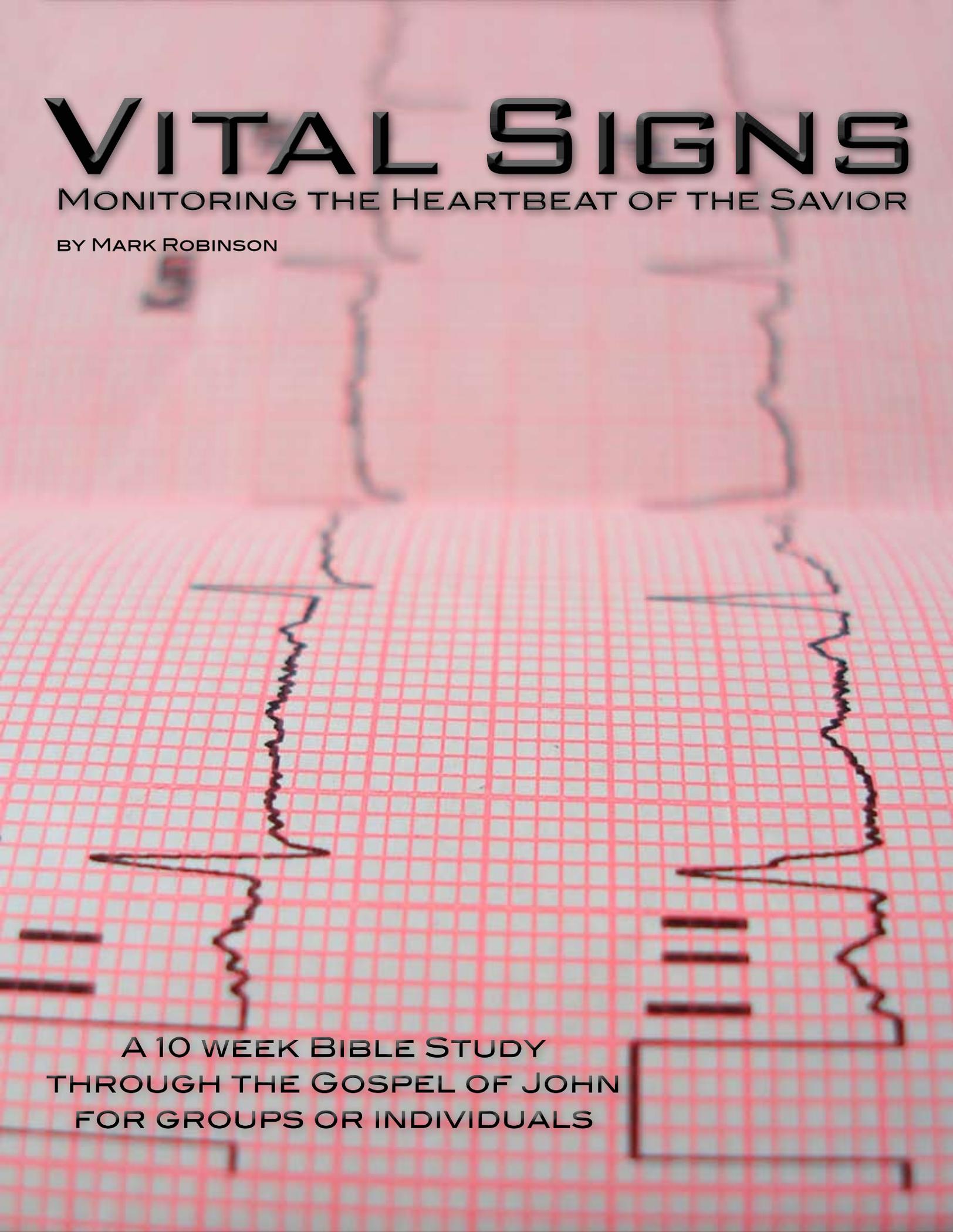


VITAL SIGNS



MONITORING THE HEARTBEAT OF THE SAVIOR

BY MARK ROBINSON

A 10 WEEK BIBLE STUDY
THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS

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Special contributions to this study were provided by Jina Schrader and Kimberly Robinson.

Introduction

Let's suppose this afternoon you decide to take a jog through the park. As you pound the pavement along the path, you come across someone who has collapsed and is now laying prone on the sidewalk. What do you do? If you are like most people, after calling for help and dialing 911, you might begin to check the person for signs of life. Is he breathing? Is he conscious? Does he have a fever? Is he cold and clammy? Is his heart racing? Does he have a pulse? These are just some of the things you would be looking for to determine if this person is truly alive. In medical jargon, these items would be called a person's "vital signs." Examining these signs would give someone clues as to the state of the fallen person's condition.

In the same way that there are physical signs that reveal a person's physical well being, there are also key "vital signs" that reveal a person's spiritual significance. The Apostle John knew this, and that is why, when he set out to write his Gospel (under the direction of the Holy Spirit), he decided to include seven "signs" that revealed the heartbeat of our Savior, Jesus Christ. These seven signs are seven miracles that particularly stood out to John as indicators of the character of Christ. Additionally, John recorded seven "I am _____" statements that Jesus delivered which further reveal His identity. These fourteen items dotted throughout the first fifteen chapters of the Gospel of John prove to be vital indicators for us to see in order to understand who Jesus is so that we may believe in Him and have life (John 20:31). In an awesome gift—when we embrace by faith the vitality of Jesus Christ—He gives to us His abundant life as well! Much more than checking to see if Jesus is still breathing (which He is!), these vital signs reveal to us the awesome identity of our risen Savior so that we might savor His spiritual significance for our lives.

This study is designed to help examine these seven signs and seven "I am" statements by seeing them in their original contexts. Much more than just a book, I hope this is a tool to help you fall more in love with Jesus Christ as you see His true identity shine forth on the pages of His Word.

In order to help facilitate your study, we have divided these fourteen items over ten weeks of the study. Additionally, each week has been divided into six days for ease of study. Each day you will be directed to read a few verses and answer a few questions about those verses. On Day 1 of each week, you will be asked to make some general observations on each passage. Days 2-4 each week consist of questions to help you dig deeper into the meaning and application for each passage. Day 5 includes a written devotional highlighting one aspect of the passage, and Day 6 provides a chance to reflect on what God has taught you during that week. While these six days may seem rather methodical and rigid, don't worry if you get behind! Read what you can at your own pace. The important thing is that you read the Scripture passages each week and check for the Savior's "vital signs" recorded on each page. Enjoy the study!

In Christ,



Mark

Vital Signs: Monitoring the Heartbeat of the Savior

Seven Miraculous “Signs” in the Gospel of John

1. Turning water to wine (2:1-11)
2. Healing an official’s son (4:46-54)
3. Healing the lame man (5:1-18)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14)
5. Walking on water (6:16-32)
6. Healing the blind man (9:1-17)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45)

Seven “I am _____” Statements in the Gospel of John

1. “I am the Bread of Life” (6:35)
2. “I am the Light of the World” (8:12)
3. “I am the Gate for the Sheep” (10:7)
4. “I am the Good Shepherd” (10:11, 14)
5. “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25)
6. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14:6)
7. “I am the True Vine” (15:1)

Week 1: John 2:1-25

As Jesus started to reveal to the world the signs of His true identity, He began with a most unlikely miracle. Before He ever raised the dead or fed the 5,000, He helped a friend escape embarrassment at his wedding feast. As with many of Jesus' miracles, there is more to this story than meets the eye. This week we will look at the first vital sign that reveals the heartbeat of our Savior.

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray. Remember that it is not possible to really understand God's truth unless He reveals it to you. (Reflect on 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.") Acknowledge that you cannot understand His Word by yourself, and ask God to illuminate His Truth for you today as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19a: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read John 2:1-25, and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?
 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 2:1-25? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray as you begin your study today. Ask God to reveal Himself to you today in the way that John wrote of in 1 John 5:20: “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”
2. Read John 2:1-25.
3. The events recorded in John 2 represent some of the earliest events in the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus had lived His life up to this point as the simple son of Mary and Joseph, probably helping out with the family business and leading a fairly “normal” life in the town of Nazareth. In fact, Jesus’ life was normal enough that He had regular friends who invited Him to their wedding, as we see in John 2. (Cana was a town about nine miles north of Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth.) Given the fact that Jesus was a “known quantity” in these parts, why do you think it was necessary for there to be “signs” about His identity revealed to His friends and neighbors (2:11)? In other words, why do you think His friends and neighbors needed instruction about who Jesus really was?
4. Read Isaiah 53:1-12.
5. Isaiah 53 is an Old Testament prophecy about the description of the look and work of the Messiah ... Jesus Christ. This description was given to mankind by God Himself hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth to make sure that people had their expectations right when the Messiah finally arrived. What do you notice about the description of Jesus in these verses? (Pay particular attention to the information relating to His physical appearance and reputation.)

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read John 2:1-25.
3. Jesus' mother came to Jesus and asked Him to assist the groom at the wedding so that he would be spared the embarrassment of not having enough food and drink for his guests. Weddings at this time were a celebration lasting several days, and the groom would actually have a legal responsibility to provide enough food for the guests. Mary, Jesus' mother, apparently was helping with the catering for this event and saw the problem coming. Knowing her Son to be the Messiah and someone of great compassion, she turned to Him for help. At this point, Jesus had not yet performed any miracles that we know of, so it is not a guarantee that Mary expected Jesus to miraculously solve the problem. Whatever her specific desire, it is clear that she wanted Jesus to help. Jesus used this event to begin the public revelation of both His ministry and His identity by changing the water into wine. What do you notice about the kind of wine and quality of wine that Jesus created here?
4. From where did the wine that Jesus created come from? What kinds of containers held the wine that Jesus created?
5. In the Jewish culture and religious system in which Jesus lived, there were many ceremonial washings that were required in order for people to become clean. Jesus took the ceremonial water and made wine with it. Can you think of any spiritual and symbolic significance to what Jesus was doing here?

6. In the later portions of John 2, Jesus came to the Temple in Jerusalem for a Passover festival. Though there were synagogues in almost every town, there was only one Temple, and this Temple was a key place where sacrifices were made to God and where God's presence was believed to dwell among the people of Israel. When Jesus arrived at the Temple, He found it filled with people selling things. These people would gather in the Temple area and sell items for sacrifice and worship at an inflated rate to make money off of God's people as they came to worship. The attitude of these salesmen to exploit the system to their advantage enraged Jesus—the Temple was for worship, not for profit. Jesus cleared the Temple of these business people by driving them from their tables with a whip. Imagine you were present at this event. What might you have been thinking if you had seen this event unfold? What does this event tell you about what Jesus thought about the way God's people were relating to God in worship?

7. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

8. Both the water-into-wine miracle and the clearing of the temple show Jesus taking something that already existed and making something new and better out of it. The old ceremonial water became the new celebratory wine. The old Temple that had become a market where people exploited others became the "new" House of God where zeal for Him could be expressed in worship. This is an early set of events that shows that Jesus, though a member of the Jewish race, was going to usher in a new arrangement for relating to God ... a way which would be better than the previous way had been. 2 Corinthians 5:17 indicates that Jesus' actions of taking something old and making it new and better is not just relegated to water at weddings but to our very lives as well! Read Hebrews 8:1-12 and record your observations below about how life with Christ (called here the New Covenant) is superior to life as a Jew (referred to as the Covenant made with Moses or with their ancestors).

STUDY NOTE: When Jesus gathered with His disciples the night before His arrest and crucifixion, He shared a meal with them that we commonly call the Last Supper. This meal would take on great significance for Christians and become the symbol for remembering the body and blood of Christ that provide for us forgiveness and new life. At this original meal, Jesus made an interesting statement about the significance of the wine they were drinking. In Luke 22:20, Jesus said, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you." By claiming that His blood was the symbol of the New Covenant, Jesus was signifying to His disciples (and to us) that He was setting up the new arrangement of how God would relate to His people. In the Old Testament times, God related to His people under a covenant that He established through the prophet Moses. This "Old Covenant" was based on the Ten Commandments and the Levitical system of animal sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. This Old Covenant was also a conditional covenant. In other words, if the people kept the Ten Commandments and kept participating in the sacrificial system, God would continue to protect their borders and keep them safe. If the people disobeyed God, then He would withhold His blessing and allow them to be disciplined through subjugation to a foreign nation. This Old Covenant taught the Israelites (and us today) many things about God and His relationship with people. The Old Covenant taught people God's holy standards through the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law. The Old Covenant also taught people that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sin. While the Old Covenant taught these truths, it did not provide the people with any real power to live those truths out. The Old Covenant taught God's holiness, but it left it up to the people themselves to try to be holy. The Old Covenant taught the necessity of the shedding of blood for forgiveness, but the blood of bulls and goats only provided a temporary covering for the sins of God's people, not a thorough cleansing. Because of these deficiencies, God promised a better covenant that would come at a later time. This better covenant (or "New Covenant") was promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:22-32. The New Covenant would provide all the things that the Old Covenant only hinted at: true forgiveness and real power for righteous living. When Jesus stood at the Last Supper and said that His blood would mark the beginning of the New Covenant, He was letting the world know that from that moment on, this new and better way of relating to God (an unconditional covenant—God fulfilling His promise with nothing required of His people except faith) was being made possible through the blood of Christ! At last, God's people would have their sins really cleansed and would have an internal powerhouse to guide them into righteousness. In rough terms, the words "Old Covenant" refer to the Old Testament times, and "New Covenant" refers to the New Testament times, where the primary difference between the two is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23,24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read John 2:1-25.
3. After Jesus cleared the Temple, what did the Jewish people ask Him in 2:18, and how did Jesus answer them in 2:19? What did the Jewish people understand Him to be saying when He answered? What do you think He meant by it?
4. While Jesus performed many miraculous signs to reveal His identity, He indicated that His raising from the dead would be the most compelling sign of all. Why do you think that is?
5. The Apostle Paul wrote about the significance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-34. Read these verses and then summarize below what you understand Paul to be saying about why the resurrection is so important.
6. What significance does the resurrection of Christ hold for your own life? How does knowing that Jesus was raised from the dead help to strengthen your faith and belief that it is through Christ that one can have a relationship with God?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read John 2:1-25.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

A New Invention

The year was 1957. IBM had created a device which would change the world as we know it. This device was large by today's standards, taking up several cabinets of space. This machine was also expensive, costing nearly \$80,000 to purchase. What is this large and expensive machine that changed the world? An electronic calculator.

Now, I realize that we do not normally consider the calculator to be a world changing device, but that is because we have grown up with it. We have grown accustomed to it, and thus we take it for granted. If you were born prior to 1957, all math was done in your head. If you are like me, you grew up in elementary school learning to add, subtract, multiply, or divide by hand. And if you are like me, math became difficult for you when dealing with numbers that outstretched your number of fingers and toes! Because of my difficulty with math, I welcomed the day I got to use my first calculator to aid in solving problems in school. It was as liberating as it was accurate. It also opened new vistas into deeper fields of mathematics (things like trigonometry and calculus) which would be nearly impossible without the use of a machine. The machine IBM invented in 1957 did not invent math ... it was based on the same numbers and truths as long division ... but it did reinvent how higher math was computed, placing a powerful tool in the hands of people everywhere.

In John 2:1-11, Jesus performed a miracle filled with symbolism to reveal to his followers that He was creating a New Covenant by which mankind would relate to God. For centuries, God's people had related to Him under the Old Covenant based on the Old Testament Law which was filled with the Ten Commandments, ritual cleansing, and animal sacrifices. While the miracle of John 2 may look like Jesus was simply providing some good wine to a few thirsty guests at a wedding feast, a closer look reveals that Jesus was actually highlighting a significant truth about His identity and the gift He was offering. By taking the water from the Old Covenant ceremonial jars and turning it into something new (and better), Jesus was actually foreshadowing the fact that He was creating a New Covenant that would change the spiritual lives of all who would embrace it. This New Covenant would be very expensive, costing

Jesus His blood. This New Covenant that Jesus was establishing was what we know of as Christianity.

Now, I realize that as Americans, we can take for granted the amazing revolution that life in Christ creates, but that is because many of us have grown up with it. If you lived your life before the time of Christ, all spiritual interaction with God was based on strict adherence to the Law. If you are like me, you find God's Law beautiful but too lofty to adhere to 100 per cent of the time. Because of our inability to keep God's Law, we should welcome the amazing extension of God's grace to us in Christ. It is as liberating as it is holy. It provides forgiveness for our sins once and for all in Christ and opens new vistas for our spiritual lives including mission, purpose, a close and personal relationship with God, and gracious provision to actually live out the Christian life. The New Covenant did not invent holiness—it was based on the same righteousness prescribed in the Law—but it did reinvent how our spiritual lives would be lived out, placing the powerful life of Christ in the hearts of people everywhere.

Like wine out of water, Jesus has saved the best for last. Take a moment and praise God for creating us as people who are arriving at the feast of history at this time. Like wedding guests in Cana, we can enjoy the blessing that Jesus creates out of an old pot.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God that He has revealed His true identity to us by sending Jesus Christ to the earth. Pray that you will continue to be receptive to the truth of His Word and that He will continue revealing to you more and more aspects of the character of Christ.
2. Reread John 2:1-25.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Week 2: John 4:43-5:15

In just a few words, Jesus can accomplish so much. "Your son will live," Jesus said to one man, and the son was immediately healed. "Pick up your mat and walk," Jesus said to the crippled man, and even though he had never done that before, the man immediately got up and walked around. These next two signs remind us of the power of the words of Christ to accomplish otherwise impossible tasks.

Day 1

1. As you pray for your study time today, ask God to illuminate His Word for you as Paul prayed in 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24: "May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it." Pray that the Lord will use His Word mightily in your life.
2. Read John 4:43-5:15, and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?

 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 4:43-5:15? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray. Echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
2. Read John 4:43-54.
3. Last week, we read in John 2 that Jesus had gone down to Jerusalem in the early days of His ministry for the Passover festival. While He was there, He performed many miracles (see John 2:23), and there were many Galileans, people from Jesus' hometown area, who were also in Jerusalem during this time and saw Him performing these miraculous signs. However, John 4:44 tells us that Jesus had said that a prophet was without honor in his own country. Why do you think that is the case? Why do you think it would be more difficult for the people Jesus grew up to conclude that He was indeed the Messiah?
4. In this section, a royal official came to Jesus and requested that Jesus come to Capernaum with him and heal his son. The man was asking Jesus to make a thirteen mile journey to bring healing to his son. What must the royal official have believed about Jesus that would cause him to make this trip and request that Jesus come to his house?
5. Why do you think Jesus responded to the royal official as He did in John 4:48?

Day 3

1. Let us pray that through our study we'll grow in knowledge and love for Christ as Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-11: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."
2. Read John 5:1-15.
3. In these verses, Jesus came back to Jerusalem for a festival. When He arrived in town, He saw a particular paralytic who was lying by the pool of Bethesda. The man apparently believed (based on popular superstition) that if he were the first person into the pool immediately after the waters were stirred, then he might be healed of his afflictions. However, even if the water really had these healing properties, this man would have had a difficult time ever experiencing healing. Why? (Think about the type of affliction this man had.)
4. Given the hopeless situation this man was in, it is no wonder that Jesus asked the man in 5:6, "Do you want to get well?" (It seems that He was asking the man, "Are you sure you really want to get well? Because it can never happen this way since you can't get yourself into the water.") The man was clinging to a flawed plan in order to experience healing. In the areas of your life where you struggle the most, what do you turn to when you want to ease the pain or find hope (even if that hope is unfounded)?
5. In 5:7, the man asked Jesus for help. What kind of help did the man want from Jesus? What does this show you about what the man believed about the identity of Jesus?

Day 4

1. Pray for God to reveal Himself in a new way and to use this study to purify your heart. We know that it is God “who works in your to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13), so pray that you will be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15b-16a).
2. Read John 5:1-15.
3. Why were the Jewish leaders upset that Jesus had healed the paralytic?
4. **STUDY NOTE:** The Old Testament Law prescribed a Sabbath day for all people that required them not to work for a living on that day and to rest and focus on God. While this Sabbath Law was created primarily for the purpose of increasing worship and ensuring rest from vocational work, the rabbis of Jesus’ day had redefined the Sabbath as a day when virtually nothing could be done, including carrying a mat or helping a friend. Jesus’ actions violated their sense of what the Law was; however, Jesus’ actions did not violate God’s Law. God never intended the Sabbath to be a day where those in need could not find help or even walk carrying a mat.
5. Do you find anything odd about the Jewish leaders’ statement in 5:10, given the fact that a crippled man they had seen lying helplessly at a pool of stagnant water for 38 years was now WALKING IN FRONT OF THEM!?!? What explanations can you possibly think of for their shortsighted actions?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray and thank God for His word, which is living and active in our lives. Praise Him for the power of His word as you remember Hebrews 4:12, which says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Ask God to use His word powerfully in your life today.
2. Read John 4:43-5:15.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Right/Wrong

Every year in elementary school, there was one event that attempted to separate the mental men from the boys ... one event that drew the attention of students and parents everywhere. What was this event? The Science Fair. Every year, I would make a project ... and I would lose every time.

While some students were discovering the theory of relativity, I was relatively impressed with my project, "Which carpet cleaner works best: Scotch or Resolve?!" While some students were putting together computer "mother boards" to power robots that could make dinner for you, my mother was impressed by my card board box covered with hand drawn images that represented video games I "designed," complete with a tape recording of me making the related sounds these games would produce.

Every year, as the projects would be displayed at the fair, and as all the ribbons would go to my friends, I would begin to rationalize my performance. "My friends must not have designed their own projects," I would muse. "Their fathers who are research scientists must have worked on their projects for them." Of course, in my reasoning, the answer could not have been that they were just better at science than me. There must be some other explanation!

As these friends have gone on in life to become engineers, research scientists, and medical doctors, however, I am forced to realize that my original assessment was not accurate. Though I had the right information [their projects were better than mine], I was drawing the wrong conclusions [they must have cheated].

I was thinking about this reality as I read John 4:43-5:15 and pondered the reactions people had to the miracles of Christ. Compared to the religious leaders of Jesus' day, His actions and methodology stood out in their power and authority. Though people all saw these same awesome acts of Jesus Christ, they all did not respond in the same way. When the royal official from Capernaum was told by Christ that his son would be healed, the official "took Jesus at His word and departed." In the next few verses we find out that the royal official and

all his household believed in Jesus Christ. Later in the passage, though, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, after seeing Jesus heal a lifelong paralytic, assumed that Jesus was cheating the Father's Sabbath. The royal official in Capernaum and the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem both got right information about Jesus Christ, but they each had different responses. Though the Jewish leaders had correct information, they made the wrong conclusion.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and His actions are always impressive, and they are always right; however, sometimes, we find ourselves not reacting rightly to the revelation of Jesus Christ that we receive. Sometimes when things don't work out the way we had hoped, we might be tempted to draw the incorrect conclusion that Jesus is not in control or that He does not care about us in our time of need. While it may be true that things are not working out according to our plan, it is wrong to ever conclude that Jesus is anything less than our holy and loving God.

The spiritual life is not simply a life of observation; it is a life of our response to God's revelation. We should follow the example of the royal official and always take Jesus at His word and believe.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time in prayer praising God for being our compassionate Healer. Pray that you will take Jesus at His word and place yourself trustfully into His hands. Share with God your greatest needs, believing that He tenderly cares for you and that His grace is sufficient for all your needs.
2. Reread John 4:43-5:15.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?
5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Week 3: John 6:1-15, 25-59

What do you do when the task outstrips your ability to provide? Give up? Make excuses? Lose heart? In this week's passage, we see that when Jesus' disciples were in a spot where the task was too great for them, they gave over their supplies to Jesus (instead of giving up), and as a result they did not lose out on a chance to see the Savior's Heart.

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray and consider this promise from Isaiah 55:10-11 concerning God's word: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Praise God that His word and promises are trustworthy and reliable. Continue to pray that He will use this study to accomplish His work in you.
2. Read John 6:1-15, 25-59 and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?

 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 6:1-15, 25-59? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Thank God for the provision of His Holy Spirit, who leads us into His truth. Reflect upon Jesus' words when He told His followers, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Pray and ask God to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit's faithful counsel and guidance. Ask Him to teach you as you look at today's study.
2. Read John 6:1-15.
3. By the time John 6 rolled around, large crowds were flocking to Christ everywhere He went, even when He retreated to remote hillsides in rural Galilee. According to this passage, why were the people flocking to Christ?
4. Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, grew up in Bethsaida, the largest town near where the events of John 6 took place. Perhaps it was because of his familiarity with the "restaurants" and "grocery stores" in this area that Jesus singled him out in 6:5 and asked, "where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" According to the text, why else did Jesus ask Philip this question?
5. Philip's assessment was that it would cost way more money than they had, even to provide a light snack for the thousands who were gathered there. Because they did not have enough money to purchase food, Andrew relayed the offer of a small boy who had given five barley loaves and two small fish. Barley loaves were small and meager pieces of food, widely regarded as the food of peasants. These barley loaves and fish may have served as light hors d'oeuvres for Jesus and Peter, but they certainly did not look like enough to feed the thousands that were present. Given this situation and the events that would immediately transpire, what do you think Jesus was trying to teach His disciples?

Day 3

1. As you begin today's study, pray and ask God for wisdom as you look into His word. Remember James 1:5, which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Pray thankfully to God, trusting that He will generously give you wisdom as you rely on Him to reveal His truth and help you understand His word today.
2. Read John 6:1-15, 25-59.
3. According to 6:4, when did this miracle take place? What do you know about this season of time in the Jewish culture? (NOTE: If you don't know, don't worry about it. We will examine the implications of this later on in today's study.)

4. **STUDY NOTE:** The Passover Feast was a yearly celebration in Israel of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt during the time of Moses (see the book of Exodus for more details). One of the key components of the Passover festival was a special and symbolic meal that was shared by families, using different foods as reminders of God's provision to the Israelites' ancestors and as reminders of a promised and permanent deliverance by God in the future. One of the predominant pieces of the meal was unleavened bread. This bread was made without yeast to demonstrate how food was made in a hurry as the people were fleeing Egypt, but it also had the added significance of reminding God's people of His provision of manna (or bread from heaven) for the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt.
5. The 5,000 men in attendance at this miraculous feeding must have recognized that something very special was happening and that Jesus was a person of great significance. Based on what they saw, what did these men try to do with Jesus (see 6:14-15)?

Day 4

1. Take some time to pray and ask God to use His word to teach, rebuke, correct and train you, just as Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16,17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Thank God for His word and ask Him to equip you for good works today.
2. Read John 6:25-59.
3. Why did Jesus think that the people were following Him? (See 6:25-27.)
4. Though the people wanted their stomachs filled, Jesus was offering something else. What was He offering to them?
5. In what ways was what Jesus was offering to them better than a full stomach of actual fish and bread?
6. According to 6:28-29, what is it that we must do to experience the blessing of Jesus as our "Bread of Life?"

Day 5

1. Begin today's study with 2 Peter 1:3,4 in mind: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Praise God for His divine power which provides us with everything we need! Ask God to remind you daily of His great and precious promises that you are learning as you read His word.
2. Read John 6:1-15, 25-59.

Take a moment to read and reflect on this devotional as you continue to seek understanding of this week's passage for your life.

Not Partial, but Total

I wear many hats. On any given day, I might have to serve the function of a jungle gym, an elevator, a taxi driver, and a tour guide ... and that is just after 5:00 PM! Before you begin to think that I am one of the original Wonder Twins from the 1970's "Superfriends" television show or a raging lunatic, I need to explain. While I do not actually do any of those tasks vocationally, I perform their functions for my sixteen month old son, Joshua.

Being so small, Joshua finds himself in situations of need frequently. If he wants to climb and swing, he needs someone to climb on or to swing him around. If he wants to go up one floor (from the floor of our sunken living room to the hallway leading to the rest of the house), he needs someone to lift him. If he wants to get outside and see the world, I either drive the car or push the stroller. Because of his need, he cries out frequently for help.

Now, as Joshua's father, I love wearing the hats he asks me to wear. There will come a day when he will not want to wrestle on the floor while watching a basketball game. There will come a day when he will drive himself where he wants to go. There will come a day when climbing the steps to the rest of the house will be an after thought. So before those days come, I am all too excited to hear him cry out in need. I love wearing all those hats to help meet his needs.

Two thousand years ago, as Jesus was living on this earth and was in the process of training His disciples (and by extension, training you and I who read of their experiences in the New Testament), He knew that a necessary component of a vibrant spiritual life would be a child-like sense of need. By virtue of our sinful tendencies and God's lofty calling, by ourselves—spiritually speaking—we are very small ... therefore we frequently find ourselves in situations of great need. Our spiritual need is not partial, it is total. Jesus wanted His disciples to know this, and that is why He led them to a remote place among a hungry crowd to teach them a lesson.

In John 6:1-15, Jesus led His disciples into the countryside among 5,000 men, not counting women and children. When it came time to eat, Jesus asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" This is a very funny question for Jesus to ask! Sure, Philip grew up in the area in which John 6 took place and most likely knew the whereabouts of all the grocery stores and restaurants nearby, but buying food for all these people would cost an amount far greater than the disciples had available to them. Even if Philip knew of a grocery store next door, they would not be able to afford the cost of giving everyone even a light snack, much less a full dinner. Jesus asked this question, not because He was unaware of their financial situation, but because He wanted to "test him [Philip], for He [Jesus] already knew what He was going to do [6:6]." Jesus had planned all along to provide the food for the whole crowd in a miraculous way; He just wanted to make sure that Philip and the rest of the disciples recognized their need and thus could recognize God's supernatural provision. In the end, Jesus blessed a few fish and loaves so that they fed everyone present, with twelve basketfuls of leftovers! Jesus gave each of the twelve disciples their own basket full of reminders that He was able to meet any need.

As adults, we tend to see problems as things we need to fix, pay for, or solve. Since we are grown, we tend to think that we do not need or even deserve any help; therefore we often do not cry out. We think we are supposed to have the resources necessary to meet all of life's demands all by ourselves. We may fear that any cry for help is a sign of weakness and might even bother God or cause Him to think less of us. If this is you, then remember that Jesus wants us to have child-like faith. This is the kind of faith that caused a small boy to offer a few measly fish and loaves to a hungry mob. Any adult would tell you the boy's offering was not enough, but any adult who said this would be forgetting the One who would be doing the feeding.

Spiritually speaking, we are like sixteen month olds with many needs requiring someone who wears many hats to come to our rescue. We need someone who can be a doctor, a counselor, and an empowerer every moment of our lives. When we realize this and cry out, Jesus hears our cries and comes to our rescue. In fact, He loves wearing the many hats we ask Him to wear because in this life, we will never grow out of our state of dependence.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Pray and thank God that Christ is the all-sufficient Bread of Life. Praise Him for being your ultimate satisfaction and provision. Pray that you will continue to cling to Him as your source of provision and power. Bring Him your “loaves and fish”, trusting that He will provide all you need and will multiply His work in your life.
2. Reread John 6:1-15, 25-59.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?
5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray as you begin your study today. Ask God to reveal Himself to you today in the way that John wrote of in 1 John 5:20: "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."
2. Read John 6:16-24.
3. The prevailing wind on the Sea of Galilee was coming from the west, and the disciples were trying to sail west toward the city of Capernaum. This means that they were struggling to row into a fierce wind on choppy water. They had also just experienced a very busy day on the hillside feeding the 5,000 with Christ. Given these factors, how do you think the disciples were feeling as they were rowing to Capernaum?
4. When the disciples saw Jesus walking to them on the water, how did they react? Why do you think they reacted this way? (For more insight, see the parallel passage in Mark 6:48,49.)
5. Up to this point in their lives, the disciples (being natives of this area) had seen many severe storms on the Sea of Galilee. They had probably experienced several nights straining against the wind in a boat on their way to a new destination. However, the disciples had never seen a person walk on top of the water before. Though they were acquainted with difficulty, they were surprised by this display of power. By coming to the disciples in such a miraculous way, what do you think Jesus was trying to tell the disciples about His concern for them?

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life today as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read John 6:16-24.
3. Now scan back over John 6:1-15. What is the immediate context of Jesus walking on the water? In other words, what had just happened?
4. According to the parallel account of this story in Mark 6:45, it was Jesus' idea for the disciples to go on ahead of Him on the boat toward Capernaum. Why do you think that Jesus set up this situation for the disciples? What do you think Jesus was trying to teach the disciples by coming to them on the water in such spectacular fashion?

5. **STUDY NOTE:** Reflecting on this passage, writer Warren Wiersbe said, "Sometimes we are caught in a storm because we have disobeyed the Lord. Jonah is a good example. But sometimes the storm comes because we have *obeyed* the Lord. When that happens, we can be sure that our Savior will pray for us, come to us, and deliver us. ... Jesus had led His people into the green pastures (John 6:10), and now He brought them into the still waters (Ps. 23:2). What a wonderful Shepherd He is!" (Wiersbe. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2 vols. Wheaton: Scripture Press, Victor Books, 1989: pg 310)

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23,24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read John 6:16-24.
3. Also read the parallel passage of this miracle in Matthew 14:22-33.
4. In Matthew's recounting of this story, what additional details do we learn of this encounter on the water?
5. What was the key to Peter walking on water? What caused Peter's suddenly buoyant life to sink?
6. Do you think that Jesus was harsh in saying to Peter that he had "little faith"? Why or why not? After all, the other eleven disciples were merely watching this one from the sidelines!

7. It may be possible that faith is proportionate. In other words, faith steps for different people may look different. For one disciple in the boat, it might have been a huge step of faith merely to calm down when he saw Christ. For others, however (including Peter), much more may have been expected. Peter had probably been on this sea more than any of the eleven other disciples. Because of that, he had weathered many storms, but he had never walked on water. Given the experiences that Jesus had taken him through, it is possible that Peter's faith threshold was simply higher than that of the others, and it's possible that Jesus wanted to help Peter grow even more. This is simply a theory ... a guess as to why Peter got a gentle rebuke from Christ for sinking into the stormy sea. Do you think this guess is reasonable? Why or why not?

8. Assuming that faith is proportionate and "faith steps" look different for different people, where is the current faith threshold in your life? What do you sense to be the faith steps that Jesus is asking you to hop over the sides of the boat to take?

9. Regardless of your thoughts on the possible explanation listed in question 7, it is clear that Jesus expected Peter to walk on the water (not because Peter could do this on his own, but because Jesus was giving him the ability to do so). This reminds us that when God is at work in our lives, we can do things that would be seen as impossible without His help. What in your life right now looks impossible? (Examples might be forgiving someone who hurt you deeply, breaking an addiction, confronting a friend in sin.) How does this passage encourage you to take steps of faith, even in situations where things look "impossible"?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read John 6:16-24.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

In the Weight Room

Growing up I had always feared the weight room. I played organized sports my entire life, but somehow, by playing football, basketball, and running track, I was able to avoid ever having an off season for weight training! It was not the weights that scared me, it was the other people I would find there. Now, my high school weight room was not the dwelling place of Arnold Schwarzenegger, but his picture was on the wall (an encouragement to participate in the Presidential National Fitness Challenge), and the weight room placed me in close context with other people who, no doubt, could lift considerably more than I could. I lived in fear that I would have to share a workout with D'Angelo who would be bench pressing 250 pounds while I was struggling to raise just the bar.

As an adult, I have a new-found interest in weight lifting. I have found that the gym is a place where many people, just like me, are just trying to stay fit and "tone their cores." We all have roughly the same goal in mind. Sure, I may start with less weight on the bar than most, but raising that bar is still a good workout for me. Over time and with proper exercise, raising that bar will make me stronger so that I can lift more tomorrow than I can lift today. This is the progressive and proportional nature of weight lifting.

I was thinking of this idea as I was reading Matthew 14:22-33. In this story, the disciples were on a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee amidst a fierce storm when Jesus came walking to them on top of the water. What an amazing site this must have been! There were twelve disciples in that boat that saw Jesus walking on the water. Upon seeing the figure on top of the water, eleven of them decided that it must be a ghost. Eleven of them kept their mouths shut. Eleven of them trembled in fear. One of them spoke. In Matthew 14:28, Peter said, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come!" and while eleven other men watched with wide eyes, Peter hopped the side of the boat and walked ON TOP OF THE WATER in the direction of Christ. Now, after Peter got a good distance from the boat, he began to realize that he was walking on top of the water. This sudden realization led to Peter taking his eyes off Christ and sinking into the sea.

When Peter sank, Jesus spoke and said in 14:31, “You of little faith. Why did you doubt?” Now the question comes. Why would Jesus say this to Peter? Why not say this to the other eleven men cowering in the boat with their jaws on the deck. Why call Peter out? I think the answer to this question (while I cannot know for sure) is found in the weight room at the local fitness club.

You see, Jesus’ goal for every person is that they would grow in their faith in Him. Jesus wants us to trust Him. Though His goal for each of us is the same, by faith, each of us (at different times in our lives) can “lift” different amounts. Some can only lift the bar and others can bench press a mobile home. Spiritually speaking this translates into the fact that our faith grows over time as we exercise it. It is a significant faith step for a mature Christian to trust God with cancer or the death of a child, but it is also an equally significant step of faith for a new Christian to trust God with the forgiveness of his or her sins—something that a more mature Christian had trusted Christ with long ago. Our faith grows over time, and as God grows our faith, each day/season/year is filled with different “weights” that God has placed on the bar. Based on who Peter was and all that Jesus had taken Him through (including the initial steps he took on the water) Jesus wanted Peter to persist in that faith and lift even more. Once Peter walked on the water, Jesus expected him to keep walking. For the rest of the disciples in the boat, their faith steps may have had less “weight.” Their faith steps may have involved just ceasing to be afraid, or believing that Jesus could really perform such a miracle. This is the progressive nature of growth in the Christian life.

What about you? As you live out your life today, what are the weights that God is asking you to lift by faith? It is probably different for every person, but they all have the same goal ... to grow us in our depth of relationship with Jesus Christ. Don’t spend a lot of time comparing yourself to others, growing fearful of participating in the spiritual life because you don’t think you can lift as much as the next guy. Know that Christ has put the weight on your bar that is appropriate for you to grow in faith. Believe that and then trust Him. If you do, you will find that your faith is stronger tomorrow than it is today.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Take a few moments and thank God for bringing His peace into the turbulent storms of your life. Ask Him to teach you about His character and consistency through the daily trials you are facing. Pray that He will reveal to you the appropriate “faith steps” that you can take in your life as you live by His Spirit.
2. Reread John 6:16-24.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?
5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray. Echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
2. Read John 8:12-30.
3. Up to this point in our study of John's Gospel, we have looked at five signs, or miracles, that Jesus performed which revealed aspects of His character. Today we are going to look at the second of Jesus' "I am _____" statements in the book. (The first "I am" is His declaration in 6:35 that He is the "Bread of Life.") In John 8:12, what did Jesus say that He is?
4. What do you think Jesus meant when He made this declaration?
5. Quickly rescan the section of Scripture you read at the beginning of today (8:12-30), focusing on verses 19 to 30. What did Jesus talk about in this section which might shed light on what He meant when He said He is the "Light of the World"?

6. Darkness brings uncertainty and uncertainty breeds fear. This is true in many ways, but it has a special depth of significance when we think of the greatest darkness of all: death. Is there anything about death that you find frightening or unsettling? According to Jesus in these verses, is there anything that ANYONE should be afraid of in death?

7. How does knowing Jesus Christ and believing in Him help us overcome our fear of death? How does Christ's light provide hope for us in eternity?

8. According to this section, what is the only way to avoid "dying in our sins"?

9. Jesus was revealing that death is indeed a dark place to be. Because of our sin, we are separated from God, and judgment is due us. However, there is a way out. Jesus, the Light of the World, shines into the darkness to direct us to another way. By believing in Him, we can reside in the light of paradise, instead of in the darkness of sin and judgment. Have you ever come to a place in your life where you placed your faith in Jesus Christ (just as the people did in 8:30)? If so, when was that time? If not, why have you not placed your faith in the Light of the World?

Day 3

1. Let us pray that through our study we'll grow in knowledge and love for Christ as Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-11: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."
2. Read John 8:31-41.
3. In these verses, Jesus continued His discussion with the people concerning the benefits He offers as the Light of the World. What is the benefit Jesus spoke of in 8:31-38?
4. How did the people respond to Jesus' promise of liberation?
5. Do you think Jesus was right by saying that sin enslaves the sinner? In what way is this true?
6. Think of an area of struggle and sin in your own life. In what way do you find yourself enslaved by that sin? Is that sin orienting your day? Is that sin controlling your thought life? Is that sin forcing you to lie to your friends and family? Is that sin dictating to you how God must feel about you?

7. To those who are enslaved by sin, (which is all of us to one degree or another), Jesus offers a full and complete liberation. His light shines into our darkness and breaks the chains that hold us down. Jesus said that “the truth will set you free.” What do you think Jesus meant by this? How can the truth set us free from the bondage we feel with sin?

8. Look up the following verses. In the space beside the verse, write out “the truth” of what Jesus has set us free from.

- Romans 6:1-10

- Romans 8:1

- Galatians 4:1-7

- Colossians 2:13-15

- 1 John 1:9

How do these verses help you to understand in a deeper way the freedom from sin that Jesus offers you?

8. Read Exodus 3:13-14. In this passage, God told Moses His real name, "I am." This emphasizes the eternal nature of God. He is not the God of the past ("I was") or the God of the future ("I will be"); He is the God who always was and who always will be. He is the God who sits outside of time and thus is not bound by time. When Jesus said "I am," in 8:58, He was implying to the Jewish audience that He was God Himself! The Pharisees clearly understood this claim, as they wanted to kill Him for making it (8:59). Have you ever stopped to think that Jesus was God Himself? How does knowing this fact impact your understanding of all that you have seen Jesus do in the book of John up to this point?

9. Scan back over John 8:42-47. In these verses, Jesus explained why those who rejected Christ did not understand Him. He said that they were (in essence) speaking a different language (8:43-44). Who did Jesus say is the originator of the lying language that the people understood?

10. If you are someone who has come to faith in Jesus Christ, it is not because you are extra smart or extra spiritual. It is because God chose (in His grace) to translate His message for you into a language you could understand and embrace. This is the meaning of 8:47. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, take a moment and thank God that the message of Christ is comprehensible to you and that you get to live "in the light" because of it.

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray and thank God for His word, which is living and active in our lives. Praise Him for the power of His word as you remember Hebrews 4:12, which says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Ask God to use His word powerfully in your life today
2. Read John 8:12-59.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Turn on the Light

When I was a kid, I was terribly afraid of the dark. Each night, I would hate going to bed because I did not want to be alone in the dark. As a result, my parents tried several compromises. For a while, I slept in my sister's room ... being with someone helped ease the fear. When I wore out my welcome in Debbie's room, my parents went to "Plan B" which was leaving my lamp on when I went to bed. After I fell asleep, my Dad would come in (on his way to bed) and turn off my lamp. At the time, I was very appreciative of these concessions. Companionship and light allowed me to sleep easy even if I could not see what was causing the shadow from my closet or the monsters that I was certain were hiding under my bed.

What is it about the dark that makes things so scary? Being afraid of the dark is not just something that small children face. As adults, every scary movie we have ever seen is set at night. I have heard that elderly people in nursing homes often become afraid of the dark all over again. So, what is it about the dark that makes our hearts race faster?

I believe the reason we are afraid of the dark is because in the darkness, all of our world becomes unclear, uncertain, or unknown. In the light, we can tell that the mysterious figure in the corner of the room is a teddy bear, not a bad guy, but in the dark, we cannot be certain. In the light, the moving shadows on our floor are branches swaying in the wind, but in the dark, everything just looks more ominous.

Because of our natural fear of the dark, Jesus' words in John 8:12 offer incredible hope and promise. Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Notice what Jesus says there. The "light of the world" that He represents is the "light of life." In other words, the greatest piece of darkness that people are fearful of is the darkness of death. One day, the lights of this life will come to an end for each of us, and (on our own) the darkness of death is terrifying.

What will life after death be like? On our own and without the revelation of God, we have no idea. Where will I spend eternity? Is death more of a "period" or a "comma" in the sentence

of my life? Have I lived my life “good enough” to be in a preferred spot, or could my eternity hold the unthinkable as a final destination? These questions, like shadows on the floor of a child’s darkened room, frighten us and cause us to long for help ... companionship or even light itself!

Jesus hears our cries of fear and does something amazing. He comes to be with us and He lets us know that He is our light. With Him, our future does not look so dark. With Him, our journey beyond the door of death is not filled with uncertainty and judgment but is filled with promise and paradise. Jesus says in 8:23-24, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” Jesus was saying that eternity is a scary, dark place for those who “go it alone” because their sins will lead to an undesirable future. However, if we believe that Jesus is who He claims to be (namely the Son of God and our Savior), then our future is much different—and infinitely better!

If the darkness of death frightens you, fear not. Belief in Jesus Christ turns on the light of life to you for all eternity!

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time praying and thanking God for sending Jesus as the Light of the world. Praise Him for setting you free from sin, death and shame. Ask Him to continue speaking truth and light into your life as you read and study His word.
2. Reread John 8:12-59.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?
5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Week 6: John 9:1-41

Physically blind people have no eyesight. Without the ability to see, they stumble over obstacles that they did not know were there, and they become dependent on those around them to lead and direct them to safe places. In John 9, we find out there are also people who are spiritually blind. Without the ability to spiritually understand God's revelation, they stumble over the Rock of their Salvation, Jesus Christ, who looked different than they were expecting. Jesus confronts the spiritually blind in this week's verses with hopes that they will realize their need and allow Him to direct them to the safe place.

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray and consider this promise from Isaiah 55:10-11 concerning God's word: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Praise God that His word and promises are trustworthy and reliable. Continue to pray that He will use this study to accomplish His work in you.
2. Read John 9:1-41, and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?
 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 9:1-41? In the space below, write any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Thank God for the provision of His Holy Spirit, who leads us into His truth. Reflect upon Jesus' words when He told His followers, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Pray and ask God to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit's faithful counsel and guidance. Ask Him to teach you as you look at today's study.
2. Read John 9:1-12.
3. When Jesus' disciples came across the blind man, what did they do? In your own words, explain how you think they assessed the situation.
4. How did Jesus' assessment of the situation differ from that of the disciples? What did Jesus say was the reason the man was blind?
5. Healing people from blindness is the most common miracle that Jesus worked (see Matthew 9:27-31; 12:22-23; 15:30-31; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:21-22). Why do you think this particular miracle was so often performed by Jesus? One possibility is that there were just a lot of blind people living in Israel in Jesus' day. What other possibilities do you think there are for why Jesus chose to work this miracle so frequently? Can you think of any spiritual analogies that this particular miracle might point to?

Day 3

1. As you begin today's study, pray and ask God for wisdom as you look into His word. Remember James 1:5, which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Pray thankfully to God, trusting that He will generously give you wisdom as you rely on Him to reveal His truth and help you understand His word today.
2. Read John 9:1-12.
3. How did Jesus choose to heal this man? What means did He use to perform this miracle?
4. It may seem a bit odd to us that Jesus would perform such a miracle with mud made from spit. However, it is important to note that Jesus did not always perform miracles in this fashion. Sometimes He just spoke a word and someone was healed. Other times, people just touched the hem of His garment and were healed. Still other times, He laid His hands on them and they were healed. Therefore, we can conclude that there are many different methods which Jesus used to heal people. Though there are many differences in the way that people were healed, there is one constant in each scenario. What is it?
5. **STUDY NOTE:** The person actually performing the miracle is the same in every situation—It is Jesus who does the work. By varying the method, Jesus brought attention to Himself as the source of the healing, not some "magical spell" that He was enacting by saying the right words or using the right potion. Jesus Himself was the Healer, no matter how He chose to make it happen.
6. How radical a change was there in this man's life after Jesus performed the miracle on him? What did his friends and neighbors say to him after the miracle? Did they think this was a big change [see John 9:8-12 and 9:18-21]?

7. The radical transformation of the blind man is a beautiful picture of the radical transformation that comes into the life of someone who has been “spiritually blind” for his or her whole life, but then comes to embrace the Light of the World by placing faith in Jesus Christ. This transformation is, as 2 Corinthians 5:17 indicates, a full change in identity: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Can you think of anyone you know personally who placed his or her faith in Christ later in life? What kinds of radical changes have you seen in the lives of others you know who have had their spiritual blindness removed by Christ?

8. What about you? In what ways have you seen God work in your own life to bring about significant change?

9. Just as the miracles of Christ were performed using a variety of methods, so our coming to Christ happens in many different ways—or by different things that God uses in our lives (events, circumstances, people, places, etc.). Physical sight was restored with mud and saliva at the pool of Siloam. What methods and situations did God use to bring you into a relationship with Him, restoring your spiritual sight?

10. Remember, while the different methods are interesting to note, the things that God uses to save us do not replace the fact that it is Christ who gives us spiritual sight. How does remembering this truth help you as you minister to others in the name of Christ? What does this truth say about the details of the experiences in each of our spiritual journeys?

Day 4

1. Take some time to pray and ask God to use His word to teach, rebuke, correct and train you, just as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16,17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Thank God for His word and ask Him to equip you for good works today.
2. Read John 9:13-41.
3. This section shows the continued response of the Pharisees to the miracles of Jesus Christ. Jesus implied in 9:39 that the Pharisees were spiritually blind. From what you have read in John 9:13-41, how did the Pharisees reveal their "spiritual blindness"?
4. In John 9:25, the formerly blind man gave a powerful testimony about the person of Christ. Though his understanding of Jesus' full identity was still in process, this man knew one thing for certain about Christ. What was it? What has God done in your life about which you might be able to deliver a similar testimony?

5. It is truly ironic that the Pharisees (and the disciples to a lesser extent—see 9:1-2) saw this blind man as an item for theological debate. While they were thinking about what the Law said regarding his situation, they totally missed the work of God among them. Jesus did not see this man as a thing to be debated, but as a person on whom to show mercy and grace. Sometimes in life, it is far easier to debate things intellectually than it is to help people intentionally. Jesus here provides us an example. He helped the person physically in 9:1-12, then He helped the person spiritually by allowing him to connect the dots in 9:35-38. What is a situation that God has placed you in right now where there is a person in need of help? Have you ever wanted to debate the pluses and minuses of helping this person instead of simply helping him? What can you learn about these areas of life by watching the person of Christ at work?
6. While the formerly blind man did not originally know that Jesus was the Son of God, he did know that He was a healer. Based on the miracle he experienced in which Jesus restored his eyesight, he was then willing to trust Jesus' claims about the full nature of His identity. In what ways do you think this is a good picture of the life of faith for a Christian?

Day 5

1. Begin today's study with 2 Peter 1:3,4 in mind: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Praise God for His divine power which provides us with everything we need! Ask God to remind you daily of His great and precious promises that you are learning as you read His word.
2. Read John 9:1-41.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Three Simple Things

When I think of how God worked in my own life to draw me into a relationship with Him, I think of golf balls ... rocks ... and car washes. I am sure you think of the same things.

When I was sixteen years old and pulling away (physically and emotionally) from all things "church," the new youth pastor at East Cross United Methodist Church began to take a special interest in me. He pursued me on my terms and in the places where I liked to hang out. Thus, our very first spiritual conversations were on the golf course. It was somewhere near the fourth tee at Adams Municipal Golf Course that we began talking about forgiveness, and somewhere near the 18th green where I decided to start going back to youth group to hang out with my new friend, Dwight. Based on my experience, I am sure the golf course is where God got a hold of you as well.

On Easter Sunday, 1990, in the Fellowship Hall of East Cross, Dwight shared the Gospel with us in a unique way. He had each person walk through ten stations where a question was asked concerning each of the Ten Commandments. If you could answer yes to the question (thus indicating guilt), you were supposed to pick up a rock. By the time I ended my progression through these stations, I had a bag full of rocks—and a sudden realization that I was in need of a Savior. As Dwight spoke of the forgiveness found in Christ, I laid my "rocks" at the foot of the cross and began a relationship with the Living God. Based on my experience, I am sure that a bag of rocks is how God showed you your need for a Savior too.

Soon after coming to Christ, Dwight asked me if I wanted to lead the planning of a fund raising car wash to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. I reluctantly agreed to do so. This was the first time I had ever taken any leadership responsibility as a Christian. Through this process, I began to realize some of my gifts and my desire to serve Christ with my life. This small spark that began at the car wash was fanned into flame over the next couple of years until I felt

God's full call on my life into vocational pastoral ministry. Based on my experience, I am sure that God used a car wash to launch you into a lifetime of serving Him as well.

Golf balls, rocks, and car washes. These are the things that God used in my life. No one can deny that. It is my experience. However, is it proper for me to imply or expect that because God used these things in my life, He will do the same in yours? As we search for an answer to that question, let's look at John 9:6-11 where Jesus came across a man who had been blind since birth, and He decided to show mercy on him. The story reads, "Having said this, He [Jesus] spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go,' He told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' [this word means Sent]. So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' Some claimed that he was. Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.' 'How then were your eyes opened?' they demanded. He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed and then I could see.'"

In that story, Jesus used spit to restore the man's eyesight. Jesus worked in this man's life using a very common thing coupled with some very common instructions. As the healed man reflected on the experience of what had just happened to him, he could easily recall the simple steps and commands that led to his healing. As we read this story, we might be tempted to think that healing blindness is a product of WWJD (what would Jesus do?). If we simply follow the formula that Jesus did, maybe we could get the same result. However, there is a serious problem with thinking that way: Jesus did not heal the same way twice.

When Jesus healed the royal official's sick son (John 4:43-54), He did not even go see the boy. He simply spoke a word and the boy was healed. When Jesus healed the woman who was hemorrhaging for many years, He allowed her to simply touch the edge of His coat, and her bleeding immediately stopped (Luke 8:40-48). Even when Jesus healed other people of their blindness, sometimes He would just touch their eyes with His bare hands (Matthew 9:27-31) or He would just have a conversation with someone that led to his healing (Mark 10:46-51). All these varied stories and encounters should remind all of us that the only consistent thing as it pertains to the "healing method" that is demonstrated in each story is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus would work through many simple things to bring about healing. Words, clothing, spit ... all these things Jesus used to bring about healing, but what He used with one person, He often did not use with the next. The one constant, however, was His presence enacting the miracle upon the person in need.

This is very significant as we consider how God has worked in our lives. All of us who have experienced God's love and forgiveness have at least three things that He used in our lives to draw us closer to Him. For me it was golf balls, rocks, and car washes. For you, it might be Young Life Camp, scrapbooking, and cokes at Sonic. These are all simple things that God can use in our lives—the saliva and dirt of our contemporary landscape. However, before we begin to think that our salvation came through rocks, cokes, or saliva, we need to remember that whatever the methods, it is Christ alone who brings us grace. This should free us up from demanding or expecting that everyone will be impacted just as we were [contrary to my silly

implications earlier in this story). God is a personal God who reaches out to us in many ways. Remember that the next time your friend does not want to go to the same camp you went to or someone else thinks your “rocks” illustration is cheesy. The same God who used saliva in one place and the edge of His garment in another can just as easily personalize the way He reaches you and me.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Take a moment and praise God for the unique way He has drawn you to Himself. Thank Him for making you a new creation in Christ, and ask Him to use you in the lives of others as an instrument of His truth and love.
2. Reread John 9:1-41.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Week 7: John 10:1-21

“I am the Good Shepherd,” Jesus declared. “I am the sheep gate,” He declared again. What did Jesus mean by these statements, and what vital sign was He revealing about His identity when He used the example of a shepherd with his sheep? This week’s study seeks to help you better understand this analogy.

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray, asking God to illuminate His truth for you today as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19a: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read John 10:1-21, and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?

 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 10:1-21? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray as you begin your study today. Ask God to reveal Himself to you today in the way that John wrote of in 1 John 5:20: “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”
2. Read John 10:1-6.
3. In talking about shepherds and sheep, Jesus was beginning to draw a comparison between a shepherd’s relationship with his sheep and His own relationship with His followers. What did Jesus say about these relationships in these first six verses?
4. Jesus contrasted Himself (who enters by the gate) with “thieves” and “robbers” (who enter by improper means). Based on what you have seen in the book of John so far, do you have any guesses as to who Jesus was implying were the “thieves” and “robbers” (spiritually speaking) in His generation?
5. **STUDY NOTE:** In the Mid-East sheep herding culture of Jesus’ day, the sheep would be kept in a pen overnight in an area away from houses. The sheep pen would be guarded by a common watchman who would stand guard at the gate to the pen. Each pen might contain sheep from various shepherds who would herd their flocks together for the night. In the morning, when a shepherd would come back to the pen, the watchman would give him access and he would call out, and his sheep would come to him. The sheep would literally recognize the voice of their shepherd.
6. How does this study note help you better understand what Jesus was saying in John 10:1-6?

7. Based on what you have read in the book of John so far, what kinds of people had tended to recognize Jesus' voice as coming from God? Who had tended to fail to understand Jesus' actions as being from God?

8. In your life today, how can you tell if an "inner voice" or "leading" is coming from Jesus or from someone or something else? In other words, how do we learn to recognize the voice of Christ in our lives today?

9. **STUDY NOTE:** The concept of "hearing Jesus' voice" as a Christian is a difficult one to grasp, especially if we are hoping to hear an audible voice. The reality is that Jesus does still lead us (and speak to us) today, but His voice is seldom audible. The Bible is called the Word of God for good reason: we believe that God leads us through the words recorded on its pages. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 talks about how the Bible is "God-breathed" and provides for us direction for life. In other words, the Bible defines for us many things that God desires for our lives. Even though these words were written thousands of years ago, they still hold true for us today since "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)." In other words, the things Jesus called people to in New Testament times are the same things He is calling us to today. Therefore, "hearing Jesus' voice" today is a matter of reading His Word and comparing it to the directions we think we should take. For instance, if I thought it would be a good idea to go out and get drunk with my friend on his 21st birthday, I could check to see if that was "Jesus' voice" or my own by looking to see if His Word says anything about this. Upon further review, Jesus tells us in Ephesians 5:18 that we are not to "get drunk on wine." Therefore, I can know that Jesus is not telling me to go out with my friend and get drunk since He once said not to get drunk, and his advice/commands never change.

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life today as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read John 10:7-10.
3. In these verses, Jesus once again gave us an "I am _____" statement. What did Jesus compare Himself to in these four verses?
4. What do you think He wanted us to understand by comparing Himself to the sheep gate?
5. Jesus here made an exclusive claim. He did not say that He is "a gate" but that He is "the gate." All who enter through Him attain salvation. What does this tell you about all other religious systems in the world?
6. Jesus indicated that He offers to His "sheep" not only salvation, but also something else. What is it?

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23,24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read John 10:11-21.
3. In these verses, Jesus took another angle on the analogy He was unfolding, making another "I am _____" statement. What did Jesus say that He is in these verses? What do you think He meant by this analogy?
4. How did Jesus contrast Himself as the Good Shepherd with the "hired hands" that also might work with sheep? What connections do you see with this agricultural example and the spiritual life?
5. In this passage, Jesus said He considers the needs of His sheep above His own physical well being. This is not a role that Jesus took on reluctantly, but one that He intentionally chose to take on (10:17-18). In what ways has Jesus lived out His promise to take care of His sheep, regardless of the cost?

6. How does knowing that Jesus is our Good Shepherd impact your understanding of how Jesus feels about each of us? Do these statements by Christ add to your feelings of security in the Christian life?

7. In 10:16, Jesus referenced “other sheep.” Who do you think He was referring to?

8. **STUDY NOTE:** Jesus was born a Jew and was raised within the Jewish system. Jesus interacted primarily with Jews, and He never left the area of Palestine once He started His earthly ministry. It was to Jews that Jesus was talking as He shared His Good Shepherd story. Jesus had a ministry to the Jews, but He also always intended to have people from all over the world be a part of His flock. The biblical term for non-Jewish people is “Gentiles.” I believe that in 10:16 Jesus was hinting at His desire to have Gentile followers as well as Jewish followers. He would be the Shepherd of all who would come to Him. This means any non-Jewish person who knows Christ was referred to in 10:16 as one of the other sheep Jesus would invite into His flock.

9. How does knowing that Jesus always intended for there to be non-Jewish followers impact your understanding of the global nature of God’s plan?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read John 10:1-21.

Take a moment to read this and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Give and Take

OK, so what if Santa Claus were real? What if there really was a big man with a red suit who visited your house one night a year by sliding down the chimney with his big bag of gifts? What if this guy really existed ... but what if you did not know about him? What if Santa Claus was a real guy who really did what "The Night Before Christmas" said, but you had never heard the story? Now if Santa Claus did exist, and you did not know anything about him, how would you react at midnight on December 24 if you heard a "thud" on your rooftop? As you would spring to your feet to see what was the matter, you would find a grown man in a red suit packing (or unpacking ... from your angle it is tough to say) an overgrown pillow case worth of stuff in your living room! What would you do? I know what you would do. You would either call the cops or grab your shotgun! But why would anyone do that to good old Saint Nick?

If we were unaware of the existence of Santa Claus, we would not be thinking that ANYONE breaking into our house at midnight was there to bring us stuff. Living in this fallen world has convinced us that people come to our houses unannounced to take stuff, not give stuff. This is why we lock our doors, install security systems, and "let the machine get it" when the phone rings at dinner time. For the most part, this world has shown us that people come to us primarily for their benefit, and not for our own ... and so we are skeptical.

Now the Santa Claus story is a fake one. I am sorry to break that to you. There really is no old man who lives at the North Pole with his short friends making toys to deliver to all the good little girls and boys late at night on December 24. However, there is a true story of someone who comes to us to give rather than to take, and it is found in John 10:9-10.

In John 10:9-10, Jesus says this: "I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." In these verses, Jesus is saying that He has come to us not to take, but to give something wonderful: "life ... to the full." If Jesus came to give, why do we have the perspective that what He really wants is to take from us?

Now, you may not have thought about this before, but we really do (sometimes) have the perspective that Jesus comes to take from us, not to give. We sometimes feel that He came to “take” the fun out of our lives. Many of the things we think we would want to do and that we are tempted to do are things that exist on the forbidden list in God’s economy. Don’t have sex outside of marriage. Don’t get drunk on alcohol and don’t use drugs. Don’t tear each other down with your words. Don’t harbor anger towards another. Sometimes we can think that all these commandments take more than they give. Our experience in the world has conditioned us to think that anyone coming to us wants to take, not to give, so when we see what Christ is offering, we are waiting for the catch.

However, as I read John 10, I am struck by this incredible reminder that a thief takes, but Jesus always gives. In fact, He not only gives, but He gives unbelievable gifts! Jesus comes to us offering the best life possible. Being the creator and author of life, He knows what is best for us, and He guides us through the gates of everyday life to the green pastures of abundant living. All the things we thought He was taking away through commandments are really just directions guiding us to the location of abundant living.

Therefore, the next time you read the Bible and see commands from Christ, do not imagine that these are the words of someone who has come to take from us. Do not be unaware of Jesus’ existence or be skeptical of His intentions—He has come for our benefit, to give us the abundant life!

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend some time thanking God for sending Jesus to be our Good Shepherd. Ask Him to continue to reveal Himself to you as you study His Word so that you may always know and recognize His voice and experience the full life that He has promised.
2. Reread John 10:1-21.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray. Echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
2. Read John 11:1-16 (and scan Luke 10:38-42 and Mark 14:1-11).
3. Jesus was informed of the news that Lazarus was sick. According to these passages, what kind of relationship did Jesus have with the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus?
4. Based on the relationship that Jesus had with them, do you think anything about His behavior was odd when he learned of Lazarus' illness?
5. According to John 11:1-16, what was Jesus' rationale for waiting two more days to go and visit Lazarus?
6. For whose benefit did Jesus wait until Lazarus had died? (Be as specific as you can, based on the context of this passage.)

7. A few things are clear from these opening verses of John 11:

- Jesus loved Lazarus and his family.
- Jesus was aware of Lazarus' illness.
- Jesus waited an extended period of time before coming to Lazarus' aid.
- Jesus' intention was to raise Lazarus from the dead, though Mary, Martha, and Lazarus did not know that.
- Jesus waited intentionally to go to Lazarus in order to show the disciples something about Himself.

During the time period of John 11:1-16, all Mary, Martha, or Lazarus knew was that Lazarus was sick and dying and that Christ was not yet on the scene. How do you think they must have felt at that moment? How do you think they felt about Christ at that moment?

8. Two principles we can learn from this passage are that Christ is aware of our situation even if we fail to see Him act on our behalf and on our schedule and that He acts on our behalf in a glorious fashion in His time and according to His great purposes. How does knowing these two things help you to trust God more when you are experiencing difficulty and you wonder when—or if—divine help will come?

Day 3

1. Let us pray that through our study we'll grow in knowledge and love for Christ as Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-11: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."
2. Read John 11:17-37.
3. In these verses, we read about Jesus' arrival on the scene at Bethany. What did Jesus find out in John 11:17, and what kind of scene do you see described in the following verses?
4. Martha was the first of Lazarus' sisters to come out to meet Christ on the road. How did she approach Him? How did Jesus respond?
5. Martha made a theological statement in 11:24, and Jesus added to her understanding with a theological revelation about who He really is and what He offers. When it comes to life after death, this is one of the clearest passages about what Christ is offering to all who will believe in Him. What did Jesus say about His relationship with death and what He offers to those who believe in Him?
6. One possibility for interpreting 11:25 is to say that Jesus was promising that anyone who believed in Him would never experience physical death; however, we know that everyone [Lazarus included] who has lived from Jesus' time until today actually has experienced physical death. Either Jesus was a liar or there must be another interpretation for John 11:25. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that those who believed in Him would "never die"?

Day 4

1. Pray for God to reveal Himself in a new way and to use this study to purify your heart. We know that it is God “who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13), so pray that you will be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15b-16a).
2. Read John 11:38-44.
3. When Jesus arrived at the tomb and wanted to go inside, what did Martha say to Him? What does this reveal to us about Martha’s understanding about what Christ was getting ready to do?
4. Jesus took a moment and prayed to God before asking Lazarus to come forth. What was the reason Jesus gave for why He prayed out loud?
5. **STUDY NOTE:** Over the course of Jesus’ ministry, His miracles were met with more and more (and increasingly intense) opposition. The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders were convinced that Jesus was operating on His own agency or possibly even working with Satan to perform His miracles. Jesus here prayed to remove any doubt about who Jesus was “working with” or where His power came from.

6. Jesus called Lazarus out by name, asking him to come forth from the grave. This is a great reminder to us that Jesus was not just raising “someone” from the grave, but He was raising someone He knew from the grave—Lazarus. The salvation that Jesus offers is not generic (for just “someone”); it is for specific people whose name Christ calls out. If you have a relationship with God, it means that at some point in the past, Christ has called out your name and asked you to come forth from your life of sin and to live with Him for eternity. What an awesome thing to think that the God of the Universe knows our names! How does knowing that Jesus calls us forth by name impact the way you think about your relationship with God?

7. Upon hearing His name called, Lazarus walked out of the tomb alive! Though Lazarus was alive again, He was still bound by his grave clothes. Jesus wanted Lazarus released from that bondage as well, which seems to point to a restoration of quality of life for Lazarus. He was not simply breathing again, but he was really LIVING again! What does this tell you about the extent of Jesus’ power over death?

8. Scan back over John 11:1-44. In the space below, describe the person of Christ as revealed in these verses.

9. How is God moving you to respond to the person of Christ after reading this passage?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray and thank God for His word, which is living and active in our lives. Praise Him for the power of His word as you remember Hebrews 4:12, which says, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Ask God to use His word powerfully in your life today.
2. Read John 11:1-44.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week’s passage to your life.

Surgery AND P.T.

As we lined up along the free throw line, we were one miss, three seconds, and ninety feet away from victory. We were trailing our opponent by two points in the 12th Street Recreational Center Fall Church League Tournament, and one of their players was on the free throw line with a chance to clinch the game with a pair of free throws. If he missed, we would have a chance to take the ball the length of the court for a last second desperation heave for victory. I wanted the chance to take that heave. So, when his free throw fell short, I grabbed the ball, turned and began sprinting towards our goal. And that is when I fell down.

Now, I don’t know how many times I have played in my mind or practiced in my driveway this very scenario (three seconds left, down two, with a chance to make the shot and win the game), but never in my fantasies has the play ever ended with me falling to the ground! But in real life, that is exactly what happened. I wanted to take the shot, but I ended up feeling as though I had been shot instead— a loud pop preceded intense pain as I ruptured my right Achilles tendon. Oh yeah ... and we lost the game.

The next day, I went to see an orthopedic surgeon who told me that he could stitch my leg back together and make me “just like new.” Sure enough, one week later I had surgery, but I soon found out that becoming “just like new” was not as simple as just having surgery. After surgery, my leg was casted, immobile and sore—it took six months of physical therapy and hard work to get the “just like new” leg I was waiting for. The surgery brought the possibility of life and mobility back to my leg, but actual usefulness and function would not return to my leg for quite some time.

In John 11, Jesus received word that his friend Lazarus was very ill and in need of help. After waiting two days before beginning the journey to Lazarus’ side, Jesus arrived at Bethany (Lazarus’ hometown) to find that Lazarus had already died and had been in the tomb for four days.

When Jesus arrived, He talked with Lazarus’ sister Martha. Jesus said to Martha in 11:25, “I

am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” Jesus told Martha this (and John recorded it for us) so that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, everyone might see the larger significance of this mighty miracle. More than just returning life to one dead man, Jesus was offering resurrection AND life to all who would believe in His name.

After making this declaration, Jesus moved to the tomb where He ordered the stone to be rolled back, opening the door for the dead man (Lazarus) to come forth. With a loud cry, Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!”—and out walked Lazarus, still bound in the clothes that they had used to bury him. Jesus then ordered people to cut the grave clothes off of his body, freeing Lazarus to live life. John 12:2 records for us that Lazarus’ health did return immediately, and he was seen at a feast with Christ just a short time later.

When Jesus said that He was both the resurrection and the life, He was implying something very significant. Sometimes we may think that Jesus’ salvation is like surgery. He, our heavenly Surgeon, goes in and creates the potential for life by stitching up our wounds and extracting sin’s ultimate consequence from our lives. Though we understand Christ’s role as Surgeon, we often think of our spiritual lives as physical therapy ... a lengthy process where we alone have to work very hard to restore vitality to an otherwise dysfunctional situation. When we hear that Jesus is the resurrection, we sometimes think that as Christians we are like the “living dead,” saved from our sin eternally, but fully bound by its restrictive grave clothes in the present. If this is your attitude, remember that Jesus says that He is both the resurrection AND the life. He not only restores the potential for life, but He also provides the life itself—immediately. Like Lazarus who was not just given breath, but was cut free from his grave clothes, so Jesus offers us not just eternal hope for tomorrow, but every help for today!

Therefore if you know Christ, remember that He has done more than just raise you from the consequences of your sin; He has offered you the abundant life here and now with Him. Remember that He has cut off the grave clothes of your sin and invited you to a feast with Him today.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. As you begin your study today, spend some time praising Christ for being the resurrection and the life. He has made it possible for us to be resurrected after death as well as to live a fulfilling and purposeful life while on earth. Ask the Lord to continue showing you His truth today just as He showed truth to His disciples and Lazarus' family and friends when He raised Lazarus from the dead.
2. Reread John 11:1-44.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?
5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Week 9: John 14:1-14

Jesus desires to be with His people ... not just now, but for eternity. That is why He went to prepare a place for His followers— that where He is, they may also be. Read this week to see where Jesus plans to take His followers and how He plans to get them there.

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray and consider this promise from Isaiah 55:10-11 concerning God's word: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Praise God that His word and promises are trustworthy and reliable. Continue to pray that He will use this study to accomplish His work in you.
2. Read John 14:1-14, and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?

 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 14:1-14? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Thank God for the provision of His Holy Spirit, who leads us into His truth. Reflect upon Jesus' words when He told His followers, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Pray and ask God to make you sensitive to the Holy Spirit's faithful counsel and guidance. Ask Him to teach you as you look at today's study.
2. Read John 14:1-4.
3. To gain a better sense of the context of John 14, read John 13:31-36. Do you see a connection between what Jesus told the disciples in John 13 and how He comforted them in John 14:1-5? If so, what is that connection?
4. In John 14, Jesus was thinking about the events that were getting ready to unfold: His trial, death, and ascension into heaven. According to Matthew 26:36-46 and Luke 22:39-46, Jesus was in "great anguish" and His soul was "overwhelmed with sorrow" as He thought of the days and events ahead. Given what Jesus was getting ready to go through, one might expect that Jesus would desire comfort from His disciples. Instead He chose to comfort them. What does this tell you about the character of Christ? Does this provide an example for us to follow in caring for the needs of others?
5. Jesus described a place known as the "Father's House." What do you think He was talking about when He referenced the Father's House?

Day 3

1. As you begin today's study, pray and ask God for wisdom as you look into His word. Remember James 1:5, which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Pray thankfully to God, trusting that He will generously give you wisdom as you rely on Him to reveal His truth and help you understand His word today.
2. Read John 14:4-7.
3. In John 14:4, Jesus told the disciples that they knew the way to the place where He was going (and where He eventually planned to take them). Based on what you read yesterday in John 14:1-4, how would the disciples know the way to the place Jesus had prepared for them?
4. Even though Jesus told them that He would take them to the place He was preparing for them, Thomas voiced in 14:5 a question many of the disciples may have been thinking: "Where are we going, and how do we get there?" Why do you think the disciples had such a hard time embracing what Jesus had just told them (that He would be taking them to His Father's house)?
5. Instead of getting angry or impatient with His disciples for asking a question about something He had just answered, Jesus graciously answered the question again with a firm declaration in 14:6. What is that declaration?

6. By claiming to be “THE Way,” “THE Truth,” and “THE Life,” Jesus was emphasizing that He is not simply “A way, truth, or life” but the ONLY way to true life. In context, Jesus appears to have been saying that He is the only true way for someone to experience eternal life in the Father’s House, or heaven. What are some of the other “ways” suggested by the world to get to God and heaven? What does Jesus’ statement mean for the other ways to get to the Father’s House?

7. While many religious systems are built on a plan of what we have to do and not do in order to earn the right to stand before God, Christianity is built on a Person (Jesus Christ) who has done a great thing for us so that we can have an eternal residence in the Father’s House. Christianity is thus more of a relationship with God than a religion to impress God. How does understanding this truth impact your view of life as a Christian today?

8. Has there ever been a time in your life when you have placed your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and accepted Him as THE Way to the Father’s House? If so, when was that time? If not, what other “ways” are you trusting in for eternity?

Day 4

1. Take some time to pray and ask God to use His word to teach, rebuke, correct and train you, just as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16,17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Thank God for His word and ask Him to equip you for good works today.
2. Read John 14:7-14.
3. Jesus made a strong statement as to His true nature/identity in John 14:7-14. Who did Jesus claim to be "one" with in these verses? What were the implications of this for Jesus' followers?
4. What can we learn about who God is by looking at the person of Jesus Christ? Think back over the past nine weeks of this study and all the things you have seen Jesus do in these weeks. Based on the fact that if you have "seen the Son, you have seen the Father" we can conclude that the kinds of things Jesus does are the kinds of things God the Father does. Make a list below of what you have learned about who God is by reading about Christ these past nine weeks. (For example: In this week's study we saw Jesus comfort and encouraging His disciples when they were afraid that He was leaving them. We can conclude from this that God is an encourager.)

5. In John 14:12, Jesus indicated that after His ascension into heaven, His followers could continue on doing even “greater things” than He had done. What do you think Jesus was referring to? We have seen Jesus do some great things; how could He be serious that “greater things” would be done in the future?
6. **STUDY NOTE:** According to John 14:15-31 and 16:5-16, Jesus said that after He would ascend to heaven, He would send His Holy Spirit to His disciples to empower them to continue His ministry on this planet. While Jesus was one person who lived in one geographical setting, the Spirit would be given to many people living all over the world who believe in Jesus’ name. In this way, the work of Christ would be “greater” in number and scope than what Christ had done in His earthly miracles while living in Palestine.
7. How does knowing that Jesus desires to do His great works through us encourage you as you live out your life today? What do you sense that Jesus wants to do through you today as He works out His “greater things” in our lives?
8. One of the ways in which we appropriate the power of Christ in our lives today is by asking in faith for Christ to work in our lives through prayer. This is what Jesus was talking about in John 14:13-14. If we ask Him to work in a way which is in connection with His will, He will grant us our requests. In your life today, where would you like to see a “greater thing” done? What are you trusting God to do in your life? Take a moment and pray for that item that Christ might be glorified in answering our requests and working in a mighty way.

9. What do you think Jesus meant when He said in verse 14, “You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it.”?

10. STUDY NOTE: While reading John 14:14, it is important to remember the context in which Jesus made this statement. In the opening verses of John’s 14th chapter, Jesus offered words of comfort to His disciples about His imminent departure. He assured them that He was going to prepare a place for them, and that He is the way to the Father. Immediately after verse 14, Jesus again spoke words of comfort and hope to the disciples. This time He promised them the Holy Spirit, who would be their constant comforter and guide to the truth. What powerful words of hope these were not only for the disciples, but also for followers of Christ today!

Furthermore, Jesus gave even more hope, as He said in verse 13, “And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” Notice the second half of that verse, “...so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” These words begin to shed some light on Jesus’ meaning in the following verse. Christ’s purpose and ultimate goal was always to bring glory to His Father, and that is to be our purpose as well. So when we read verse 14, we can remember that the purpose of these prayers is to be God’s glory.

Bible scholar and professor Dr. Thomas L. Constable writes of verse 14, saying, “This apparently blank check type promise has a condition that we often overlook. It is ‘in my name.’ We overlook this condition because many Christians think it means simply making our request and then adding the phrase ‘in Jesus’ name’ at the end. Praying in Jesus’ name means coming to the Father in prayer as Jesus’ representative. ... Someone who prays that way will always ask only what is God’s will or what is subject to God’s will since that is always how Jesus related to His Father. ... The purpose of our praying must always be God’s glory, as it always was and always will be the Son’s purpose.”

1 John 5:14-15 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.” Notice that John specifically says “... if we ask anything according to His will ...” According to Bible Gateway’s commentary on John, this means to “pray in keeping with His character and concerns and, indeed, in union with Him. ... The promise is made to those who will pray in Jesus’ name and for the glory of the Father. As such it is a great promise for the advance of God’s purposes in oneself, in the church and in the world.”

11. After reading the Biblical note on the previous page, what further thoughts do you have on John 14:14? Do you ever pray in this way?

Day 5

1. Begin today's study with 2 Peter 1:3,4 in mind: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Praise God for His divine power which provides us with everything we need! Ask God to remind you daily of His great and precious promises that you are learning as you read His word.
2. Read John 14:1-14.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

On the Right Path

At the top of a waterfall, high above beautiful Lake Louise in Banff National Park, Canada, sits a most peculiar tea house. This tea house is a beautiful site: a log cabin equipped with a wood burning stove to heat hot tea for weary hikers. The cabin was built atop this waterfall by the Canadian Pacific Railway many years ago as a diversion for passengers to enjoy while the train was stopped in this mountain villa.

Back in the summer of 2000, my sister-in-law, her husband, and I decided to hike the 2,000 foot ascent to get to this tea house while on vacation in the Banff area. Before we began our hike, we asked someone in the Chateau at the Lake's edge how to get to this tea house. They told us that you had to take the "horse trail" to the top. This was because heavy snow still covered the ground on the high country trail and made any other route impassable to the tea house's locale. Upon receiving these instructions, we were faced with two options: 1. We could take their expert advice, ascend the horse trail, and enjoy the benefits of the tea house experience. 2. We could assume that the instructions we received were an exaggeration, and we could try to find our own way to the top.

While those two options do exist, only one of the two of those options is really a valid or wise choice. We had never been to Lake Louise before, but the people we got the advice from were employees of the park and were paid good money to help people like us get to the top of that tea house trail. Therefore, we took their advice and hiked the "horse trail" to get to the top.

After having our tea in those beautiful surroundings, I decided to test the advice we had been given. Instead of heading down the horse trail like my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, I decided to blaze my own trail and follow a different path back down the mountain. About ten minutes into my journey, I realized what a mistake that was. I soon lost the "path" and found myself waist deep in powdery snow, trying to find a way to retreat back to the tea house and gallop back down the "horse trail." Some might have thought the advice we received was closed-

mindful and narrow, but in reality, it was just plain fact. If we wanted to go up or down the mountain, there was really only one trail to take.

I was thinking of this story as I read John 14. In John 14, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to heaven to prepare a place for them ... a place He would one day come back and take them to. After Jesus told them of this place, He also told them of the only way they could make it to heaven: through Him. He said in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In a sense, Jesus says that at the pinnacle of life is a beautiful place prepared for you. However, in order to get to that place, there is only one trail you can take: through Him.

Now Jesus' exclusive claim on the way to God may sound narrow or closed-minded to our 21st century ears, but in reality, it is just plain fact. If there were other ways, He (who knows all) would have told us about them. However, Jesus knew that there is only one way to God and that all other efforts to reach Him will only leave us "waist deep in snow" and helpless on the hillside of life. The only way to a holy God is by means of someone who can make us clean and acceptable in His sight. Since we are all sinful people, we all need cleansing, and the kind of cleansing we need can only be provided by Christ Himself. The paths of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Secularism sound promising, but do not lead you up the mountain of God. Only by faith in Jesus Christ can we make it to paradise.

Faced with these instructions, we are faced with two options: 1. We could take Jesus' expert advice, place our eternity into His capable nail-scarred hands, and enjoy the unspeakable joy of an eternity in "the Father's House." 2. We could assume that Jesus' instructions are an exaggeration, and try to find our own way to the top. While both of these options exist, only one of them is really a valid or wise choice. There is only one path that leads to the top. As we follow Christ, He will always keep us on the right trail.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Praise God that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Thank Him that we are able to come to the Father because of Jesus, and pray that He will continue to guide you in His ways as you study His truth today.
2. Reread John 14:1-14.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Week 10: John 15:1-17

Apple trees produce apples. Grapevines produce grapes. Christians produce Christ's fruit. This is the product of a branch/trunk relationship, and it is precisely what Jesus wants us to realize about the Christian life. He desires to pump His life into us so that His fruit might hang from our "branches." The key to a fruitful life is explained by Christ in John 15.

Day 1

1. Take a moment to pray, asking God to illuminate His truth for you today as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19a: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read John 15:1-17, and write down some observations of the text. (I.e., what stands out to you about this passage?)
 - What are the key words in this section?

 - What is the big idea of this section?
3. What questions come to your mind as you read John 15:1-17? In the space below, write down any questions you have about this text.

Day 2

1. Take a moment to pray as you begin your study today. Ask God to reveal Himself to you today in the way that John wrote of in 1 John 5:20: "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."
2. Read John 15:1-17.

3. **STUDY NOTE:** In this section, Jesus used an extended metaphor to show the disciples a deep truth about Himself and their relationship with Him for the rest of their lives. Though Jesus was going away (see 14:1-6), He and the disciples would need to remain close in order for them to live the life He was calling them to. In order to communicate this truth, Jesus used the symbol of a vine. This was significant because the vine was a national symbol of the nation of Israel. It appeared on the back of coins during the period of time just before Jesus' birth (similar to how Americans have a bald eagle on the back of older quarters). The vine became a symbol of the nation itself. Jesus played on this many times, referring to Israel as the vine or the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16, 21:23-41; Mark 12:1-9; and Luke 13:6-9, 20:9-16. According to Merrill C. Tenney, as Jesus and the disciples left the upper room and headed toward the Garden of Gethsemane, they would have walked right past the Temple and seen the giant golden vine that was hanging on its front. (See Tenney's "John" in *John-Acts*, vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 150.) The significance of this image is that Jesus was showing Himself to be more important to their identity and future spiritual success than their ancestry as Jews could be.

4. Beyond the ties to a popular symbol for the country, why do you think Jesus used the example of the vine and the branches to talk about His relationship with His disciples?
5. According to 15:1-16, what is produced by those who abide in the "vine"?

6. John 15:1 tells us that the Father is the gardener. John 15:2 tells us that He prunes the branches that are connected to Christ so that they might bear more fruit. What do you think “pruning branches” is referring to here?

7. **STUDY NOTE:** Since Christians relate to God on the basis of His grace and not their performance, many have wrongly concluded that how we live our lives must not matter all that much. If our good deeds don't get us into heaven, what is the point of doing good? Sections of Scripture like John 15 help remind us that God has plans for our lives right now that involve producing His fruit through us. Fruit is the outward expression of the inward identity of an organism. In other words, if I see three trees standing before me in a garden, I can tell which tree is which by the kind of fruit it produces. An apple tree produces apples. A grapevine produces grapes. An orange tree produces oranges. Similarly, when speaking of spiritual fruit for those “in Christ,” Jesus is talking about His disciples producing actions and outcomes in this world that “look like Christ.” The New Testament sometimes refers to Christ's fruit as character qualities (Galatians 5:22-26). In other places, a person's ministry is described as fruit (Colossians 1:6-10). In other places, fruit is merely a visible sign of repentance (Matthew 3:8). In each case, it is the character and work of Christ that is being displayed through the lives of His followers. Therefore, when we read in John 15 that Jesus desires for us to produce fruit, He is saying that He wants our lives to look different and be lived differently right now, so that the watching world can see Jesus more clearly through us. He gives us the power to produce His fruit as we remain connected to Him by faith. He also “prunes” us and cares for us so that our lives might produce the most fruit possible. In short, we do good, not to be known by Christ, but to make Christ known to the watching world.

8. Complete this sentence (found in John 15:5) by filling in the blank: “Apart from Me, you can do _____.” What do you think this phrase means? Apart from Christ people seem to do all kinds of things. What do you think we cannot do apart from Christ?

9. Do you really believe that apart from Christ you can do nothing that God is calling you to? On a scale of 1-10, how dependent on Jesus Christ do you feel every day (where 10 is very dependent and 1 is very independent)? What kinds of things would you do if your dependence on Christ was a "10"? How would being very dependent upon Christ impact your daily life?

10. On Day 3, we will talk more about what it means to "abide" or "remain" in Christ. Before we end today, however, what do you think the "abiding Christian life" looks like? What would it look like for you to "abide" in Christ?

Day 3

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life today as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. Read John 15:1-17.
3. This passage indicates that the key to the Christian life is to "abide" in Christ like a branch stays attached to the vine. This is a graphic picture because, as 15:6 reminds us, a branch that is not connected to the vine (or trunk) of the tree withers and dies. Today we will explore further what it means to abide in Christ. The word "abide" literally means to remain in something. In order for something to remain someplace, it first has to be placed there. When do Christians first get "placed" in Christ?
4. When people come to Christ for the first time and become His followers, at some level, they are acknowledging that they are in great need. At a fundamental level, they are in need of forgiveness of their sins, and they believe that Jesus Christ is their only hope for that forgiveness. By placing their faith in His work on the cross, they receive the free gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, people first come to Christ and are "placed" in Him because of their sense of need and their dependence upon Him to supply that need. As people live out their Christian lives, however, there is a real temptation to try to grow in their relationship with God on the basis of their own hard work and competence instead of on the life that Christ provides. In a sense, people want to receive eternal life through Christ, but then grow into a "mature branch" based on their own hard work and devotion. Jesus did not want any of His disciples to fall into this trap. He knew that any hope anyone has in growing into maturity in Christ will be through a life of sustained dependence upon Him. Just as we come into a relationship with Christ through dependence on Jesus' provision of forgiveness, so we grow as Christians by *remaining* dependent upon Jesus' provision of His righteous fruits through our lives. One of the key ways in which we do this is by regularly praying and asking Jesus to work in us and through us to give us the strength to do the things He is calling us to do. Take a moment and write down three things that you feel God is leading you to do right now in your life. (Examples: honor my parents, relate to a friend in a loving way, invite my neighbor to come to church with me.) After writing down these three issues, write out the words of John 15:5 at the top of the next page as a reminder that you cannot do any of these things in your own strength. Then, take a moment and pray, asking Jesus to work through you to give you the strength to see His fruit produced in your life in these three areas.

5. Abiding in Christ is a state of remaining in dependence upon Christ throughout our Christian life. This dependent life, according to Jesus' words in John 15, leads to a life that produces much spiritual fruit. Jesus gives us another clue on how we abide in Him in John 15:10. Abiding means remaining dependent, but it also means something more. What is that something as described by Jesus in John 15:10?

6. In life, we are confronted with many choices as to our behavior. In many instances, our choices will eventually boil down into two categories: 1. the choice that Jesus desires for us to make, and 2. the choice our flesh wants to make. For instance, Jesus said that sex outside of marriage is wrong. Our flesh tells us that anything that feels good must be alright to do. In these situations, we have a choice: will we choose to go Jesus' way or our own way? Based on what we saw in John 15:5, one of the keys in the Christian life is to remain dependent upon Jesus as we make this decision, asking Him for the strength to do the right thing. However, John 15:10 tells us that one of the ways in which we demonstrate our dependence upon God is that we follow His lead and become obedient to His direction as we make our decisions in life. In other words, it is the dependent, faith-filled thing to do to deny our flesh and trust that Jesus' way is really the way to go, then walk forward in obedience. In this way, as we are obedient, we are "abiding" or "remaining" in a state of dependence upon God. What is a choice you are facing in life right now where what you want is at odds with what God is calling you to do? What does "abiding in Christ" in the midst of your choice look like for you?

7. In John 15:11, Jesus indicated that when we are living an obedient life, remaining in Him, our joy is complete. In what ways in your life have you seen the "complete joy" of God as you have walked in obedience in an area? In what ways have you seen a lack of joy when you have walked away from God in disobedience?

8. **STUDY NOTE:** While reading John 15:1-8, a few questions may arise. For instance, who does this passage apply to? Is Jesus speaking only to believers? To help make sense of this question, it is important once again to turn to the context of the passage. Jesus had been speaking to His disciples, giving them words of instruction, encouragement, and exhortation. In this beginning section of John 15, Jesus compared Himself to the “true vine” and His Father to the “Gardener.” Those who are attached or connected to Him are referred to as the “branches.” It seems logical, then, that He was speaking to believers.

However, some of these branches, those not abiding in the Vine, are not producing any fruit. According to Dr. Constable, “Lack of fruit in the life, therefore, may not necessarily be an indication that the branch has no vital relationship to the vine ... It may indicate that the branch, though connected to the vine, is not abiding in it [i.e. that the believer is not cultivating an intimate relationship with the Savior].” It’s not saying that these branches are not true believers in Christ; it’s saying that they are not abiding and growing in Him.

Here’s another interesting point made by Zane C. Hodges [see the book *Absolutely Free!* p. 118]: “How strange that in our day and time we have been told so often that fruitlessness is a sure sign that a person is unsaved. Certainly we did not get this idea from the Bible. Rather, the Bible teaches that unfruitfulness in a believer is a sure sign that one is no longer moving forward, no longer growing in Christ. It is a sign that the Christian is spiritually sick, and until well again, cannot enjoy spiritual success.”

Another question might arise while reading John 15, especially verses 2 and 6: What happens to these unfruitful branches? What does it mean for them to be “like a branch thrown into the fire and burned?” Again, turning to the context of the passage seems to help in grappling with this question. Jesus was speaking to believers about *abiding* in Him and living a *fruitful* life. What would be the outcome of not abiding in the True Vine? A life devoid of fruit and usefulness to the Gardener.

A few interpretations of John 15:6 exist. Some interpreters think the reference to fire implies that the unfruitful branch will experience either a loss of salvation or a loss of heavenly reward. Constable (and others) prefers another interpretation, which seems to line up better with the overall statement of this passage. “...the mention of fire is only incidental since vinedressers burned the branches they cut off in the fall pruning. They believe Jesus’ point was that some Christians are as useless to God as these branches were to vine-growers. The point is their uselessness, not their judgment.”

Overall, in these verses Jesus was reminding and encouraging His followers to remain and abide in Him because that is the only way to live a fruitful and abundant life.

Day 4

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23,24. "This is what the Lord declares: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read John 15:9-17.
3. There is a key word repeated nine times in these nine verses. What is it?
4. According to 15:13, what is the highest form of love?
5. For someone to lay down his life for another, he is placing the other person's wants, needs, and desires above his own. Jesus indicated in this passage that He wants us to love God. According to the purest form of love that John 15:13 describes, what does it mean for us to love God?
6. Jesus also indicated that He wants us to love one another (15:17). Using the same definition of deep love provided for us in 15:13, how can we love one another?

Day 5

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, "Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."
2. Read John 15:1-17.

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Tree Truths

We live in a neighborhood with lots of trees. In part, it was those trees that helped to attract us to our house. This towering canopy of sycamores, oaks, elms, and maples keeps our back yards shaded, and our streets lined with beauty. Over two years of living in this house, however, I have come to learn a few things about trees.

First of all, I have learned that tree branches that fail to stay connected to the trunk of the tree become a real hassle. This never became more real than in December 2007 when an ice storm dumped a half inch of ice all over every tree branch in the neighborhood. At first the ice was pretty; then we realized it became very destructive. Under the heavy weight of the ice, branches all over our yard and neighborhood began snapping off and crashing to the ground. The damage was so bad that CNN, The Weather Channel, and NBC nightly news all broadcast about the damage within a short walk from my house. After the temperatures warmed and the ice melted, my neighbors and I began surveying the damage. We lost thousands of pounds of branches. Over the course of the next couple of weeks, I would drag all these branches to the curb for the city to pick up. My neighbors would do the same. Eventually, our entire neighborhood looked like it had a log cabin hedge lining every street. The beauty of the branches that once hung green above the streets below now lay in lifeless, brown piles awaiting destruction in the fires of the city collection areas.

Second of all, I have learned that trees require care if they are to remain vibrant. Left to themselves, trees will actually overproduce branches. We once had an apple tree. That apple tree would produce thousands of grape sized apples if I let it. Over time, however, I found that by trimming several branches off the tree, the tree would actually produce bigger, tastier apples. Without the strain of those extra branches, the tree could produce better fruit. This made pruning a priority for me, because the reason you have an apple tree is to produce apples!

These two truths that I have learned about trees are echoed in John 15:1-17 when Jesus compares His relationship with His followers with the relationship between a tree trunk (the

vine) and its branches. This parallel is true in at least a couple of ways.

First, Christians who fail to remain connected to Christ in their daily lives cease to be beautiful. Now, I am not talking about physical beauty, but spiritual beauty. When Christians live their lives dependent upon Christ and allowing Jesus to produce His fruit in and through them, their lives are beautiful and attractive. People want to be around them, and they reflect God's glory. However, when these same Christians decide to do their own thing, rely on their own strength, and detach themselves from Christ, they quickly dry up and wither. Their lives may have once had a spiritual vitality or beauty to them, but now they lay lifeless by the roadside of life. As Jesus said in John 15:6, "If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers."

Second, it can be noted that God's purpose for Christians is to display His fruit in our lives. In John 15:8, Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." In order to have a life that produces Christ's fruit, however, we must remain dependent upon Christ AND allow the Father to prune us for maximum growth. In Jesus' metaphor, God the Father is the gardener who comes into our lives and cuts away "extra" things so that what is left might sustain more of the fruit He desires that we produce. John 15:2 says, "He [the Father] cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." This can be a scary thought—God pruning our lives of the "extra branches"—but it need not be. God is always good and always right, so the things that He cuts away are things that we never needed in the first place and that were getting in the way of what we really want ... to glorify God with our lives. Pruning is a priority for the Father because the purpose of Christians is to produce Christ's fruit!

As you reflect on the truths of this passage, I want you to examine your own spiritual life for a moment. How are things going? Is your spiritual life alive or dead? Are you producing Christ's fruit, or are extra things getting in the way? This passage reminds us that spiritual vitality comes from abiding in Christ as a branch remains in its vine. The key to spiritual life and growth comes from living a life of dependence upon the Savior. Further, if you find your spiritual life producing some fruit, but not "much fruit," then think for a moment about what is in your life that might be an "extra branch" that the Father might need to prune off to allow for more growth. Maybe your extra branches are relationships that pull you away from Him, addictions, time wasters, etc. Whatever they are, invite the Gardener to examine your life and see if He might want to clip a branch here or there to encourage future growth.

All Christians are a collection of branches attached to one tree. When we stay attached to Him, it becomes a beautiful sight for all to see.

Use the next page to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Begin today's study by thanking God that He can produce His fruit in us as we abide in Him. Ask Him to allow you to remain in Him today so that He can illuminate His truths as you study His Word today.
2. Reread John 15:1-17.
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn about Jesus this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Epilogue

Over the past ten weeks, we have had our fingers on the pulse of the heartbeat of our Savior. We have seen various vital signs that have revealed to us His identity and character as recorded by John in his Gospel. Over these weeks we have seen Jesus perform seven miraculous “signs” and utter seven “I am _____” statements that have shown us His life and encouraged us to embrace Him by faith. In these ten weeks we have seen the following vital signs:

- Week 1: Jesus turned water into wine and drove the money changers from the Temple. (John 2:1-25)
- Week 2: Jesus healed the royal official’s son and the lame man at the pool. (John 4:43-5:15)
- Week 3: Jesus fed the 5,000 and declared Himself the “Bread of Life.” (John 6:1-15, 25-59)
- Week 4: Jesus walked on water. (John 6:16-24)
- Week 5: Jesus said He is the “Light of the World.” (John 8:12-59)
- Week 6: Jesus healed the blind man. (John 9:1-41)
- Week 7: Jesus said He is the “Sheep Gate” and the “Good Shepherd.” (John 10:1-21)
- Week 8: Jesus revealed Himself to be the “Resurrection and the Life” as He raised Lazarus from the dead. (John 11:1-44)
- Week 9: Jesus declared, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:1-14)
- Week 10: Jesus declared, “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” (John 15:1-17)

As you scan over this list of vital signs you have seen concerning Christ, take just a few moments to reflect on their spiritual significance for your life. In the space on the next page, write out what you have learned about Christ from this study and list any applications you feel Christ is leading you to take as a result of this study.



