him. In Christ, we have not only peace *with* God, but also the peace *of* God.

Maybe, like me, you have a long list of fears that assail you. Consider the *presence* of Jesus Christ. See the long-awaited promise of God fulfilled in the Person of His Son. Watch Him draw near to people in their distress, offering the comfort of His presence. Observe Him as He cries out on the cross in agony, enduring separation from His Father, so that we would be estranged from God no longer. Hear His words of comfort anew: "It is I; do not be afraid" (John 6:20).

Prayerfully read through the suggested passages below.⁴ As you work through the passages, consider:

- *How did Jesus demonstrate obedience to the Father during His earthly life and ministry?*
- *What motivated Christ's obedience to the Father, especially when it led to immeasurable sacrifice?*
- *What did Jesus teach about obedience?*
- *What difference did Christ's obedience make in the lives of those who trusted in Him?*

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. You can always write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time.

"It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness..."

- Luke 2:21-32, 39-40
- Matthew 3:13-17
- Matthew 4:1-11
- Matthew 5:17-18

"I have come not to do my own will..."

- John 4:34
- John 5:17, 19, 30
- John 6:38-40
- John 8:28-29
- John 12:49-50
- John 14:10
- John 14:31
- John 15:10
- John 17:4

"The ruler of this world...has no claim on me..."

- John 14:30-31a
- John 18:38; 19:4, 6
- Matthew 17:5
- Matthew 27:3-4
- Matthew 27:19
- Luke 23:13-25

⁴If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of John to gain an even better understanding of Christ's obedience.

It was the will of the Lord to crush Jesus, and God's will prospered in his care. He had no guilt, and yet Jesus was *numbered with the transgressors*. The righteous one, Jesus Christ, *bore the sin of many* (Lk 22:37; Isa 53:12). By His obedience, *many will be made righteous* (Rom. 5:19; 1 Pt. 2:21-24; 3:18). Because of His obedience, God can now pour out "never ending grace upon His enemies"³.

None of us deserves to partake in the blessed results of His obedience. May this study serve to increase your awe and gratitude for our righteous Savior and generous God! Believers live with the great hope of becoming like our righteous Savior in every way. One day, when we see Him face to face, our bent toward sinning will be removed forever, and we will perfectly reflect His glorious purity. Those of us who live with this hope are encouraged to put every effort into purifying our lives in the here and now (1 Jn. 3:1-3). We do this by beholding Him in His Word—just as you are preparing to do with this study (2 Cor. 3:18). *Consider His obedience*, and God will use your view of Christ to make you more like Him. So that one day, we will be able to say with Jesus, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8).

As you work through the following study, remember to look at the broader context of the passages to which you are directed. Especially when reading the statements of Jesus. Consider when, where, and to whom He made these claims. Notice the obedience of Jesus in contrast to the failure of the religious authorities, and even His own disciples.

The words Jesus spoke during His earthly life provide a window into His character. Jesus devoted a significant amount of time to preaching on righteousness—what it is, what it isn't, and how to obtain it. *What did Jesus teach about obedience?* While we will only look at a few of these instances, the sheer amount of teaching Jesus provided on this topic should serve as a clue to the importance of obedience to God.

³Lyrics taken from *Jesus Emmanuel*. Words: Andy Gleiser. Music: Josh Sparkman. Copyright 2021 by Determined Hymns

Lesson Six: STUDY

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God's truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. Because of what Christ, our faithful High Priest, has done for us, we can *draw near* to God (Heb. 7:25). Pray that the Lord will use your time in His Word to help you move closer to Him, confident in the access He has given you through Christ.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

SEARCH

The Bible begins and ends with God, present in the midst of His people. When man's choice to sin separated us from fellowship with Him, God already had a plan to bring us near again. The story-line of the Bible traces out this plan—from the Garden of Eden to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. From Genesis to Revelation, we can see God at work restoring His presence with His people, both in this life and in the next.

Brainstorm for a moment of all the times this theme appears in Scripture: the Garden, the pillar of fire and cloud, Mt. Sinai, God's glory filling the temple, the incarnation, the giving of the Holy Spirit, the promise of Christ's return. Why is the presence of God such a major theme in Scripture? Because this is what we were made for—fellowship with our Creator God—knowing, loving, serving, and worshiping Him. God delights in being near the people He has created and redeemed.

It is not surprising, then, to find the presence of God as a major theme in the life of Jesus as well. The gospel writers clearly show us that Jesus Christ came from God and returned to God after His death and resurrection. Jesus declared all through His earthly life that His Father was with Him. They are so close, in fact, that Jesus Christ says they are one and the same. Jesus came to bring this kind of relational closeness to us. He is *the way, the ladder, the door* (Jn. 14:6; Gen. 28:12; Jn. 10:9). The death and resurrection of Christ

opened the way to God by dealing with the sin that separates us from Him. God's presence is restored, through Jesus.

None of this would have been possible if Jesus had not come in the flesh—the event we call the incarnation. From our time in John's gospel in previous lessons, we have already seen ample, undeniable evidence that Jesus Christ is God. But it is equally important that we believe Jesus Christ is fully human. In order to draw near to us, Christ had to become like us. In order to die, He had to take on a real, human body. As you read about His first coming, remember that “the crucial significance of the cradle at Bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of steps down that led the Son of God to the cross of Calvary.”¹ He identifies with us so that we may, in turn, identify with Him. He took the initiative, because the space created between God and us, as a result of our sin, is too great for us to span. Only Jesus Christ, the God-man could do it for us.

Death, our great enemy, seeks to separate us permanently and eternally from God. But the coming of Christ changed that too. Our Savior is with us in death because He went before us in death. Because He led the way, death is now just a gateway for believers into the presence of our Lord. The Good Shepherd is with His sheep, even through the valley of the shadow of death. For His people, the promise of His presence extends past this life into the life to come.

While we no longer enjoy the physical presence of Christ with us on earth, we have been given an *even better* gift. Christ told His disciples that it was better for them that He go away so that He could send the Holy Spirit to *be with you forever* (Jn.14:16). How close will He be to us? Jesus declares, *He dwells with you and will be in you* (Jn. 14:17). This is a gracious gift! And yet, we have another promise to which we cling: the One who came in the flesh 2,000 years ago, will come again. It will be *yet a little while* and we will see Him again (Jn 16:16). The disciples had a foretaste of this promise when they met the resurrected Christ on that first Easter morning. Our *little while* may feel interminably long right now, but His promise to come again and take us to Himself is still just as true and just as certain (Jn. 14:3). This is His great desire for His people, and He will not be denied (Jn. 17: 24).

¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), p58.

when He lived out “not my will, but yours, be done” to the ultimate degree (Lk. 22:42). Jesus showed us what a truly Spirit-filled person looks like.

As the perfect Law-keeper, no charge of wrongdoing could stick. Because of His perfect obedience, Jesus could boldly declare that Satan had “no claim” on Him (Jn. 17:30). Unlike Jesus, Satan has a claim on each one of us—and the charge against us stands, for every one of us has broken God's law. Countless times. Praise God, this is not the end of the story. Jesus came to settle that claim—for all who will receive His finished work on their behalf.

As we saw in an earlier study, John uses a very specific phrase when inviting us to place our faith in Jesus. We are called not only to believe in Him, but to believe *into* Him. Through faith in Jesus, God makes us one with Christ. United to Adam by our first birth, we share in Adam's sin, guilt, and resulting eternal death. United to Christ by our second birth, we share in Christ's obedience, righteous standing before God, and resulting eternal life.² The results of Jesus' obedience are shared with us through our union with Him.

This means that God does not just command us to be holy and leave us to flounder along by ourselves. He enables us to be holy through our union with His Son. Christ's obedience isn't merely an example to follow, it is a gift to be embraced. Because of what Christ accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection, there is “no condemnation” for all who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1, 33-34). The claim Satan once had on our lives has been fully satisfied by Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5-6a).

This was God's plan from the very beginning. Thousands of years before His first advent, God said this about His Son:

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.
(Isaiah 53:10-11)

²The apostle Paul expounds on this gracious exchange in passages like Romans 5, 2 Corinthians 5, and Galatians 2.

Lesson Eight: STUDY

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God's truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. In light of God's holiness and our sinfulness, we should be supremely interested in this aspect of Christ's character. His obedience is not merely a good example for us to follow, it is *good news* for us to embrace! As you read and study the gospel accounts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, pray that God will grow your understanding of what 2 Corinthians 5:21 means:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

SEARCH

When Gabriel spoke to Mary about the baby she would bear, he also revealed the character of this baby: *the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God* (Lk. 1:35). Holy—morally pure, clean, righteous, set apart for God. What a fitting title for our Savior. Holiness defined the earthly life and ministry of Jesus from start to finish.

First-century Jews lived under 633 Laws. Laws they were required to keep in order to maintain a right standing with God. Who could live up to such a standard? God already provided the verdict in Psalm 53:3, "there is no one who does good, not even one." But then Jesus came, sent by the Father, to do for us what we could never do for ourselves (Rom. 8:3-4).

Jesus kept the Law of God perfectly. Not one error. Ever. Even as a baby, Jesus fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the Law.¹ He was the model Son who always gave heed to the Father's voice. And even more, He kept the Law of God *internally*. He always wanted to do the Father's will. He delighted in obedience (Ps. 40:8). Of course, the clearest example of His obedience came during His final hours,

¹This teaches us something important about the roles God gave to Mary and Joseph. He used their godliness to enable his Son to obey even when he was physically dependent on others.

How have God's people through the centuries faced danger and fear with such undaunted courage? Because they lived—and died—in the reality of His Presence. They knew that the Prince of Glory died to secure their entrance into eternal fellowship with God. They knew that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. They could leave houses and families behind and go to the uttermost parts of the earth because they believed the words of the One who promised, "I am with you always." They chose not to fear but to act on the truth that, no matter what they faced, their Good Shepherd would never leave them or forsake them, even when walking through the dreaded valley of the shadow of death. They placed their hopes, not in this life but in the life to come, because they believed to die is to gain the very One they had been living for all along.

May the Lord use this study to help us lift our eyes and look farther ahead. The Morning Star is on the horizon. He is coming soon. And when He does, He will usher in a brand-new day. We can join with saints through the ages to voice our great desire: *Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev. 22:20).

Prayerfully read through the following suggested passages.² How does Jesus give us access to God's presence? As you look for the answer to this question in the study to follow, keep these ideas in mind:

- *How did Jesus manifest the presence of God during His earthly life?*
- *What promises did Christ make regarding His presence with His people?*
- *What are the future implications of the presence of Christ in the life of the believer? In the life of an unbeliever?*
- *How does Christ's presence alleviate fear and bring peace to people in distress?*

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. You can always write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time.

²If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of Matthew and John chapters 13-17 to gain an even better understanding of Christ's presence.

Immanuel, God with Us:³

- Matthew 1:18-25 (see also Isaiah 7:14)
- Luke 1:26-38
- Luke 2:1-20
- Luke 2:22-38
- John 1:1-18

It is I, Do Not Be Afraid:

- Matthew 14:22-33
- Luke 24:36-39
- John 20:19-21

Come to Me:

- John 7:37-39
- Matthew 11:28-30
- Matthew 19:13-15
- Luke 23:39-43

I Am Going...I Will Come Again:

- John 13:31-36
- John 14:1-6
- John 14:18-19a
- John 16:16-28

Abide In Me, and I In You:⁴

- John 14:7-11
- John 14:19b-23
- John 15:9-11
- John 16:32-33
- John 17:9-13, 20-23
- John 17:24-26

Brought Near by the Blood of Christ:

- Matthew 27:45-54

I'm sure I'm not alone. Can you even imagine growing up without a story like this in your past? *Always* doing right, never doing wrong? Living every day of your life guilt-free? Never experiencing the shame that accompanies sinful choices? Never needing to hide?

One person can. Jesus Christ took on our humanity, but without a nature bent on sinning. And this is where hope begins for us. Jesus *never* disobeyed. Ever. Jesus *always* did what was right. Absolute, perfect obedience. And He offers this record to any who will place their faith in Him.

My kids love to hear me tell the story of the day we broke the expensive porcelain figurine. But they don't need me to recount my misdeeds as a child to know that I disobey. Living together makes that obvious. If we are honest, each of our lives tell this story every day. Born with a sin nature, disobedience comes naturally. All of us are sinners by birth and by choice. And because of this, we often live under a cloud of guilt and shame. But thankfully, this does not have to be the end of the story for us. Take heart as you *consider His obedience*.

³ Both Mary and Zechariah boast in the Lord's covenant faithfulness and steadfast love demonstrated by sending Jesus Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of His mercy (*cheshed*). You can read their words of praise in Luke 1:46-55 and 1:67-79.

⁴ John's gospel, especially chapters 13-17, highlights the special relationship those who believe into Christ have with Him. Believers are brought *into* the very life of Christ, becoming one with Him, just as He is one with the Father.

hide-and-seek with Merlin, without her consent. Being the obedient children that we are, we didn't *actually* go into the living room. We just reached as far as we could, and slid Merlin under one of the chairs. She would never find it. Revenge would be sweet.

Only, it wasn't. Running down the hall, in a frantic search for the Electronic Wizard, my sister couldn't slow herself in time. Tripping on the leg of the chair, she was propelled headlong onto the glass table top in the middle of the room. People who recount near-death experiences often describe events as happening in slow motion. I was probably no older than six, but I was pretty sure my life was over. I can still see my sister crashing into the table, her slumped figure on the floor, and our collective groan as we watched the *Lovers on a Swing* slide to the floor. As we picked up the glass table top, reset it on its base and carefully set the figurine back in the center of the table, we noticed the awful truth—the two lovers had lost their legs.

Our animosity toward one another quickly turned to unity as we joined forces in an effort to get out of trouble. We agreed on what we thought was a plausible lie and then waited in a state of dreadful anxiety for the sound of the car pulling into the driveway.

Far from getting in trouble that night, our parents believed our lie. We had “only been trying to clean the house as a surprise for them” when my sister tripped and fell into the table. Our best of intentions gone awry. The lovers' legs were glued back together and life went on as usual. Until I walked by the living room again. And again. Every day, that visible crack in the figurine served as a stark reminder of my disobedience, and worse—the lie I told to cover it up. My fear of punishment was relieved, only to be replaced by a growing sense of guilt and shame.

I lived under a cloud of guilt for months, until I could bear it no longer and finally confessed to my mom. Even as a little girl, I understood clearly that I had done wrong and deserved punishment. I was afraid to bring my disobedience into the light, until it almost crushed me with its weight. Over forty years later, I can still remember the relief I felt that day—the lifting of weighty guilt, the freedom of forgiveness, and the joy of relationships restored.

I Am with You Always: (Spirit)

- John 14:12-17
- John 14:25-29
- John 15:26-27
- John 16:1-15⁵
- Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

Behold, I Am Coming Soon:

- Matthew 16:24-28
- Matthew 24:27-44
- Matthew 25:31-46
- Revelation 22:12-21

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe that Jesus Christ is with me, then how will I live?*
- *What does it look like to rest in the reality of His presence?*
- *How does knowing Immanuel alleviate my fears?*
- *How can I better image Christ by drawing near to others?*

Take the time to write down any specific *action steps* you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer and praise. The believer's life should be marked by the presence of peace, precisely because they have the presence of the Savior. For believers, Christ is not just *with* us, as remarkable as that is; He is also *in* us. Christ paid the highest price to purchase this access for us. The apostle Paul put it this way: “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” (Eph. 2:13). Thank Him for His gracious gift and ask Him to enable you to rest confidently in the reality of His presence. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

⁵ You can read about the fulfillment of this promise in Acts 2:1-42.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning. Set aside some time during your time of fellowship to *draw near to the throne of grace* together.

CONSIDER *His Obedience*

Lesson Eight: INTRODUCTION

Oh, the glorious 80s. The decade of big hair, jelly shoes, scrunchies, and leg warmers. So much to miss. Not to fear—culture has a way of recycling fashion. Jelly shoes will rise again. And they will still hurt your feet. This was the decade of my childhood, and it was a great time to be growing up. Sony gave us the Walkman, Commodore 64 brought computers from NASA into our homes, Nintendo created the Gameboy (along with Super Mario Land and Tetris), Dr. Robert Jarvik invented the first artificial human heart, Camcorder allowed millions of people to record their funniest home videos, and Kodak made us all photographers with the advent of disposable cameras.

Several of these new inventions found their way into our home, but the one that I cared about most was Merlin. Also known as Master Merlin, the Electronic-Wizard, this hand-help electronic game was first produced by Parker Brothers in 1978. Just a simple search on eBay and you can experience the joys of Merlin for yourself. The problem with our family owning one was that I had two other siblings at the time. One Merlin. Three children. The math never added up. If my memory serves me right, Merlin technically belonged to my older sister. But then, wasn't she supposed to serve the younger?

Then came that fateful day. When my parents decided to leave us at home for a few hours, with no babysitter. They had an officers' function to attend on the army base on which we lived. And we were trusted with the privilege of being home alone, along with strict instructions to stay out of the living room. Yes, the living room—home to several European antiques and my mother's collection of Lladró. A three-legged, glass-topped table in the very middle of the room served as pedestal to a large Guiseppe Armani figurine made of Capodimonte porcelain: *Lovers on a Swing*. As a young girl I loved to look at this work of art. I could almost feel myself swinging through the air, wind in my hair.

I can't remember how long it took for the fight to begin. But considering my parents' absence, it was probably only a few minutes. My sister wouldn't share, so we decided to play a game of

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. From the passages you read, what aspect of Christ's presence with His people most impacted your heart and mind? In what ways is this truth changing you?
2. What practical ways can I better image Christ by drawing near to others?
3. We are given a window into the heart of our Lord in John's gospel as He prays to His Father on the evening before His crucifixion. Think of all the things you might ask God to do for you if you were in Christ's place. The desire of Christ may surprise us. Review John 17:24. What is Christ's prayer request? Discuss as a group how knowing Christ's desire should impact what we desire and how we pray.

Responding to God

Horizontal dotted lines for writing.

Journal Pages

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CONSIDER *His Presence*

(LESSON SIX)

Responding to God

Horizontal dotted lines for writing.

Journal Pages



CONSIDER *His Authority*

(LESSON SEVEN)

Questions

A series of 25 horizontal dotted lines for writing answers.

3. During His earthly life, Jesus had “all authority,” and yet He chose to submit to ungodly, corrupt human authorities who only held such positions because they had been delegated to them by God. How does the truth of “delegated authority” help your thinking when relating to ungodly authorities in your current setting?

4. Think of one relationship in your life in which you exercise authority. Look back through this lesson and consider what changes you can need to make to better align to Christ’s teaching and example. What specific attitudes, actions, or words do you need to put on to be more like your Lord?

CONSIDER *His Authority*

Lesson Seven: INTRODUCTION

On its journey through Uganda, the world’s longest river passes through a narrow rock gorge, just 23 feet wide, before dropping almost 150 feet. The pressure created by such a large volume of water funneling through such a tight space forces 11,000 cubic feet of water per second over Murchison Falls, giving it the authority to claim the title of *most powerful waterfall* in the world.

It is one thing to watch such a powerful display of beauty like Murchison Falls from the comfort of an observation tower. Unleashed on a town, such a volume of water would leave devastation and destruction in its wake—like the residents of Johnstown, Pennsylvania experienced in 1889, when a compromised earthen dam burst up-river, sending a wall of water with such power that it wiped their town away.

The same kind of correlation exists with human power and authority. Just recently, the US was once again voted the most powerful country in the world, a title it has been granted seven times. The right to this title is based on many factors, including economic influence and military strength. From a position of power, the US wields greater influence around the world in the shaping of policy and culture. Power results in authority. And such authority can be employed for good or evil.

In our broken world, raw power often frightens us, a stark reminder of our vulnerability as human beings. Unleashed without restraint, power can leave devastation and destruction in its wake.

Five Families, tells the story of the mafia in America. With self-proclaimed authority, five prominent mafia families exerted their power over entire cities through fear tactics, violence, murder, and organized crime. It is an astonishing story of unlawful authority wielded for selfish gain. Sadly, this story repeats itself throughout history with varied characters and cultural backdrops: Attila the Hun, Diocletian, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Stalin, Mao, Hitler. Unchecked power corrupts and leads to tyranny.

An authoritarian father. A corrupt political leader. A sexually aberrant religious leader. Unfortunately, these are often the first images that come to our minds when we think of the word “authority.” No doubt Satan uses the abuse of power to taint our understanding of authority—something God created for our good. Distrust in authority, if allowed to go unchallenged, eventually leads us to resist the ultimate authority: God Himself. This is a great tragedy.

But there is good news. Our view of authority can be reclaimed. Unlike the corrupted authority and abuse of power we often see and experience in our world, God uses His authority solely for the good of His people and His creation. Sometime this is hard for us to believe, especially when we are hurt by those in authority over us. And so, Jesus came. Through His life, death, and resurrection we get to see in living color what ultimate authority used for our ultimate good looks like.

Jesus Christ came proclaiming Himself as the *Son of Man*. For His Jewish audience, this title held great significance. It spoke of a promised ruler who would wield great power and authority. During His first coming, though clearly seen through His words and works, the power of Jesus was greatly *veiled*. Believers cling to the promise of a future day when the Son of Man will come in *unveiled* power and glory. One day the Son of Man will use His authority to bring about the greatest good—a New Heavens and a New Earth. On this day, we will “weep no more” because “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered” (Rev. 5:5). With redeemed saints through the ages, we will worship the Lamb who was slain and who, by His blood, ransomed a people for God (Rev. 5:6-10). He is both the Lion and the Lamb. Symbols of ultimate power and ultimate humility abide in perfect harmony in our Lord Jesus Christ.

May our faith in our good, all-powerful Savior be strengthened as we *consider His authority*.

Group Discussion

Please be prepared to give input on the following discussion questions with your group:

1. From the passages above, what aspect of Christ’s authority impacted your heart and mind the most? In what ways is this truth changing you?
2. In a fallen world, it doesn’t always seem true that Christ has “all authority in heaven and earth.” From our vantage point, things can sometimes feel very out of control. Use the space below to make a list of all the things over which Jesus demonstrated authority:

Think through the list above. Are there any aspects of Christ’s authority that are difficult for you to believe? If so, why do you think that is? How do you typically demonstrate your unbelief?

John 19:10-11

Behold, your King is coming to you:

- Matthew 21:1-11
- Matthew 24:29-31
- Matthew 15:31-46
- Matthew 26:57-64

APPLY

As you read, ask the Lord to help you apply what you learn to your personal life. Use the following questions to prompt personal reflection as you prayerfully review what you learned from your Bible reading. Journal your thoughts.

- *If I truly believe that Jesus Christ has all authority, then how will I live?*
- *How should Jesus' teaching on authority shape how I use any positions of strength or authority entrusted to me?*
- *How can I better image Christ's submission to God in my own life?*

Take the time to write down any specific *action steps* you need to take to become more like Christ.

RESPOND

Take time to respond to God in prayer and praise for His authority, used always and only for your good. Ask Him to enable you, by His grace, to better use your God-given positions of authority to image His gracious rule in your life. You may find it beneficial to write out your response to God in your journal.

SHARE

Prayerfully answer the questions for group discussion provided on the following page. Please be ready to share what you are learning.

Lesson Seven: STUDY

PREPARE

Prayer prepares our hearts to humbly receive and respond to God's truth. Before you begin your study, ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truth and give you spiritual understanding. Whatever your past history with earthly authorities, pray that the Lord will guard your heart from imposing your experience on the character of God. You can be confident that, even in your study of the Word, His power is at work in you for your good. Join the apostle Paul in praying that God would receive glory as He transforms you into the image of His Son:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

SEARCH

We spent significant time in John's gospel during the lesson on the identity of Christ. Jesus told us plainly who He is and what He came to do. We also noticed that one of the compelling witnesses used to verify His identity were the works that Jesus did in the Father's name. These works, or miracles, were "signs" given to us that we might know that His testimony was indeed true.

Theologians often call the first half of John's gospel the Book of signs. Along with the seven "I Am" statements of Christ, John records seven signs, or miracles, done by Christ—in order that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). The other gospel accounts corroborate John's testimony, declaring the absolute power and authority of Jesus.

Writing about God's sovereignty, A.W. Tozer comments, "Sovereignty and omnipotence must go together. One cannot exist without the other. To reign, God must have power, and to reign sovereignly, He must have all power."¹

¹ Tozer, A.W., *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Harper & Row, 1975), p.71.

In the gospel accounts, we encounter story after story of our Lord exercising power over all things in heaven and earth—things like nature, disease, sin, government, religious tradition, and even death. He wields this power from a position of absolute authority. Jesus Christ is *God*. He is the *Son of Man*. He is the *King*. He alone has the right to these titles because He alone possesses all authority.

But as we will see in lessons to follow, the One who had all authority also possessed all humility. Even as we isolate specific aspects of our Lord's character to better learn what our Savior is like, we want to remember that He embodies each of these attributes perfectly, as a unified whole. He is the Lord of glory, full of power and might. And yet Jesus is meek and lowly, gentle in heart, humble, and kind. He never used His power to gain an advantage over others. Jesus Christ is the King, yet He lived in perfect submission and obedience to the Father. Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth. And yet He uses His authority only for our good. He employs His strength to benefit others. When considering His power, we have nothing to fear. His power and gentleness are never at odds. As the children's song so aptly states, "we can always run to Jesus" because Jesus is "strong and kind."²

This study should build greater confidence in the benevolent disposition of God towards us, His people. Ultimate power combined with ultimate goodness results in ultimate peace. He holds us in His all-powerful grip, not to crush us, but to keep us eternally safe.

Prayerfully read through the suggested passages below.³ As you work through the passages, consider:

- *How did Jesus demonstrate God's power during His earthly life and ministry?*
- *Through His powerful words and acts, what aspect of creation or humanity does Jesus demonstrate His authority over?*
- *What motivates Christ's demonstration of power in these various settings?*

²"Jesus, Strong and Kind," by Rich Thompson, Jonny Robinson, Michael Farren, and Colin Buchanan. <https://cityalight.com/song/jesus-strong-and-kind/>

³If you have the opportunity for further study, you can read through the entire gospel of Matthew to gain an even better understanding of Christ's authority.

- *What did Jesus teach about power and authority?*
- *How did Christ display submission to His Father's authority?*

If you come to something difficult to understand, pause and ask the Lord to help you comprehend what you are reading. You can always write your question down to bring up later in your group discussion time.

These are written so that you may believe:

- John 2:1-11
- John 4:43-54
- John 5:1-9
- John 6:1-5
- John 6:16-25
- John 9:1-41
- John 11:1-44

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me:

- Luke 1:26-37
- Luke 4:14-21, 31-37
- John 5:19-30
- Matthew 7:28-29
- Matthew 8:1-17
- Matthew 8:23-27
- Matthew 9:1-8
- Matthew 12:1-8
- Matthew 12:38-42
- Matthew 19:23-30
- Matthew 21:12-17
- John 17:1-5
- Matthew 28:16-20

By what authority are You doing these things?

- John 6:38-40
- John 8:28-29, 37-42
- John 10:17-18
- John 12: 44-50
- John 14:8-11
- Matthew 21:23-27

What Jesus taught about authority:

- Matthew 20:20-28