THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The King Who Said I AM

John, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King Who Said I AM: The Gospel of John, Unfiltered

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the NIV. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

By now you know the saying that keeps showing up in this series: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” This is the fourth book. The saying stays. Consider it a family tradition.

Here’s why it matters for John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell a lot of the same stories, often in the same order. Scholars call them the Synoptic Gospels, meaning they “see together.” Then John comes along and tells the story from a completely different angle. If you think you already know the story of Jesus, John is the Gospel most likely to surprise you.

John doesn’t start in Bethlehem or at the Jordan River. He starts before the universe existed. He calls Jesus “the Word,” and he says the Word was with God and was God. Most of the stories in this book aren’t in the other Gospels at all: water turned into wine, a late-night talk with a religious leader named Nicodemus, a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, a man born blind, Lazarus walking out of his tomb, Jesus washing His friends’ feet, Thomas and his doubts, and Peter getting a second chance on a beach.

John also gives us the “I am” sayings. Jesus says, I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way and the truth and the life. Those two words, “I am,” echo the name God gave Himself when He spoke to Moses from a burning bush. John wants you to hear that echo.

The writer was probably John, one of the Twelve, the son of Zebedee. He never uses his own name. He calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He was there at the Last Supper, at the cross, and at the empty tomb. He wrote as an old man, looking back on a lifetime of following Jesus.

And John tells you exactly why he wrote. Near the end of his book, he says he wrote these things so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life. That's the challenge. John doesn't want you to finish this book knowing more facts. He wants you to finish it believing. So bring your questions. Bring your doubts. Thomas did. Then look closely at the evidence, and decide what you think.

How This Book Works

This book walks through all 21 chapters of John, in order, one chapter of this book for each chapter of John. Each one tells what happened, adds background about the world Jesus lived in (Jewish festivals, Samaritans, Pharisees, the temple, Roman rule, crucifixion), and points out what John wants you to notice, especially the signs and the "I am" sayings.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and sometimes a Try This challenge.

One more thing: this book is a guide, not a replacement. Keep a Bible open next to it and read each chapter of John for yourself.

John wrote so that you would believe, not so that you'd take someone else's word for it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

This book follows the whole Gospel of John, all 21 chapters, in order. I have worked to stay faithful to the text: no invented events, no rewritten dialogue that changes the meaning. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV); elsewhere I paraphrase and explain. Historical background is included where it helps the story make sense, and I've tried to stay with what's well established rather than speculation.

John is in some ways the deepest of the Gospels, but it's also full of personal conversations: Nicodemus at night, the woman at the well, Martha and Mary at Lazarus's tomb, Thomas, and Peter on the beach. Teenagers are wrestling with identity, belief, and belonging, and John speaks right to those questions. I've emphasized the seven signs, the "I am" sayings, Jesus' long conversation with His disciples at the Last Supper, and the way John keeps calling the reader to believe. The hard parts are here too, including the crucifixion, told truthfully but without graphic excess.

The book also deals honestly with the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11). The NIV notes that the earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not include it. I've explained that briefly and respectfully, and I've still covered the story, so that students aren't surprised when they see the note in their own Bibles. I've also noted briefly that John 5:4 is missing from the earliest manuscripts.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will come to the same place Thomas did, and say to Jesus, from the heart, "My Lord and my God!"

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

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CHAPTER 1

The Word Moved In

John 1

Matthew starts with a family tree. Mark starts with John the Baptist. Luke starts with a research report. John starts before time.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If those first three words sound familiar, they should. They're the first three words of the Bible, from Genesis 1. John is telling you he's about to retell the story of creation, and this time the Word is the main character.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why "the Word"?**
>
> The Greek term John uses is logos. To Jewish readers, it would bring to mind God's word that created the world ("And God said, 'Let there be light'") and spoke through the prophets. To Greek readers, logos was a philosophical idea: the reason or order behind the universe. John uses a word both groups recognized and then says something neither group expected. This Word is a person. He was with God, He was God, and He became human.

Through the Word, all things were made. Nothing that exists was made without Him. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all people. Then John says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Darkness never wins in John's Gospel. It tries. It fails.

Next John introduces another John, John the Baptist. He came as a witness to the light. He wasn't the light himself. Then comes a heartbreaking line: the Word came to His own world, and His own people didn't receive Him. But to everyone who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. Not by family background or human decision. Born of God.

Then the sentence the whole book hangs on: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The God who made galaxies became a baby. He got tired, hungry, and sore. The word translated "made his dwelling" literally means He pitched His tent. It points back to the tabernacle, the tent where God's presence lived among Israel in the wilderness. In Jesus, God moved into the neighborhood.

No one has ever seen God, John says. But the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is close to the Father's side, has made Him known. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

Then the story begins on the ground. Religious leaders from Jerusalem send priests and Levites to ask John the Baptist who he is. Are you the Messiah? No. Elijah? No. The Prophet? No. He finally says he's just a voice calling in the wilderness: make straight the way for the Lord.

The next day, John sees Jesus coming and says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Every Jewish listener knew what lambs were for. Lambs were sacrificed. John is announcing, on day one, how this story will end.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Lamb**

In the Old Testament, lambs were sacrificed in the temple every morning and evening, and at Passover each family killed a lamb to remember the night God rescued Israel from Egypt. The blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts meant death passed over that house. When John the Baptist calls Jesus "the Lamb of God," he's saying Jesus is the sacrifice God Himself provides. Later in this Gospel, Jesus will die at the very time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered.

Two of John's disciples hear this and start following Jesus. He turns around and asks, "What do you want?" It's the first thing Jesus says in this Gospel, and it's a question for every reader. They ask where He's staying. He says, "Come… and you will see." So they spend the day with Him.

One of the two is Andrew. The first thing he does is find his brother Simon and tell him, We've found the Messiah. He brings Simon to Jesus, and Jesus looks at him and gives him a new name: Cephas, which means Peter, "rock." Jesus sees what Simon will become before Simon does.

The next day Jesus finds Philip and says, "Follow me." Philip finds his friend Nathanael and tells him they've found the one Moses and the prophets wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael's response is the first recorded insult about Jesus' hometown: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Philip doesn't argue. He just says, "Come and see."

That's still the best answer to a skeptic. Don't win the debate. Invite them to look for themselves.

When Jesus sees Nathanael coming, He says, Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. Nathanael is startled: How do You know me? Jesus says He saw him under the fig tree before

Philip called him. Whatever happened under that fig tree, it was private, and Nathanael is floored. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." Jesus smiles at how little it took to convince him. You'll see greater things than that, He says. You'll see heaven open and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man.

That's a reference to Jacob's dream of a stairway to heaven in Genesis. Jesus is saying He Himself is the connection between heaven and earth.

Count the titles for Jesus in this one chapter: the Word, God, the light, the one and only Son, the Lamb of God, the Messiah, Rabbi, the Son of God, the king of Israel, the Son of Man. John isn't easing into anything. He wants you to know from the first page exactly who you're dealing with.

KEY VERSE

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. John says that if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. What's one thing about Jesus that changes how you picture God?
2. The first words Jesus says in John are "What do you want?" How would you honestly answer Him?
3. Philip didn't argue with Nathanael. He said, "Come and see." Who could you invite to come and see?

CHAPTER 2

Water into Wine

John 2

On the third day, there's a wedding in Cana, a village in Galilee. Jesus' mother is there, and Jesus and His disciples have been invited too.

Weddings in that culture weren't a single afternoon. They could last a whole week, and the groom's family was responsible for providing food and drink the entire time. Running out was more than inconvenient. It was a public embarrassment that people would talk about for years.

And they run out of wine.

Jesus' mother comes to Him and says simply, "They have no more wine." She doesn't tell Him what to do. She just brings Him the problem. "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replies. "My hour has not yet come." It sounds rude in English, but "Woman" was a polite form of address, like "ma'am." Still, Jesus is making a point. His "hour" is a big theme in John. It refers to the moment of His death and glory. He's not on anyone else's schedule.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Hour**
>
> Throughout the first half of John, Jesus says His hour has not yet come. People try to arrest Him and can't, because His hour hasn't come. Then in chapter 12, right before His death, He finally says, "The hour has come." In

> John, the "hour" is the time when Jesus will be lifted up on the cross, rise again, and return to the Father. Everything in the book is moving toward it.

Mary doesn't argue. She tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." That's good advice for anybody.

Nearby stand six stone water jars, the kind used for Jewish ceremonial washing, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus tells the servants to fill them with water, so they fill them to the brim. Then He tells them to draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.

The master of the banquet tastes the water that has become wine. He has no idea where it came from, but the servants know. He calls the groom aside and says, Everybody brings out the good wine first, and then the cheap stuff after the guests have had plenty. But you've saved the best till now.

Do the math. Six jars, twenty to thirty gallons each. That's somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of the best wine anyone at that wedding had ever tasted. Jesus doesn't do just enough. He's generous to the point of excess.

John calls this "the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory." Notice that word, "signs." John doesn't usually call Jesus' miracles "miracles." He calls them signs, because they point to something beyond themselves. The jars were for religious washing, the old system of trying to become clean. Jesus fills them with something new and better. Something like a party.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Seven Signs**
>
> John carefully selects seven signs from the first half of Jesus' ministry: water into wine (chapter 2), healing an official's son (chapter 4), healing a disabled man at a pool (chapter 5), feeding five thousand (chapter 6), walking on water

> (chapter 6), healing a man born blind (chapter 9), and raising Lazarus (chapter 11). Each one reveals something about who Jesus is. John says Jesus did many other signs, but he wrote these so that readers would believe.

After a few days in Capernaum, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for Passover. In the temple courts, He finds people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables. He makes a whip out of cords and drives them all out, sheep and cattle too. He scatters the coins and overturns the tables. To the dove sellers He says, Get these out of here! "Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

Matthew, Mark, and Luke put the temple clearing near the end of Jesus' ministry. John puts a temple clearing right at the start. Some scholars think Jesus did it twice. Others think John arranged his material to make a point up front. Either way, John wants you to see this early: Jesus has come to replace the old way of meeting God.

The leaders demand a sign to prove He has authority to do this. Jesus answers, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They're baffled. It's taken forty-six years to build this temple, and You're going to raise it in three days? But John explains that the temple Jesus was talking about was His body. After He rose from the dead, His disciples remembered He'd said this, and they believed.

The temple was where God met His people. Jesus is saying that from now on, He is that meeting place.

Many people in Jerusalem see His signs and believe in His name. But John adds an unsettling note: Jesus didn't entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people. He knew what was in each person. He knew the difference between people who were impressed by Him and people who actually trusted Him.

KEY VERSE

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 2:11 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Mary brought Jesus the problem without telling Him how to fix it. What would it look like for you to pray that way?
2. Jesus turned 150 gallons of water into the best wine at the party. What does that tell you about His generosity?
3. Jesus knew the difference between people who were impressed with Him and people who trusted Him. Which describes you right now?

CHAPTER 3

Born Again at Night

John 3

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He was a respected teacher, an insider, the kind of person everyone assumed had God figured out. And he comes to Jesus at night.

Maybe he didn't want to be seen. Maybe night was just a quiet time for serious conversation. But in John's Gospel, darkness and light always mean something. Nicodemus is coming out of the dark to talk to the light of the world.

He opens politely: Rabbi, we know You're a teacher who has come from God, because no one could do the signs You're doing unless God were with him. Jesus skips the small talk. "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

The Greek word can mean "again" or "from above." Jesus probably means both. You need a second birth, and it has to come from God.

Nicodemus takes it literally. How can someone be born when they're old? Surely they can't go back into their mother's womb! Jesus explains that no one can enter God's kingdom unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. Then He compares the Spirit to the wind. You

hear it, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it's going. You can't control the Spirit. You can only see what He does.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Who Was Nicodemus?**
>
> Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the seventy-member council that served as the highest Jewish court in Jerusalem. He shows up three times in John. Here he comes at night with questions. In chapter 7 he cautiously defends Jesus in front of the council. And in chapter 19, after the crucifixion, he brings about seventy-five pounds of spices to help bury Jesus' body. John lets us watch his slow journey from the shadows toward the light.

Nicodemus asks, "How can this be?" And Jesus says, with what sounds like a little surprise, You're Israel's teacher, and you don't understand these things?

Being religious isn't the same as being born again. Nicodemus had the education, the reputation, and the rule-keeping. What he needed was new life.

Then Jesus points back to a strange story from Numbers 21. When the Israelites were dying from snakebites in the wilderness, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who looked at it would live. Just as Moses lifted up the snake, Jesus says, the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him. He's talking about the cross.

And then the most famous verse in the Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Read it slowly. God loved. Not tolerated. The world. Not just good people. He gave. It cost Him. Whoever. No one is left out. Believes.

Not earns. Shall not perish. Rescue. Eternal life. Not just later, but a new kind of life starting now.

The next verse matters too. God didn't send His Son to condemn the world, but to save it. Whoever believes isn't condemned. But whoever doesn't believe stands condemned already. Then John explains why: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. People who do evil hate the light and won't come into it, because they're afraid their deeds will be exposed.

That's the real reason many people stay away from Jesus. It isn't always lack of evidence. Sometimes it's that the light would show us things we don't want to see.

Meanwhile, John the Baptist's disciples are worried. Jesus is baptizing too, and everybody is going to Him instead. They're basically saying, Your numbers are down. John's answer is beautiful. He's like the best man at a wedding. The best man doesn't get jealous of the groom. He's thrilled just to hear the groom's voice. Then John says one of the most freeing sentences a person could say: "He must become greater; I must become less."

KEY VERSE

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Nicodemus was religious but still needed to be born again. What's the difference between being religious and having new life?
2. Jesus said some people avoid the light because they don't want their deeds exposed. Is there anything you'd rather keep in the dark?
3. John the Baptist said, "He must become greater; I must become less." Where in your life do you need to become less?

TRY THIS *Rewrite John 3:16 in your own words, putting your own name in place of "the world" and "whoever." Read it out loud.*

CHAPTER 4

The Woman at the Well

John 4

Jesus leaves Judea and heads back to Galilee, and John says He "had to go through Samaria." Geographically, that was the most direct route. But many Jewish travelers went the long way around to avoid Samaria entirely. Jesus didn't have to go through Samaria because of the map. He had to go because someone there needed Him.

He comes to a town called Sychar, near a well Jacob had dug centuries before. Tired from the journey, He sits down by the well. It's about noon. The disciples have gone into town to buy food.

A Samaritan woman comes to draw water. Women usually came to the well in the cooler morning or evening, together. This woman comes alone, in the heat of the day. It's likely she was avoiding people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jews and Samaritans**

Samaritans lived in the region between Judea and Galilee. They were descendants of Israelites who had intermarried with foreigners after the Assyrian conquest centuries earlier. They worshiped the God of Israel but only accepted the five books of Moses, and they worshiped on Mount Gerizim instead of in Jerusalem. The two groups had a long history of hostility, including the destruction of the Samaritan temple by a Jewish ruler about 150 years before Jesus. Devout Jews avoided contact with Samaritans whenever possible.

Jesus says to her, "Will you give me a drink?" She's shocked. You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can You ask me for a drink? John adds the explanation: Jews didn't share things with Samaritans. A Jewish man talking alone with a Samaritan woman broke at least three social rules at once.

Jesus says that if she knew who was asking, she would have asked Him, and He would have given her "living water." She points out that He doesn't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Is He greater than Jacob? Jesus says that anyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. "But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."

She says, Sir, give me this water so I won't have to keep coming here. She's still thinking about plumbing. So Jesus changes direction. "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she says. Jesus answers that she's right. She's had five husbands, and the man she's with now isn't her husband.

We don't know her whole story. In that culture, women couldn't usually initiate divorce, so she may have been abandoned or widowed more than once. Whatever happened, she carried a lot of pain and probably a lot of shame. Jesus knew everything about her. And He was still talking to her.

She tries to change the subject, the way people do when a conversation gets too personal. She brings up a religious debate: our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say people must worship in Jerusalem. Jesus answers that a time is coming, and has now come, when true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must

worship in the Spirit and in truth." It's not about which mountain. It's about the heart.

She says she knows the Messiah is coming, and when He comes, He'll explain everything. And Jesus says, "I, the one speaking to you —I am he." In Greek, His words are simply "I am, the one speaking to you."

The first person in John's Gospel to hear Jesus plainly say He is the Messiah isn't a priest or a scholar. It's a Samaritan woman with a messy past who came to the well alone.

The disciples come back and are surprised to find Him talking with a woman. Nobody asks Him about it. And the woman leaves her water jar, the thing she came for, and runs back to town. She tells the very people she'd been avoiding, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." The thing she was ashamed of became her testimony. Many Samaritans from that town believe because of her, and when they meet Jesus themselves, they say, "We know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Meanwhile, the disciples urge Jesus to eat. He says He has food they don't know about: to do the will of the One who sent Him. Open your eyes, He tells them, and look at the fields. They're ripe for harvest. As He says this, a crowd of Samaritans is probably walking toward them across the fields.

Back in Cana, a royal official comes to Jesus because his son is dying in Capernaum, about twenty miles away. Jesus tells him to go, his son will live. The man takes Jesus at His word and leaves. On the way home, his servants meet him with the news: the boy is alive. The fever left at one in the afternoon, exactly when Jesus spoke. John calls it the second sign.

KEY VERSE

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."

John 4:13–14 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus knew everything about the woman and still wanted to talk with her. How does it feel to know Jesus knows everything about you?
2. The woman changed the subject when things got personal. How do you change the subject with God?
3. Her shame became her story. Is there a part of your story God might use to help someone else?

CHAPTER 5

Do You Want to Get Well?

John 5

Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Near the Sheep Gate there's a pool called Bethesda, surrounded by five covered colonnades. A huge number of disabled people lie there: blind, lame, paralyzed. Many believed that when the water was stirred, the first person into the pool would be healed.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Pool of Bethesda and Verse 4**
>
> For a long time, some critics doubted that a pool with five colonnades ever existed. Then archaeologists excavated the site in Jerusalem and found a double pool with porches around it, matching John's description. If you look at your NIV, you'll also notice that verse 4 is missing, with a footnote. Some later manuscripts add a line explaining that an angel stirred the water. The earliest and most reliable manuscripts don't include it, so the NIV leaves it out while keeping the verse numbers the same.

One man there has been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Jesus sees him lying there, learns he's been that way a long time, and asks him a question that sounds almost rude: "Do you want to get well?"

Of course he does. Right? But the man doesn't say yes. He makes an excuse. Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes ahead of me.

Sometimes we get so used to being stuck that we stop expecting change. We have explanations ready for why things can't be different. Jesus' question cuts through all of that.

Jesus doesn't help him into the pool. He says, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man is cured. He picks up his mat and walks. This is John's third sign.

But it's the Sabbath. Some religious leaders see the man carrying his mat and tell him it's against the law. He says the man who healed him told him to. Who? He doesn't know. Jesus has slipped away into the crowd.

Later, Jesus finds him at the temple and tells him he's well again; stop sinning, or something worse may happen to him. The man goes and tells the leaders it was Jesus. That's where the conflict begins. Because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the leaders begin to persecute Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Sabbath Debate**

The law of Moses commanded rest on the Sabbath, the seventh day. Teachers in Jesus' time had developed long lists of activities that counted as work, including carrying objects from one place to another. Jewish teachers also agreed that God Himself kept working on the Sabbath in some sense, since people were still born and died and the world kept running. When Jesus says His Father is always working, and so is He, He is claiming to share in work that belongs only to God.

Jesus answers them: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." The leaders understand exactly what He's claiming. Now they try even harder to kill Him. Not only is He breaking the Sabbath, but He's calling God His own Father, "making himself equal with God."

Jesus doesn't back down. He explains that the Son can do nothing by Himself. He only does what He sees the Father doing. The Father loves the Son and shows Him everything. Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whomever He wants. And the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son, so that everyone may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

Then He makes a promise. "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." Not will cross over someday. Has crossed over. Eternal life begins the moment you believe.

Jesus then lists His witnesses, like a lawyer in court. John the Baptist testified about Him. The works He does testify about Him. The Father Himself has testified. And the Scriptures testify about Him. Then He says something stunning to these Bible experts: You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.

It's possible to know the Bible inside and out and still miss Jesus. The point of the Bible isn't the Bible. It's the One it points to.

Finally He tells them that Moses, the very person they think is on their side, will be the one who accuses them. If they really believed Moses, they would believe Jesus, because Moses wrote about Him.

KEY VERSE

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

John 5:24 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus asked a man who'd been stuck for thirty-eight years, "Do you want to get well?" Where have you gotten used to being stuck?
2. The man had an excuse ready instead of an answer. What excuses do you tend to give God?
3. Jesus said it's possible to study the Scriptures and still miss Him. How can you read the Bible in a way that actually leads you to Jesus?

CHAPTER 6

The Bread of Life

John 6

Jesus crosses to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, and a huge crowd follows Him because they've seen His signs on the sick. He goes up on a mountainside and sits down with His disciples. It's near Passover, the festival that remembered how God fed Israel in the wilderness.

Jesus looks up, sees the crowd coming, and asks Philip where they can buy bread for all these people. John tells us He asked "only to test him," because He already knew what He was going to do. Philip does the math: more than half a year's wages wouldn't buy enough for each person to get a bite.

Andrew has found something, though not much. "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Barley bread was the cheap bread, the food of the poor. Only John tells us it came from a boy.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Five Thousand Men**
>
> John says about five thousand men sat down. In that culture, crowds were often counted by the number of men, so the total crowd including women and children may have been much larger. A denarius was a typical day's wage for a laborer, and Philip's estimate of two hundred denarii was roughly eight months of work. Feeding a crowd like that in a remote area was simply impossible by normal means.

Jesus has the people sit down on the grass. He takes the loaves, gives thanks, and distributes as much as they want, and the same with the fish. When everyone has had enough, He tells the disciples to gather the leftovers so that nothing is wasted. They fill twelve baskets. A boy's lunch, in Jesus' hands, became more than enough.

The people are thrilled. This must be the Prophet Moses promised! They're ready to come and make Him king by force. Jesus knows it, and He withdraws to a mountain by Himself. He won't be the kind of king they want.

That evening, the disciples get into a boat to cross the lake back toward Capernaum. It's dark, Jesus hasn't joined them, and a strong wind is churning the water. After rowing three or four miles, they see Jesus walking on the water, coming toward the boat, and they're terrified. He says to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." In Greek, His words are literally "I am." Then they're willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately they reach the shore.

The next day, the crowd tracks Him down in Capernaum. Jesus tells them honestly that they're looking for Him not because they understood the signs, but because they ate their fill of bread. Don't work for food that spoils, He says, but for food that lasts to eternal life.

They ask for a sign. Moses gave our ancestors manna from heaven. What will You do? Jesus says it wasn't Moses who gave them bread from heaven. It's His Father who gives the true bread from heaven. They say, Sir, always give us this bread. And Jesus says it: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

BACKGROUND CHECK **I AM**

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3, Moses asked for His name. God answered, "I AM WHO I AM." That name became the most sacred name of God in Israel. In John's Gospel, Jesus says "I am" in seven famous statements with images: the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life, and the true vine. He also says "I am" by itself several times, in ways that clearly echo God's name.

This is the first of the seven "I am" statements in John. Bread was the most basic food in that world. Jesus isn't claiming to be dessert, a nice extra. He's claiming to be what you can't live without.

Then it gets harder. Jesus says He has come down from heaven, and the crowd grumbles. Isn't this Jesus, Joseph's son? We know His parents. Jesus goes further. The bread He will give for the life of the world is His flesh. Whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life.

That shocks everyone. Is He talking about cannibalism? No. He's speaking in vivid pictures about His coming death and about trusting Him so completely that He becomes your very life. Many Christians also hear in these words a connection to the Lord's Supper. Either way, Jesus doesn't soften it.

Many of His followers say, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" And from that point on, many of them turn back and no longer follow Him.

Jesus watches the crowd leave. Then He turns to the Twelve and asks, "You do not want to leave too, do you?"

Peter answers, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Peter doesn't say he understands everything. He

doesn't. He says there's nowhere else to go. Sometimes faith sounds like that. I don't get all of this, but I know You're the only one with real life.

Jesus answers with a sobering note: He chose the Twelve, and yet one of them is a devil. He meant Judas.

KEY VERSE

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:35 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. The crowd followed Jesus for free bread. What are some reasons people follow Jesus that aren't really about Him?
2. What are you hungry for that you hope will satisfy you? How is Jesus different?
3. Peter didn't understand everything, but he knew there was nowhere else to go. Have you ever felt that way about following Jesus?

TRY THIS *The next time you eat bread this week, stop before the first bite and thank God that Jesus is the bread of life.*

CHAPTER 7

Thirsty?

John 7

By now, the leaders in Judea are looking for a way to kill Jesus, so He stays in Galilee. But the Festival of Tabernacles is near, and His brothers start pushing Him. You should go to Judea, they say. No one who wants to be famous works in secret. If You're doing these things, show Yourself to the world. John adds a painful line: "For even his own brothers did not believe in him."

Jesus' own family thought He was either wrong or just bad at publicity. If you've ever had family members who don't share your faith, Jesus knows what that feels like. (The good news: after the resurrection, at least two of these brothers, James and Jude, became leaders in the early church and wrote books of the New Testament.)

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Festival of Tabernacles**
>
> Tabernacles, also called Booths, was a joyful week-long festival in the fall. Families lived in temporary shelters made of branches to remember Israel's years in the wilderness. Two ceremonies stood out. Each morning, priests carried water in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam and poured it out at the altar, praying for rain and remembering the water God gave in the desert. At night, huge lamps were lit in the temple courts, and people said the light filled the whole city. Keep those two images in mind: water and light.

Jesus tells His brothers to go on ahead. Later He goes up privately. Halfway through the festival, He suddenly begins teaching in the

temple courts. The crowd is divided. Some say He's a good man. Others say He's deceiving people. The leaders are amazed that He knows so much without formal training. Jesus says His teaching isn't His own; it comes from the one who sent Him. Anyone who chooses to do God's will, He says, will find out whether His teaching comes from God.

That's an interesting test. Jesus doesn't say, Figure out every question first, then obey. He says if you really want to do God's will, the truth will become clear.

The people argue about Him. Some say, Isn't this the man they're trying to kill? Here He is, speaking publicly, and they aren't saying anything. Have the authorities decided He's the Messiah? Others say, We know where this man is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where He's from.

The chief priests and Pharisees send temple guards to arrest Him. But no one lays a hand on Him, "because his hour had not yet come."

Then, on the last and greatest day of the festival, with the water ceremony happening in front of everyone, Jesus stands and calls out in a loud voice: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink." Whoever believes in Him, rivers of living water will flow from within them. John explains that Jesus was talking about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.

Picture it. The priests have just poured out the water, and the crowd is celebrating. And Jesus stands up and shouts, essentially, This ceremony is about Me. If you're thirsty, come to Me.

The crowd splits again. Some say He's the Prophet. Some say He's the Messiah. Others say the Messiah can't come from Galilee; He

has to come from Bethlehem, David's town. (John's readers know Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The crowd doesn't.)

The temple guards come back empty-handed. The chief priests and Pharisees demand to know why they didn't bring Him in. The guards answer, "No one ever spoke the way this man does." The guards were sent to arrest Jesus, and Jesus ended up arresting them.

The Pharisees sneer. Has He deceived you too? Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in Him? This mob that doesn't know the law is cursed.

And then one of their own speaks up. Nicodemus, the man who came to Jesus at night, asks whether their law condemns a man without first hearing him to find out what he's doing. It's a small question, but it's brave. The others turn on him: Are you from Galilee too? Look into it, and you'll find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.

Nicodemus isn't fully in the light yet. But he's moving.

KEY VERSE

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

John 7:37 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Even Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Him at first. How does that encourage you if people close to you don't share your faith?
2. Jesus said people who want to do God's will will recognize His teaching. Do you want to do God's will, or do you mostly want answers?
3. Nicodemus asked one brave question in a room full of critics. When is it hard for you to speak up for Jesus?

CHAPTER 8

The Light of the World

John 8

Before we get to the rest of this chapter, there's something you should know. In most Bibles, the end of John 7 and the start of John 8 tell a famous story about a woman caught in adultery. If you look at your NIV, you'll see a note in brackets. The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses don't have John 7:53 through 8:11, and a few manuscripts put the story in other places.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Woman Caught in Adultery**
>
> Most scholars believe this story was not originally part of John's Gospel. It's missing from the oldest Greek manuscripts, its style is different from John's, and it appears in different locations in later copies. At the same time, many scholars think it records a real event from Jesus' life that was passed down in the early church before it was added here. That's why most Bibles still print it, with a note. Christians can read it with that honesty in mind. Nothing we believe about Jesus depends on this passage alone, but it fits who He is.

Here's the story. At dawn, Jesus is teaching in the temple courts when the teachers of the law and the Pharisees drag in a woman caught in adultery. They make her stand in front of everyone. Teacher, she was caught in the act. The law of Moses says to stone such women. What do You say?

It's a trap. If Jesus says let her go, He's breaking the law. If He says stone her, He loses His reputation for mercy, and He'd be calling for

an execution the Romans didn't allow. And notice who's missing. If she was caught in the act, where is the man?

Jesus bends down and writes on the ground with His finger. Nobody knows what He wrote, and plenty of people have guessed. They keep pressing Him. So He straightens up and says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Then He bends down and writes again.

One by one, starting with the oldest, they leave. Finally only Jesus is left, with the woman still standing there. He asks her where her accusers went. Has no one condemned you? "No one, sir," she says. Then Jesus says, "Then neither do I condemn you." And then, "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Both halves matter. No condemnation. And a call to a new life. Jesus doesn't excuse her sin, and He doesn't crush her with it.

Then, in the temple courts during or just after the Festival of Tabernacles, with those giant lamps fresh in everyone's mind, Jesus makes the second "I am" statement: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees challenge Him. You're testifying about Yourself, so Your testimony isn't valid. Jesus answers that His Father testifies about Him too. Where is Your father? they ask. Jesus says, You don't know Me or My Father.

Then Jesus says something that's often quoted out of context. To those who had believed Him, He says if they hold to His teaching, they are really His disciples. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

People put that line on university buildings as if it's about education. Jesus means something deeper. They answer, We're Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. (Apparently they'd forgotten Egypt, Babylon, and the Roman soldiers standing outside.) Jesus explains that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Slaves to Sin**
>
> Slavery was common in the Roman world, and everyone knew the difference between a slave and a son. A slave had no permanent place in the household, but a son belonged forever. Jesus uses that picture to describe sin. Sin isn't just doing wrong things. It's a power that takes over and controls people. Only the Son, who belongs to the household permanently, has the authority to set slaves free and bring them into the family.

The argument heats up. They say Abraham is their father. Jesus says if they were Abraham's children, they'd act like Abraham. Instead they're trying to kill Him. He says, frankly, that their real father is the devil, a liar and a murderer from the beginning. They accuse Him of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed.

Jesus says that whoever obeys His word will never see death. Now they're sure He's crazy. Abraham died. The prophets died. Who do You think You are? Jesus says Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing His day. They scoff. You're not even fifty years old, and You've seen Abraham!

And Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you… before Abraham was born, I am!"

Not "I was." I am. He's using God's own name from the burning bush. Everyone in the temple courts understands exactly what He's claiming. They pick up stones to kill Him. But Jesus hides Himself and slips away from the temple grounds.

You can disagree with Jesus. But you can't call Him just a good teacher. Good teachers don't say things like that. Either He was telling the truth, or He wasn't.

KEY VERSE

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

John 8:12 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus told the woman both "neither do I condemn you" and "leave your life of sin." Why do you think both are necessary?
2. What's one way sin has acted like a master in your life, something that controlled you?
3. Jesus claimed to exist before Abraham, using God's own name. If that claim is true, what does it change?

CHAPTER 9

I Was Blind, Now I See

John 9

As Jesus walks along, He sees a man who has been blind from birth. His disciples ask Him a theology question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Many people back then believed that suffering was always a direct punishment for someone's sin. If you were born blind, someone must have done something wrong. Some people still think that way today.

Jesus says neither one sinned. This happened "so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Jesus doesn't explain all suffering. But He refuses to treat this man as a lesson in blame. Instead, He treats him as a person God is about to do something wonderful for. "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Then Jesus spits on the ground, makes some mud with the saliva, and puts it on the man's eyes. Go, He tells him, wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man goes and washes, and comes home seeing. This is John's sixth sign.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Pool of Siloam**
>
> The Pool of Siloam was at the southern end of Jerusalem, fed by a tunnel King Hezekiah had cut through solid rock about seven hundred years earlier to bring water into the city. It was also the source of the water poured out at the

> Festival of Tabernacles. In 2004, workers repairing a sewer pipe uncovered steps of the pool from Jesus' time. The name Siloam means "Sent," which John points out, because Jesus is the one sent from the Father.

Now the rest of the chapter is basically a courtroom drama, and it's a little funny.

The neighbors can't agree it's the same man. Some say it's him. Others say it just looks like him. He keeps saying, "I am the man." They ask how his eyes were opened. He tells them plainly: the man they call Jesus made mud, put it on my eyes, told me to wash, and now I see.

They take him to the Pharisees. And, of course, it was a Sabbath. Making mud counted as work. Some of the Pharisees say this man can't be from God, because He doesn't keep the Sabbath. Others say, How can a sinner perform such signs? They're divided. They ask the man what he thinks. He says, "He is a prophet."

They don't believe he was ever blind, so they call in his parents. Is this your son? Was he born blind? How can he see now? The parents are terrified. The leaders had already decided that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. So they say: Yes, he's our son, and yes, he was born blind, but we don't know how he sees. Ask him. He's of age.

Being kicked out of the synagogue meant being cut off from your community, your friends, and much of your social life. The parents chose safety over the truth.

The leaders call the man back a second time. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they say. We know this man is a sinner. And the formerly blind man gives one of the greatest answers in the Bible.

"Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

He doesn't have a theology degree. He can't answer every question. But he knows what happened to him. That's what a testimony is.

They ask him again how Jesus did it. And the man gets bold, even sarcastic. I already told you, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? "Do you want to become his disciples too?"

They hurl insults at him. You're His disciple! We're disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but this fellow, we don't even know where He comes from.

The man can't believe it. Now that is remarkable! You don't know where He comes from, yet He opened my eyes. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man weren't from God, He couldn't do anything. The experts reply, You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us! And they throw him out.

Jesus hears that they've thrown him out. And He goes looking for him. He finds him and asks, Do you believe in the Son of Man? The man asks, Who is He, sir? Tell me so that I may believe. Jesus says, You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you. The man says, "Lord, I believe," and he worships Him.

The man lost his place in the synagogue and found Jesus. He ended up seeing more clearly than anyone in the story.

Jesus says He came into this world so that the blind would see and those who think they see would become blind. Some Pharisees overhear and ask, What? Are we blind too? Jesus says if they admitted they were blind, they wouldn't be guilty. But since they claim they can see, their guilt remains.

The most dangerous kind of blindness is thinking you see perfectly.

KEY VERSE

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

John 9:25 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. The disciples wanted to know whose fault the man's blindness was. Why do people look for someone to blame when they see suffering?
2. The man's parents chose safety over the truth. When are you tempted to do the same?
3. The man didn't have every answer, but he knew what Jesus had done for him. What could you honestly say Jesus has done in your life?

TRY THIS *Write your own "One thing I do know" sentence about God. Keep it honest, even if it's small.*

CHAPTER 10

The Good Shepherd

John 10

Jesus keeps talking to the same Pharisees who just threw the formerly blind man out. And He talks about sheep.

Every listener knew how sheepfolds worked. A shepherd would bring his flock into a walled pen at night, often shared with other flocks. In the morning, he'd come to the gate and call his own sheep by name, and they would come out and follow him, because they knew his voice. A stranger could call all day, and they wouldn't follow.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Shepherds and Sheep**
>
> In Israel, shepherds lived with their flocks for weeks at a time, leading them to pasture and water and protecting them from wolves, lions, bears, and thieves. Sheep really do learn their shepherd's voice. The Old Testament often pictures God as Israel's shepherd, as in Psalm 23, and describes Israel's bad leaders as shepherds who fed themselves instead of the flock (Ezekiel 34). Jesus' listeners would have heard both of those echoes.

Jesus says He is "the gate for the sheep." Some shepherds slept in the doorway of the pen, becoming the gate themselves. Whoever enters through Him will be saved. Then He contrasts Himself with a thief. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Some people think following Jesus means a smaller, more boring life. Jesus says the opposite. The thing that's stealing from you isn't Jesus. He's the one offering a full life.

Then He says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." He compares Himself with a hired hand who runs when the wolf comes, because the sheep aren't his. Jesus isn't like that. He knows His sheep, and His sheep know Him, just as the Father knows Him and He knows the Father. And He will lay down His life for them.

Then He mentions something easy to miss: He has other sheep that aren't of this sheep pen. He must bring them also, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. He's talking about people outside Israel, Gentiles from all over the world. That's probably you.

He's also clear that no one is taking His life from Him. He lays it down of His own accord, and He has authority to take it up again. The cross won't be an accident. It will be a choice.

The crowd is divided again. Some say He's demon-possessed and out of His mind. Others say, Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?

Then it's winter, and Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Festival of Dedication. He's walking in a covered walkway of the temple called Solomon's Colonnade. The leaders surround Him: How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Festival of Dedication**

This festival, known today as Hanukkah, remembered how Jewish rebels led by Judas Maccabeus retook the temple in 164 BC, after a Greek-Syrian king had defiled it by sacrificing to a pagan god on its altar. The temple was cleansed and rededicated to God. The festival was a celebration of freedom

> and of God's presence returning to His house. It's a fitting backdrop for Jesus' claim that He and the Father are one.

Jesus says He already told them, and they didn't believe. The works He does in His Father's name testify about Him. They don't believe because they aren't His sheep. Then He says a line that has comforted many believers who struggle with doubt: His sheep listen to His voice, He knows them, and they follow Him. He gives them eternal life, and they will never perish. "No one will snatch them out of my hand." His Father, who has given them to Him, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Then: "I and the Father are one."

For the second time, they pick up stones to stone Him. Jesus asks, I've shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you stoning Me? They say it's not for any good work but for blasphemy, "because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

Notice: His enemies understood exactly what He was claiming. Jesus points them back to His works. Even if you don't believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father. They try to seize Him, but He escapes.

He goes back across the Jordan to the place where John the Baptist had first been baptizing. Many people come to Him there. They say John never performed a sign, but everything John said about this man was true. And in that place, many believe in Jesus.

KEY VERSE

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Some people think following Jesus means a smaller life. Jesus said He gives life "to the full." What do you think a full life looks like?
2. Sheep learn their shepherd's voice by spending time with him. How can you learn to recognize Jesus' voice?
3. Jesus said no one can snatch His sheep out of His hand. How does that promise help when you're struggling with doubt or failure?

CHAPTER 11

Jesus Wept

John 11

A man named Lazarus is sick. He lives in Bethany, a village about two miles from Jerusalem, with his sisters, Mary and Martha. They were close friends of Jesus. The sisters send Him a short message: "Lord, the one you love is sick."

They don't ask Him to come. They don't need to. They know He loves Lazarus. Surely He'll hurry.

When Jesus hears the news, He says this sickness won't end in death; it's for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Then John writes two sentences that seem like they don't belong together. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days."

He loved them, so He waited. That's hard to understand. Sometimes God's delays feel like He doesn't care. John wants you to know that in this story, the delay came from love, not indifference.

After two days, Jesus says, Let's go back to Judea. The disciples are alarmed. A short while ago they tried to stone You there, and You're going back? Jesus says Lazarus has fallen asleep, and He's going to wake him up. The disciples think that's good news; if he's sleeping,

he'll get better. So Jesus tells them plainly: "Lazarus is dead." And He's glad He wasn't there, for their sake, so that they may believe.

Thomas, the one later known for doubting, says something brave and a little gloomy: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Remember that the next time someone calls him "Doubting Thomas."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Burial Customs**
>
> In Jesus' time, Jewish families buried their dead quickly, usually on the day of death, because of the hot climate. The body was washed, wrapped in strips of linen with spices, and placed in a tomb, often a cave cut into rock and sealed with a large stone. Mourning lasted for days, and friends and professional mourners would come to weep with the family. Some Jewish teachers believed the soul stayed near the body for three days. By the fourth day, everyone knew there was no hope.

When Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. Many people have come from Jerusalem to comfort the sisters. Martha hears Jesus is coming and goes out to meet Him. Mary stays home.

Martha says what both sisters had been thinking for days: "Lord... if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Then she adds, But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask. Jesus tells her, Your brother will rise again. Martha says, I know he'll rise again in the resurrection at the last day. She knows her theology.

Then Jesus says the fifth "I am" statement: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." And then He asks her, "Do you believe this?"

Jesus doesn't say, I will bring the resurrection someday. He says, I am the resurrection. Life isn't just something He gives. It's who He is.

Martha answers with one of the great confessions in the Gospels: Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.

Then she goes back and quietly tells Mary that the Teacher is asking for her. Mary gets up quickly and goes to Him, and the mourners follow, thinking she's going to the tomb to weep. When Mary reaches Jesus, she falls at His feet and says the exact same words Martha said: Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

But this time, Jesus doesn't give a theology lesson. When He sees her weeping, and the people with her weeping, He is deeply moved and troubled. He asks where they've laid him. They say, "Come and see, Lord." Then comes the shortest verse in most English Bibles: "Jesus wept."

He knew He was about to raise Lazarus. He wept anyway. Jesus doesn't skip over our grief to get to the happy ending. He enters it. He feels it with us. Some of the crowd say, See how He loved him! Others say, Couldn't He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

Jesus comes to the tomb, deeply moved again. It's a cave with a stone across the entrance. He says, "Take away the stone." Martha, ever practical, objects: Lord, by this time there's a bad odor. He's been there four days. Jesus reminds her that He told her if she believed, she would see the glory of God.

They roll away the stone. Jesus looks up and thanks His Father out loud, so the people standing there will believe the Father sent Him. Then He calls in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

And the dead man comes out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus says, Take off the grave clothes and let him go. This is the seventh and greatest sign in John.

Many who saw it believe. But some go to the Pharisees and report what happened. The chief priests and Pharisees call a meeting of the council. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.

Then Caiaphas, the high priest that year, speaks up. You know nothing at all! It’s better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. John says Caiaphas didn’t say this on his own. Without realizing it, he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation, and not only for that nation, but to gather God’s scattered children from everywhere.

From that day on, they plot to kill Him. The irony is sharp: Jesus gives a man life, and it gets Him sentenced to death.

KEY VERSE

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?

John 11:25–26 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus loved Lazarus and still waited two days. Have you ever felt like God was late? How does this story change how you see that?
2. Jesus wept even though He knew He was about to raise Lazarus. What does that tell you about how He feels about your pain?
3. Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" How would you answer?

CHAPTER 12

Unless a Seed Dies

John 12

Six days before Passover, Jesus comes back to Bethany, and they throw a dinner in His honor. Martha serves. Of course she does. Lazarus, recently dead, is reclining at the table. Imagine being at that dinner.

Then Mary takes about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, and pours it on Jesus' feet, and wipes His feet with her hair. "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

Judas Iscariot, who will soon betray Jesus, objects. Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages. It sounds noble. But John tells us what was really going on: Judas didn't care about the poor. He was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Jesus defends Mary. Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have Me.

Mary seems to understand what the disciples don't: Jesus is going to die. Her gift was extravagant, and Jesus called it beautiful. Judas measured it in money. Mary measured it in love.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Nard**

Nard, or spikenard, was a fragrant oil made from a plant that grows in the Himalayan mountains. It was imported from as far away as India, which made it extremely expensive. A pound of it was worth about three hundred denarii, close to a year's wages for a laborer. Some families kept such perfume as a kind of savings or for special occasions like weddings and burials. Mary may have poured out the most valuable thing she owned.

A large crowd finds out Jesus is there and comes to see Him, and also to see Lazarus, the man He raised. So the chief priests make plans to kill Lazarus too, because on account of him many people are believing in Jesus. Lazarus is living evidence, and they want to get rid of the evidence.

The next day, the great crowd that had come for the festival hears that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. They take palm branches and go out to meet Him, shouting, "Hosanna!" Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel! Jesus finds a young donkey and sits on it, fulfilling a prophecy from Zechariah about Zion's king coming on a donkey's colt.

The Pharisees say to one another that they're getting nowhere. "Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

As if on cue, some Greeks who had come to worship at the festival come to Philip with a request: "Sir… we would like to see Jesus." Philip tells Andrew, and they go tell Jesus.

And Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

For eleven chapters, His hour hadn't come. Now, when people from the wider world come looking for Him, it has. Then He explains what His glory will look like, and it isn't a throne. "Very truly I tell

you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

His death will be like a seed planted in the ground. It will look like the end. Instead, it will produce a harvest of people from every nation. Then He applies the principle to His followers. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves Him must follow Him.

Then Jesus admits something deeply human: "Now my soul is troubled." Should He ask the Father to save Him from this hour? No, it was for this very reason He came. "Father, glorify your name!" A voice comes from heaven: I have glorified it, and will glorify it again. Some in the crowd think it thundered. Others say an angel spoke to Him.

Jesus says the voice was for their benefit. Now is the time for judgment on this world. The prince of this world will be driven out. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." John explains: He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die. Lifted up on a cross.

Then John steps back and gives a sad summary. Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, many still wouldn't believe in Him. John quotes Isaiah about eyes that are blinded and hearts that are hardened. And yet many even among the leaders did believe in Him. But because of the Pharisees, they wouldn't openly acknowledge their faith, for fear they'd be put out of the synagogue. "For they loved human praise more than praise from God."

That sentence describes a lot of people. Believing privately, staying quiet publicly, because what others think matters more.

Jesus' public ministry ends with one last call. He came into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Him should stay in darkness. He didn't come to judge the world, but to save it.

KEY VERSE

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:24 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Judas measured Mary's gift in money. Mary measured it in love. What's the most extravagant thing you've ever given to Jesus?
2. Jesus said a seed has to die to produce a harvest. What might God be asking you to let go of so that something better can grow?
3. Some leaders believed in Jesus but kept quiet because they loved human praise. Where are you tempted to do the same?

CHAPTER 13

The Towel and the Basin

John 13

The second half of John's Gospel slows way down. Chapters 13 through 17 all happen on one night, the night before Jesus dies. It's often called the Upper Room Discourse, His last long conversation with His closest friends.

John sets the scene with one of the most tender sentences in the Bible. Jesus knew the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." To the end. All the way. Completely.

The evening meal is in progress. The devil has already prompted Judas to betray Jesus. And Jesus, knowing that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God, gets up from the meal.

Watch what He does with all that power. He takes off His outer clothing and wraps a towel around His waist. He pours water into a basin and begins to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Foot Washing**
>
> In a world of dusty roads and sandals, feet got filthy. When guests arrived for a meal, a host would provide water for them to wash their feet, or a servant would do it. Washing someone else's feet was considered one of the lowest

> tasks, often given to the lowest-ranking servant in the household. Some Jewish writings say a Jewish servant shouldn't even be required to do it. That evening, no servant was there, and none of the disciples volunteered.

He comes to Simon Peter, who is horrified. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus says Peter doesn't understand now, but later he will. Peter says, You shall never wash my feet. Jesus answers that unless He washes him, Peter has no part with Him.

Peter swings to the other extreme. Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well! Jesus explains that someone who has had a bath only needs to wash their feet. You're clean, He tells them, though not every one of you. He knew who was going to betray Him. And He washed Judas's feet too.

When He finishes, He puts His clothes back on and returns to His place. Do you understand what I've done for you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, because that's what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I've set you an example. No servant is greater than his master. "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Knowing isn't the blessing. Doing is.

Then Jesus becomes troubled in spirit and says plainly, One of you is going to betray Me. The disciples stare at each other, completely confused. The disciple whom Jesus loved is reclining next to Him, and Peter motions to him to ask who it is. Jesus says it's the one He'll give a piece of bread to after dipping it in the dish. He dips the bread and gives it to Judas.

Offering someone a choice piece of food at a meal was a gesture of friendship and honor. Even then, Jesus was offering Judas love.

As soon as Judas takes the bread, Satan enters him. Jesus says, What you're about to do, do quickly. No one else at the table understands. Some think Judas is being sent to buy something for the festival or give something to the poor. Judas goes out. And John adds four chilling words: "And it was night."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved**
>
> Five times in John's Gospel, a follower is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He reclines next to Jesus at the Last Supper, stands at the cross, runs to the empty tomb, and recognizes Jesus on the shore of the lake. The last chapter says this disciple is the one who wrote these things down. Early church tradition identifies him as John, the son of Zebedee. He never names himself. He identifies himself by one thing: he was loved by Jesus.

After Judas leaves, Jesus talks about being glorified, and tells His friends He'll only be with them a little longer. Then He gives them something new. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

The command to love wasn't new. It was in the law of Moses. What's new is the standard: as I have loved you. Like the One who just washed your feet. Like the One who's about to die for you. And the world will recognize Jesus' followers by that kind of love, not by their arguments, their rules, or their T-shirts.

Peter asks where He's going. Jesus says Peter can't follow now, but will later. Peter insists: Lord, why can't I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You. Jesus answers, Will you really lay down your life for Me? Before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times.

KEY VERSE

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:34 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus knew He had all power, and He used it to wash feet. What does that tell you about what real power looks like?
2. Jesus washed Judas's feet, knowing what Judas would do. Who would be hardest for you to serve like that?
3. Jesus said people would know His followers by their love. If someone looked at your life this week, what would they conclude?

TRY THIS *Do one humble, behind-the-scenes act of service for someone in your family this week, without being asked and without telling anyone.*

CHAPTER 14

The Way

John 14

The disciples are reeling. Judas has left, Jesus has said He's going away, and Peter has just been told he'll deny Him. Into that fear, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." You believe in God; believe also in Me.

Then He gives them a promise. His Father's house has many rooms. He's going there to prepare a place for them. And if He goes, He'll come back and take them to be with Him, so that they can be where He is.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **My Father's House**
>
> In Jesus' time, when a son got married, he often added a room onto his father's house for his new family. Large families lived in clusters of rooms around a shared courtyard. When Jesus talks about rooms in His Father's house, He's describing belonging, not a hotel. It's a picture of family, with a place prepared especially for you, and with Jesus Himself there.

Jesus says, You know the way to the place where I'm going. Thomas, honest as always, says what everyone is thinking: Lord, we don't know where You're going, so how can we know the way?

And Jesus answers with the sixth "I am" statement: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

That's one of the most controversial sentences Jesus ever said. In a world that values every path equally, it sounds narrow. But notice what Jesus is claiming. He doesn't say He'll show you a way. He says He is the way. He doesn't say He teaches truth. He is the truth. He doesn't say He'll give you some tips on life. He is the life. If Jesus is who He said He was in this Gospel, the Word who was God, then of course He's the way to God. If He's not, then nothing He said matters.

Philip asks next: Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us. Jesus' answer is almost sad. Don't you know Me, Philip, even after I've been among you such a long time? "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

If you've ever wondered what God is like, here's the answer. He's like Jesus. Kind to outsiders. Fierce against hypocrisy. Weeping at a friend's tomb. Kneeling with a towel.

Then Jesus makes some surprising promises. Whoever believes in Him will do the works He has been doing, and even greater things, because He's going to the Father. And He'll do whatever they ask in His name, so that the Father may be glorified. Asking in His name doesn't mean tacking "in Jesus' name" onto the end of a prayer like a password. It means asking for what Jesus Himself would want.

Then the biggest promise of the night. If you love Me, keep My commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world can't accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Advocate**

The Greek word Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit is parakletos. It's hard to translate with a single English word. It describes someone called to stand beside you: a helper, a counselor, a comforter, or a defense attorney. The NIV usually uses "Advocate." When Jesus calls the Spirit "another advocate," He means another one like Himself. The Spirit will do for the disciples what Jesus has been doing, and more, because He will live inside them.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." The disciples were afraid of being abandoned. Jesus promises they won't be.

Then He links love and obedience again. Whoever has His commands and keeps them is the one who loves Him. Love for Jesus isn't just a feeling. It shows up in what you do. And the Father and Son will come and make their home with anyone who loves Jesus and obeys Him. Remember the many rooms in the Father's house? Now Jesus says God will make His home in you.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in Jesus' name, will teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus said. That's one reason we can trust the Gospels. Jesus promised that the Spirit would help His followers remember.

Then He gives them a gift. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." Not the kind of peace the world gives, which depends on everything going well. His peace holds even when everything is falling apart. He's about to be arrested, beaten, and crucified, and He's giving away peace.

The chapter ends with Jesus saying, "Come now; let us leave." The prince of this world is coming, but he has no hold over Jesus. Jesus will go to the cross not because He is trapped, but because He loves the Father and does exactly what the Father commanded.

KEY VERSE

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Thomas and Philip both asked honest questions. What honest question would you ask Jesus if you'd been at that table?
2. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." How does that change the way you picture God?
3. Jesus promised peace that's different from the world's peace. What's the difference? When do you need that kind of peace?

CHAPTER 15

The Vine

John 15

Jesus and His disciples may be walking through the dark streets or still in the upper room. Either way, He gives them one more picture, the seventh "I am" statement: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."

Every branch in Him that doesn't bear fruit, the Father cuts off. Every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Vineyards**
>
> Grapevines were everywhere in Israel, and the vine was a symbol of the nation itself. Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 picture Israel as a vine God planted, which too often produced bad fruit. The historian Josephus says a huge golden vine decorated the entrance to the temple sanctuary. Vinedressers pruned vines heavily, cutting away dead wood and trimming healthy branches so the plant's energy would go into producing grapes instead of leaves. A vine left unpruned grows wild and produces little fruit.

Pruning sounds painful, and it is. Sometimes God cuts things out of your life, not because He's punishing you, but because He wants you to grow. A gardener only prunes the branches he has hope for.

Then Jesus repeats one word over and over: remain. Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. A branch can't bear fruit by itself. It has to

remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Think about a branch for a minute. It doesn't strain to produce grapes. It doesn't grit its teeth and try harder. It just stays connected, and the life of the vine flows through it. The fruit is the natural result of the connection.

Nothing. That's a strong word. Apart from Jesus, you can stay busy. You can stay religious. But you can't produce the kind of fruit that lasts. A branch that's cut off from the vine withers and is thrown away.

How do you remain? Jesus explains: if you keep My commands, you will remain in My love. Stay close to Him. Listen to His words. Obey what He says. Talk to Him. It's a relationship, not a technique.

Then He tells them why He's saying all this: so that His joy may be in them and their joy may be complete. Jesus wants His followers to be joyful, not miserable.

He repeats the command from chapter 13: love each other as I have loved you. Then He shows them what that looks like. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." In a few hours, He'll do exactly that.

Then He says something that would have amazed them. "You are my friends if you do what I command." He no longer calls them servants, because a servant doesn't know his master's business. Instead, He calls them friends, because He's told them everything He learned from His Father.

The disciples might have thought they chose Jesus. He says, You didn't choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Then the conversation turns darker. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. But you don't belong to the world. I've chosen you out of the world, and that's why it hates you. Remember: a servant isn't greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you too.

That isn't a call to go looking for a fight or to act self-righteous. It's a warning. If you follow Jesus, not everyone will like it. And when that happens, it doesn't mean something has gone wrong. Jesus said it would.

He ends by repeating His promise of the Advocate, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, who will testify about Jesus. And you also must testify, He tells them, because you've been with Me from the beginning.

KEY VERSE

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What does it look like, practically, for you to "remain" in Jesus during a normal school week?
2. Has God ever "pruned" something out of your life? Looking back, what grew because of it?
3. Jesus calls His followers friends. How is being Jesus' friend different from being His servant?

TRY THIS *For one week, start each day by reading John 15:1–11 and asking Jesus to help you stay connected to Him all day. At night, notice where you felt connected and where you didn't.*

CHAPTER 16

The Helper Is Coming

John 16

Jesus is still talking with His disciples on the night before He dies, and He doesn't sugarcoat what's ahead. They'll be thrown out of synagogues. A time is coming when people who kill them will think they're serving God. He's telling them now, so that when it happens, they'll remember He warned them.

Then He says something that must have sounded impossible. "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away." Unless He goes away, the Advocate won't come to them. But if He goes, He'll send Him.

How could anything be better than having Jesus physically present? Here's the answer: in His earthly body, Jesus could only be in one place at a time. The Holy Spirit would live inside every believer, everywhere, all at once.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Holy Spirit in John**
>
> John's Gospel says more about the Holy Spirit than Matthew, Mark, or Luke. The Spirit gives new birth (chapter 3), is the living water (chapter 7), is the Advocate who will be with believers forever (chapter 14), testifies about Jesus (chapter 15), convicts the world and guides into truth (chapter 16), and is breathed on the disciples by the risen Jesus (chapter 20). In John, the Spirit is not a force or a feeling. He is a person who teaches, reminds, speaks, and guides.

When the Spirit comes, Jesus says, He will prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. He will show people their sin, show them what true righteousness is, and show that the prince of this world now stands condemned. And for the disciples, "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." He won't speak on His own; He'll take what belongs to Jesus and make it known to them.

Then Jesus says something cryptic: In a little while you will see Me no more, and then after a little while you will see Me. The disciples whisper to each other. What does He mean, "a little while"? We don't understand.

Jesus knows they want to ask, so He explains with a picture any family would understand. A woman giving birth has pain because her time has come. But when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you, He says. Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Within hours, the disciples would watch Jesus die. That would feel like the worst pain imaginable. Three days later, they'd see Him alive. The grief would turn into a joy no one could take away.

Then Jesus talks about prayer. Until now, they haven't asked for anything in His name. Ask and you will receive, He says, and your joy will be complete. The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God.

The Father loves you. Not just tolerates you because Jesus asked Him to. He loves you.

Finally the disciples say, Now You're speaking clearly! Now we can see that You know all things. This makes us believe You came from

God. Jesus answers with a gentle reality check. Do you now believe? A time is coming, in fact it has come, when you'll be scattered, each to your own home. You'll leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for My Father is with Me.

And then His final words of the conversation, a promise for every follower of Jesus in every hard season: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Notice what He doesn't say. He doesn't promise you won't have trouble. He promises the opposite. You will have trouble. But trouble doesn't get the last word. Jesus does.

KEY VERSE

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus said it was better for His followers that He go away, so the Spirit could come. Why do you think that was better?
2. Jesus compared His followers' grief to the pain of childbirth that turns into joy. Have you ever had grief that later turned into something good?
3. Jesus promised trouble and peace in the same sentence. How can both be true at once?

CHAPTER 17

Jesus Prays for You

John 17

After all His teaching, Jesus looks toward heaven and prays. This is the longest prayer of Jesus recorded anywhere in the Bible. It's sometimes called His High Priestly Prayer, because He's standing between God and His people, praying for them like a priest.

He prays for three groups. First Himself, then His disciples, then everyone who would ever believe in Him. That last group includes you.

He begins, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." He's about to go to the cross, and He calls it glory. Then He defines eternal life, and it might surprise you: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Eternal life isn't mainly about living forever, though it includes that. It's about knowing God. Not knowing about Him. Knowing Him, the way you know a friend.

Jesus says He has finished the work the Father gave Him to do. Then He asks to be glorified with the glory He had with the Father before the world began. That's John 1 all over again. The Word was with God in the beginning.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Glory**

In the Old Testament, God's glory was the visible sign of His presence: the cloud and fire in the wilderness, the brightness that filled the tabernacle and the temple. The Hebrew word carries the idea of weight or importance. In John's Gospel, Jesus reveals God's glory through His signs. But the greatest display of God's glory, in John, isn't a miracle. It's the cross, where Jesus shows the full weight of God's love.

Then He prays for His disciples. He's given them the Father's word, and they've accepted it. They belong to the Father, and the Father gave them to Him. He's leaving the world, but they're staying in it. So He prays for their protection.

He doesn't pray that the Father would take them out of the world. "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." Jesus doesn't want His followers to hide in a bubble. He wants them out there, but protected. They're not of the world, just as He isn't. But He's sending them into the world, just as the Father sent Him.

He also prays that they'll be sanctified, set apart for God, by the truth. "your word is truth."

Then He prays for you. Literally. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." Every person who has ever believed in Jesus through the testimony of the apostles is in this prayer. That's everyone who has believed in Him since. If you believe in Jesus, then the night before He died, Jesus prayed for you by name, in a sense, before you were born.

And what does He pray? That all of them may be one, just as the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. That they will be brought to complete unity, so that the world will know the Father sent Him and has loved them even as He loved Jesus.

Read that again. The Father loves believers as much as He loves Jesus.

And Jesus' greatest desire for His followers is unity. Not uniformity, everyone being the same, but oneness. Christians often fight with each other over all kinds of things. Jesus prayed that we'd be united, because our unity is one of the main ways the world will see that He's real.

He ends by asking that His followers will be with Him where He is, to see His glory. And He promises to keep making the Father known, so that the Father's love for Him may be in them, and that He Himself may be in them.

KEY VERSE

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

John 17:3 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God. How is knowing God different from knowing about God?
2. Jesus prayed that His followers would stay in the world but be protected from the evil one. What does that look like at your school?
3. Jesus prayed for unity among His followers. Where do you see Christians divided? What could you do to help?

TRY THIS *Read John 17:20–26 slowly. Every time it says "those who will believe" or "them," remember that it includes you. Then thank Jesus for praying for you.*

CHAPTER 18

What Is Truth?

John 18

After the prayer, Jesus and His disciples cross the Kidron Valley to an olive grove. Judas knows the place, because Jesus often met there with His disciples. Judas arrives leading a detachment of soldiers and officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They come with torches, lanterns, and weapons. They come with lanterns to look for the light of the world.

Jesus, knowing everything that's going to happen to Him, goes out to meet them. He doesn't hide. He asks, "Who is it you want?" They say, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answers, "I am he." In Greek, it's just "I am." And when He says it, they draw back and fall to the ground.

A crowd of armed men falls over at two words. John wants you to see who's really in control here. Jesus isn't being captured. He's surrendering.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Garden and the Kidron**

The Kidron Valley runs along the east side of Jerusalem, between the city and the Mount of Olives. The other Gospels name the garden Gethsemane, which means "oil press," where olives were crushed for oil. Centuries before, King David had crossed the Kidron fleeing from his son Absalom, betrayed by his trusted adviser. Now the Son of David crosses the same valley, about to be betrayed by a friend.

He asks again who they want. Again they say Jesus of Nazareth. Then Jesus says, I told you that I am he. If you're looking for Me, let these men go. Even at His arrest, He's protecting His friends.

Simon Peter has a sword. He draws it and cuts off the right ear of the high priest's servant. John tells us the servant's name: Malchus. Jesus says to Peter, Put your sword away! "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Peter was ready to fight for Jesus. Jesus was ready to die for Peter.

They arrest Jesus, bind Him, and bring Him first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest. Annas had been high priest years before and still held a lot of power.

Meanwhile, Peter and another disciple follow. The other disciple knows the high priest, so he goes into the courtyard and gets Peter in too. The servant girl at the door asks Peter, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" Peter says, "I am not."

Notice the contrast. Inside, Jesus is saying "I am." Outside, Peter is saying "I am not."

It's cold, and the servants and officials stand around a fire they've made. Peter stands with them, warming himself.

Inside, the high priest questions Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. Jesus says He's spoken openly to the world. He taught in synagogues and the temple, where everyone gathers. He said nothing in secret. Ask the people who heard Me. One of the officials slaps Him in the face: Is this how You answer the high priest? Jesus replies, If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike Me?

Annas sends Him, still bound, to Caiaphas. Back at the fire, someone asks Peter again, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are

you?" He denies it: "I am not." Then a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter cut off, says, Didn't I see you with Him in the garden? Again Peter denies it, and at that moment a rooster begins to crow.

Early in the morning, they bring Jesus to the palace of the Roman governor. The leaders won't go inside, because entering a Gentile's house would make them ceremonially unclean, and they want to be able to eat the Passover. They're plotting a murder, and they're worried about being ceremonially clean.

So Pilate comes out to them. What charges are you bringing? They say if He weren't a criminal, they wouldn't have handed Him over. Pilate says, Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law. But they say they don't have the right to execute anyone. Rome reserved that power for itself.

Pilate goes back inside and summons Jesus. "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus asks whether that's Pilate's own idea or whether others told him. Pilate says, Am I a Jew? Your own people handed You over. What have You done?

Jesus answers, "My kingdom is not of this world." If it were, His servants would fight to keep Him from being arrested. But His kingdom is from another place. "You are a king, then!" says Pilate. Jesus says the reason He was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Him.

Pilate says, "What is truth?" And he walks out.

It's one of the saddest moments in the Bible. Pilate asks the most important question there is, while standing face to face with the one who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." And he doesn't wait for an answer.

Pilate goes back out and tells the crowd he finds no basis for a charge against Jesus. He offers to release Him, since it's the custom to release one prisoner at Passover. They shout back, No, not Him! Give us Barabbas! John adds a short note: Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

KEY VERSE

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

John 18:37 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. The soldiers fell back when Jesus said "I am he." Why do you think John included that detail?
2. Peter denied Jesus to a servant girl and a few people around a fire. Why is it sometimes hardest to stand up for Jesus in small, ordinary moments?
3. Pilate asked "What is truth?" and didn't wait for an answer. Do you ever ask big questions without really wanting an answer?

CHAPTER 19

It Is Finished

John 19

Pilate has Jesus flogged. The soldiers twist together a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They clothe Him in a purple robe, the color of royalty. They keep coming up to Him, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slap Him in the face.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Flogging**
>
> Roman flogging was brutal. The victim was stripped and beaten with a whip made of leather straps that often had pieces of bone or metal tied into them. It tore the skin and could cause severe blood loss. Some prisoners died from flogging alone. It was often done before crucifixion to weaken the victim. Pilate may have hoped that seeing Jesus beaten would satisfy the crowd.

Pilate brings Jesus out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and says, "Here is the man!" He's probably hoping the crowd will see how pitiful Jesus looks and back off. Instead, the chief priests and officials shout, "Crucify! Crucify!" Pilate says, You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him.

They insist that by their law He must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God. When Pilate hears this, he's even more afraid. He goes back inside and asks Jesus, "Where do you come from?" Jesus gives no answer.

Pilate is frustrated. Don't You realize I have power either to free You or to crucify You? Jesus answers that Pilate would have no power over Him if it weren't given to him from above. Pilate, the most powerful man in Judea, is reminded that his power is borrowed.

From then on, Pilate tries to set Jesus free. But the leaders play their trump card: If you let this man go, you're no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. That's a political threat. If word got back to Rome that Pilate had released a rival king, his career could be over.

Pilate brings Jesus out and sits on the judge's seat. John notes the time: it was the day of Preparation of the Passover, about noon. That's around the time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple. Remember what John the Baptist said in chapter 1: Look, the Lamb of God.

"Here is your king," Pilate says. They shout, Take Him away! Crucify Him! Pilate asks, Shall I crucify your king? And the chief priests answer, "We have no king but Caesar." For people who had waited centuries for God's King, that's a stunning thing to say.

Finally Pilate hands Him over to be crucified.

Carrying His own cross, Jesus goes out to the place called the Skull, which in Aramaic is Golgotha. There they crucify Him, with two others, one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

Pilate has a notice fastened to the cross: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. It's written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, so everyone can read it. The chief priests protest: Don't write "The King of the Jews," but that this man claimed to be king. Pilate answers, "What I have written, I have written." Without meaning to, Pilate announces the truth to the whole world in three languages.

The soldiers divide His clothes into four shares. His undergarment is seamless, woven in one piece, so they decide not to tear it but to cast lots for it. John notes that this fulfilled Psalm 22.

Near the cross stand Jesus' mother, her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus sees His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby. He says to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, the disciple takes her into his home. Even dying, Jesus takes care of His mom.

Later, knowing everything has now been finished, Jesus says, "I am thirsty." The one who offered living water to a Samaritan woman is now thirsty Himself. They lift a sponge soaked in wine vinegar to His lips on a stalk of hyssop. That's the same plant used to put the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts in Egypt.

When He has received the drink, Jesus says, "It is finished." With that, He bows His head and gives up His spirit.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **"It Is Finished"**
>
> The Greek phrase behind "It is finished" is a single word: tetelestai. It was a common word used for completing a task or fulfilling an obligation. Ancient documents show related forms of the word written on receipts and records when a debt was settled. Jesus didn't say, "I am finished," as if He'd been defeated. He said, "It is finished." The work the Father gave Him to do was complete. The debt was paid in full.

Because it's the day of Preparation, and the next day is a special Sabbath, the leaders don't want bodies left on crosses. They ask Pilate to have the legs broken to speed up death. The soldiers break the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus. But when they come to Jesus, they find He's already dead, so they don't break His legs.

Instead, a soldier pierces His side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

John stops the story to make sure you know he's not making this up. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. John was there.

John points out that these things fulfilled Scripture. The law said none of the Passover lamb's bones were to be broken. And the prophet Zechariah spoke of people looking on the one they had pierced.

Then two secret followers come out of hiding. Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus who had kept quiet because he feared the Jewish leaders, asks Pilate for the body. And Nicodemus, the man who first came to Jesus at night, brings about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes, enough to bury a king. They wrap Jesus' body with the spices in strips of linen and lay Him in a new tomb in a garden near the place of crucifixion.

Nicodemus came to Jesus in the dark in chapter 3. Now, at the darkest moment, when everyone else has run, he steps into the light.

KEY VERSE

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."
With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but gave in because of pressure. Where do you feel pressure to go along with something you know is wrong?
2. Jesus said, "It is finished." What does it mean to you that Jesus completed the work of salvation, and you don't have to add to it?
3. Joseph and Nicodemus finally went public about their faith when it was most dangerous. What would it take for you to go public with yours?

CHAPTER 20

My Lord and My God

John 20

Early on the first day of the week, while it's still dark, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. She sees that the stone has been removed from the entrance. She runs to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and says, They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put Him!

Peter and the other disciple start running. The other disciple outruns Peter and gets there first. (John seems to enjoy telling you that he won the race.) He bends over and looks in at the strips of linen lying there but doesn't go in. Then Peter arrives and goes straight inside. He sees the linen strips lying there, and the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head, folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Grave Clothes**
>
> If grave robbers had stolen Jesus' body, they wouldn't have unwrapped it first. Linen strips soaked in seventy-five pounds of spices would have stuck to the body, and removing them would take time. Thieves would have grabbed the body and run. The orderly grave clothes, with the head cloth folded separately, suggested that something very different had happened. When the other disciple saw them, John says, he believed.

Then the other disciple goes in too. “He saw and believed.” They still didn’t understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. But the evidence was right there. The disciples go back home.

Mary stays. She stands outside the tomb crying. As she weeps, she bends over to look into the tomb and sees two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and one at the foot. They ask her, “Woman, why are you crying?” She says, They’ve taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they’ve put Him.

She turns around and sees Jesus standing there, but she doesn’t realize it’s Him. He asks her the same question: Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you’re looking for? She thinks He’s the gardener. Sir, if you’ve carried Him away, tell me where, and I’ll get Him.

Then Jesus says one word. “Mary.”

She turns toward Him and cries out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” which means Teacher. Remember what Jesus said in chapter 10? The good shepherd calls His own sheep by name, and they know His voice. He said her name, and she knew.

Jesus tells her not to hold on to Him, because He hasn’t yet returned to the Father. Go to My brothers, He says, and tell them I’m returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. Mary Magdalene goes to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!”

The first person to see the risen Jesus, in John’s Gospel, is a woman who had once been possessed by seven demons. The first witness of the resurrection was someone the world would have dismissed.

That evening, the disciples are together with the doors locked, afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus comes and stands among them

and says, “Peace be with you!” He shows them His hands and side. The disciples are overjoyed.

Again He says, Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you. Then He breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In Genesis, God breathed life into the first human. Now Jesus breathes new life into His followers.

But Thomas wasn’t there. When the others tell him, “We have seen the Lord!” he refuses to believe it. Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.

People call him Doubting Thomas. But think about it. He wasn’t asking for anything the other disciples hadn’t already gotten. They had seen Jesus’ hands and side. He wanted the same evidence.

A week later, the disciples are in the house again, and Thomas is with them. The doors are locked. Jesus comes and stands among them and says, Peace be with you! Then He goes straight to Thomas. Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.

Jesus doesn’t scold him. He offers him exactly what he asked for.

And Thomas, the doubter, makes the greatest confession in the whole Gospel of John: “My Lord and my God!”

John started his Gospel by saying the Word was God. Now one of Jesus’ own disciples looks at Him and calls Him God. The book has come full circle.

Then Jesus says something to Thomas that’s really for us. “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” That’s you. You weren’t in that

room. You haven't touched His hands. Jesus calls you blessed if you believe anyway.

Then John tells us exactly why he wrote his book. Jesus did many other signs that aren't recorded here. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

KEY VERSE

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:29 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Mary recognized Jesus when He said her name. What does it mean to you that Jesus knows your name?
2. Jesus didn't scold Thomas for his doubts. He gave him evidence. How should you handle your own doubts?
3. John wrote his book "that you may believe." After reading it, what do you believe about Jesus?

CHAPTER 21

Do You Love Me?

John 21

John's Gospel could have ended with chapter 20. It sounds like an ending. But there's one more story, and it's for anyone who has ever failed Jesus.

Some time later, seven of the disciples are back in Galilee, by the Sea of Galilee, which John calls the Sea of Tiberias. Peter says, "I'm going out to fish." The others say they'll go too. They fish all night and catch nothing.

Maybe Peter was just hungry. Maybe he was bored. Or maybe, after denying Jesus three times, he figured his days as a disciple were over, and he was going back to the only thing he knew.

Early in the morning, Jesus stands on the shore, but the disciples don't realize it's Him. He calls out, Friends, haven't you any fish? No, they answer. Throw your net on the right side of the boat, He says, and you'll find some. They do, and they can't haul the net in because there are so many fish.

The disciple whom Jesus loved says to Peter, "It is the Lord!" And Peter, being Peter, wraps his outer garment around him and jumps into the water. The others follow in the boat, towing the net full of fish. They're only about a hundred yards from shore.

When they land, they see a fire of burning coals with fish on it and some bread. Jesus has made them breakfast.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Charcoal Fires**
>
> John uses a specific Greek word for "a fire of burning coals" only twice in his Gospel. The first time is in the high priest's courtyard in chapter 18, where Peter stood warming himself when he denied Jesus three times. The second time is here, on the beach. Peter is standing by a charcoal fire again. This time, Jesus is the one who lit it.

Jesus tells them to bring some of the fish they just caught. Peter climbs back into the boat and drags the net ashore. It's full of large fish, 153 of them. (Someone counted.) Even with so many, the net isn't torn. Jesus says, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dare ask Him who He is. They know it's the Lord. Jesus takes the bread and gives it to them, and does the same with the fish.

The risen Lord of the universe cooks breakfast for His tired, confused friends. That's what Jesus is like.

When they finish eating, Jesus turns to Peter. "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He doesn't call him Peter, "the rock." He uses his old name. Maybe "more than these" means more than the other disciples love Me. Peter had once claimed he'd never fall away even if everyone else did. Or maybe it means more than these boats and nets and fish, your old life.

Peter says, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. Jesus says, "Feed my lambs."

Jesus asks a second time: Simon son of John, do you love Me? Peter answers again, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. Jesus says, Take care of My sheep.

Then a third time. Simon son of John, do you love Me? "Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time." And Peter says, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."

Three denials by a charcoal fire. Three questions by a charcoal fire. Jesus isn't rubbing it in. He's giving Peter a chance to undo every denial with a declaration of love. And each time, Jesus gives him a job. Peter thought he was disqualified. Jesus put him back to work.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Did Peter Follow Through?**
>
> Peter became one of the main leaders of the early church. In the book of Acts, he preaches to thousands in Jerusalem, is arrested and beaten for his faith, and opens the door for Gentiles to follow Jesus. Early Christian writers say that decades later, in Rome, Peter was crucified for his faith. The man who once denied knowing Jesus to a servant girl ended up giving his life for Him.

Then Jesus tells Peter that when he's old, someone else will dress him and lead him where he doesn't want to go. John explains that Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then Jesus says to him, "Follow me!"

Those are the same two words Jesus used when He first called His disciples. It's a fresh start.

Peter turns and sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, and asks, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answers, more or less: That's not your concern. "You must follow me."

That's a good word for anyone who gets distracted comparing their story to someone else's. Jesus has a plan for your friend. He has a plan for you. Your job is to follow Him.

The book closes with John's signature. This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know his

testimony is true. And Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, John says, he supposes that even the whole world wouldn't have room for the books that would be written.

That's a good place to end. This book is done. The story of what Jesus does isn't.

KEY VERSE

He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

John 21:17 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Peter went back to fishing after his failure. Where do you go when you feel like you've let God down?
2. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" If Jesus asked you that question today, what would you say?
3. Peter asked, "What about him?" and Jesus said, "You must follow me." When are you tempted to compare your path to someone else's?

TRY THIS *Think of a time you failed. Write a short prayer telling Jesus about it, and then write down what you think He'd say back, based on how He treated Peter.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just walked through the whole Gospel of John. You've seen water become wine, a man born blind see for the first time, and a dead man walk out of his tomb. You've heard Jesus say "I am" again and again, watched Him wash His friends' feet, heard Him pray for you, and stood near the cross when He said, "It is finished." Now John asks you the question his whole book has been building toward. Do you believe?

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

You weren't an accident. Everything that exists was made through the Word, and that includes you. God created you to know Him and to live in His light. And the most famous verse in the Bible says that God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son.

2 We've all chosen the dark.

John says the light came into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. We hide from God, like Nicodemus coming at night, or like the woman at the well who changed the subject. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus paid it.

John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and called Him "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" On the cross, Jesus, the only person who ever lived a perfect life, took our place. When He said, "It is finished," He meant the debt was paid in full. Then He rose from the dead, proving that His payment was accepted and death was beaten.

> *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* **Romans 5:8 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Over and over in John, the way to eternal life is to believe in Jesus. Not to work harder or to clean yourself up first. To trust Him. The woman at the well had nothing to offer, and Jesus offered her living water. Salvation is a gift you receive.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Believing means following.

In John, believing isn't just agreeing with facts. It means trusting Jesus with your whole life, the way a branch depends on a vine. It doesn't mean you'll never fail again. Peter denied Jesus three times, and Jesus still met him on the beach and told him to feed His sheep. It means you belong to Him now.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. Thomas only used five. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I've been living in the dark, running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. I believe Jesus is the Word who became flesh, the Lamb of God who died for my sin, and that You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me. I believe in Jesus. I trust Him as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my Lord and my God. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me stay connected to Jesus every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. The woman at the well ran straight back to town and told everyone. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read John straight through in a Bible, a chapter a day. It takes three weeks. Then read the short letters John wrote later: 1, 2, and 3 John.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized. Jesus said His followers would be known by their love for one another, and that happens in a community.

Talk to God every day. Jesus prayed for His followers in John 17, and that includes you. Talk back. Be honest. He can handle it.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Thomas wasn't ready either. He said he wouldn't believe unless he saw the evidence for himself, and Jesus met him right where he was. Keep asking. Keep reading. Talk to someone you trust. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because John wrote his book for one reason: so that you may believe, and by believing have life. Don't close it without deciding what you think.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:31 (NIV)