

John Devotionals

Read John 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

Watching parents and grandparents pass down cars to their children and grandchildren leads me to one conclusion...they don't live in northern Illinois where cars go to die. We moved to Rockford with a minivan that had lots of miles and memories, but still looked great. Then the harsh winters full of ice and salt slowly began to eat away at her quarter panels. I had no idea that car washes are a required maintenance step to ensure that winter doesn't slowly dissolve your car around you.

There's a lot going on here, but the key understanding John brings us is the eternal nature of Jesus. Jesus hasn't been dissolved, corrupted, or weakened over the winters since His earthly arrival. He didn't begin to exist at Christmas. He wasn't just another rabbi in the eyes of his early disciples. Jesus held full authority in their eyes and they were willing to completely change course on their life plans in order to follow this Jesus. Each of the gospels has an important place in the scriptures, and John's is revealed in His opening; John's gospel was written by one of Jesus' closest disciples to confirm the eternal, divine nature of the Son of God. **Are you living in awareness of an eternal Jesus? It's most often revealed by how you approach Him. Do you approach Jesus with occasional effort, or do you seek to know Him better day by day? Jesus is more than a spiritual bailbondsman to be called when we feel locked up by sin. He's an advocate, a brother, a friend, the Lord. As you pray today, do so remembering you serve an eternal God who's been dealing with problems long before you came and will be doing so long after you're gone.**

Read John 2

When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. John 2:22

My first experience visiting NYC came in 2009 for an anniversary trip with my wife. It was close to Christmas and we hit all the iconic locations that could be done in a day: Macy's, Rockefeller Center, and a show at Radio City Music Hall. These were places I had heard about and even seen on TV, but I had never seen them in person. While they had always been real before my visit, there was something about standing at those actual locations and taking it in for myself.

What is belief? The word in John 2 means "to trust or be persuaded." It's true that faith and belief are not primarily an exercise of physical sight. At the same time, belief in God and His Son is not a matter of blind faith either. The creation expressed in nature and even our own bodies yells loudly, "There is a God!" The eyewitness testimonies of scripture lead us to confidence in both Jesus' existence and His miraculous acts. The disciples in the same way, believed the OT scriptures that had all predicted a coming Messiah who would rescue mankind from their sins. **When people challenge your beliefs in God, remember that we don't operate in a blind faith. While we haven't seen God face to face, the evidence of His existence is all around us and clearly seen on a regular basis. Just as Jesus' disciples did, stay close to the scriptures and find your faith lifted by the constant confirmation of those who came before**

us on this path of faith. When people challenge your faith and deny its proofs, remember the denial of unbelievers does not eliminate the value of proofs themselves.

Read John 3

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. John 3:18

Two big questions are tackled in this scripture. First, does God change His mind? It's revealed here that everyone is on their way to Hell. That's the statement of God on their souls and it is a sure judgment. But if accepting Christ changes our destination, does that mean we've changed God's mind? The reality is that God sees all of human history vividly at all times. Yet, He responds to us in our current moments and decisions. So God never changes in His purpose or promises, meaning that while a person may be condemned and surely on their way to Hell, accepting the payment of Jesus on the cross changes everything. It's not that God's mind changed, but you shifted into a promise of eternal life that is just as sure as the promise of eternal judgement without Christ.

The second question is this: Why do people go to Hell? We mistakenly tell people it's because they refused Jesus, but people don't go to Hell because they weren't Christians; people go to Hell because they're sinners ("whoever does not believe is condemned already"). The entire chapter is deserving of a book's worth of devotionals, but the takeaway is on the importance of moments. Moments for you, me, and others to acknowledge the truth of how bad we really are and how good Jesus really is. Everyone has the opportunity to move from spiritual death to spiritual life. Just because they are condemned right now doesn't mean they have to stay there, so let's be active witnesses who respond in the moment. **We serve a God who makes certain promises and He never wavers on any of them. As a result, we are not condemned. There is no chance we can miss Heaven, because it's the works of Jesus, not ourselves, that have reserved our place by our belief in Him. Pray for your opportunity to share that message with someone today. You being faithful in a moment could allow someone to move into better promises and see their life and eternity completely changed! Don't you want to be a part of that?**

Read John 4

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:24

What does God look like? It's a common question, and people often mistake that since humans are made in the image of God, that God must physically look like us. God's image isn't about the seen, but the spiritual unseen part. God is omnipresent (all-present), and he isn't confined by space or distance. There's nowhere I can be that God is not, because God is not easily held by any one place.

Our worship cannot be easily held either. True worship isn't about musical styles, denominations, or day of the week. True worship is about spirit and truth, both important attributes of God. To worship in spirit is the internal nature of worship. Have you ever been outdoors somewhere and marveled at the beauty of God's creation? You were worshipping just then, giving an expression of praise or thanks to the Creator. So true worship has an internal component of recognizing God's presence and actions. True worship also has an external component: God's truth. If I only internalize worship with what I know, so much of what is true

and possible is missed because I'm only going as far as my knowledge takes me. Truthful worship is moved by the Word of God. Only when we allow His words to lead us can we know we're actually connecting with him at all! **Are you limiting your worship to a time or place? Are you viewing your worship as something to be led by the professionals? True worship is internal recognizing of God and devotional attention to the truth of His Words. The best part about that? You can worship anywhere, anytime, with anyone or even all by yourself!**

Read John 5

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." John 5:14

Why are the dramatic healings and miracles of the NT less prevalent today? John 5 includes this dramatic healing of a man who had been immobile for nearly four decades! So why isn't every invalid healed today in the name of Jesus? It's important to realize, not every paralyzed or sick person in Jesus' time was healed either. We can see here there were deeper reasonings behind the healing of this man. Jesus certainly did care for the man, but he was continuing to build belief in the power of God while also setting up a showdown with the religious leaders. We even see towards the end of Jesus' ministry, he cut back on requests for miraculous signs having already sufficiently shown, short of the approaching cross, that he was operating in the power and will of God.

Undoubtedly, God still performs miracles today. It's likely his activity is less recognized without the physical Jesus standing nearby to take the credit. But notice another important truth here...physical healing was not the great need of this man's life. Jesus later sees the man and tells him to turn from sin so that nothing worse happens to him. As bad as 38 years of paralysis had been, eternity in Hell is worse! We should live the example of Jesus and care for people in their states of need, but never allowing social justice to outrank the unavoidable spiritual justice of God. God declares there is right, wrong, and justice. We are all in the wrong and can only be made right through faith in Jesus. He is the only one that can spare us from the justice we deserve to receive the grace we desire. **Ask for God to work powerfully in your life and in the lives of those you know. Pray for God to bring miraculous healings into desperate situations. Pray also as I have learned in those moments: praying for physical healing, but primarily praying for a greater acknowledgment of God in the lives of those affected. We have to remember no physical sickness is ever greater than the spiritual sickness of sin.**

Read John 6

It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them. John 6:17

My greatest challenge can often be waiting: waiting for payday, waiting for vacation, waiting for a callback. At times the waiting can feel unfair and almost torturous, but when it come to our relationship with Jesus, waiting is often the best situation for us. Jesus' disciples would have preferred Jesus was in the boat from the moment they left, but imagine what they would have missed if it hadn't been for their waiting! Jesus walked to them on the water, once again providing a proof to his closest followers of who He truly was. As the disciples later ministered on their own through difficult circumstances, how often did they think back to this great proof of Jesus' power?

I claim no divine knowledge over your life, but I know you're waiting on something. It may be something immediate or long-term, but we all have areas we're waiting to see a path become clear. The encouragement would be that we don't waste our waiting. The disciples had already rowed a few miles out when Jesus showed up. They had been tested which made the show of Jesus' power all the more encouraging. So while you're waiting, be a person who is offering your words to God, while taking time with God's Word to you. If you can learn that in the stressful times, you'll find yourself more diligent to continue those habits in the calm moments. And the way we handle ourselves in the calm moments can be even more important because that's when we dedicate ourselves to handle the upcoming storm properly. **So don't hate God for making you wait. Realize he's working every plan for God to those who love him and are seeking his purposes above all else. Ask God to make the lessons clear that you can find not only the solution you hope for, but a faith to stand through the challenges that are yet to come.**

Read John 7

For not even his brother believed in him. John 7:5

Who's the person you've given up on? We all have a person we once prayed for regularly or shared the gospel with, but their resistance led us to quit. "What's the point?" you said after what seemed like a waste of time and an exercise in frustration for everyone! We don't give up so easily when the prayer is healing of our bodies, wisdom with our children, or a better job or financial situation. We desperately want to see that answer for our lives so we keep on praying. What if we became equally as desperate for the lives of others in prayer as we are for ourselves?

Even Jesus had some long-term witnessing projects. His brothers, James and Jude, did not believe in Him as the Messiah. In fact, Jesus had some strain with his family throughout his adult ministry. Sometimes they thought he was acting crazy, other times it seemed like Jesus treated them as less important than the strangers he was ministering to. The brothers who had played and learned alongside him were unwilling to recognize him as Lord. Perhaps they were too familiar with him, but we know that after Jesus' resurrection, his brothers did believe! Jude writes an important letter on the need to resist false teachers, and James became the head of the church in Jerusalem! Their salvation wasn't due to their family ties, but their faith. Neither James or Jude lead with the detail of being Jesus' brother, but instead simply being Jesus' servant. **Is there a James or Jude in your life? Perhaps a family member, friend, or co-worker that needs the gospel, but they've seemed resistant for so long? Remember that it is not your job to save their soul. Believers have a responsibility to share the truth, but the ultimate work of salvation is done by the Holy Spirit. Your five minute conversation may have appeared unfruitful, but don't forget the Holy Spirit can keep the discussion going long after you've finished talking. So be prepared to share and pray for the person God's put on your heart. It may be a long time before you see these people submit to the Lord, but what a blessing to have been a part of it! Don't give up on any soul!**

Read John 8

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36

It falls just short of a biblical truth that Chick-fil-a is the greatest fast-food restaurant hands down. The food, service, and atmosphere are consistently high no matter where I go, though I learned something new recently about their business model: they don't give coupons. Now you

may have received a coupon from Chick-fil-a, but they're not your traditional "50 cents off." Chick-fil-a founder Truitt Cathy, determined that instead of enticing people with pocket change, he would simply give away free food. It made customers feel more valued to genuinely receive a free item and drove higher loyalty towards their brand. Even today, I love seeing my app fill with free items, some of which I've earned and others which simply show up as gifts from my local store. Free is awesome!

The Jewish people in Jesus' day were not people of freedom. The nation was held down by Rome, and society was held down by the religious leaders. Jesus points out the bondage of the people and the freedom that he is offering. There was no freedom or position simply in being Jewish, but by believing in Jesus. It's as if the priests were offering people coupons saving some occasional spiritual pocket change while Jesus offered to just pay the bill! Freedom in Christ is both a great blessing and a great challenge. Why does He set me free, knowing that at times I will return to the old life of sinful thoughts, words, and actions? Jesus didn't come to make us self-sufficient. He came to set free a people in great bondage, so that now when I sin, my heart is saddened to have let him down, but my soul remains as secure as ever. **Do you feel free? Remember that freedom and salvation are not a feeling, but a fact. IF the Son sets you free, YOU WILL BE free indeed! Don't allow your sin to keep you silent in your prayer life, but instead remember the relationship continues based on the love and forgiveness of Jesus. Allow your freedom in Christ to keep you unashamedly near Him at all times.**

Read John 9

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. John 9:34

This whole chapter is a bad look for the Pharisees. These church leaders cannot find joy in this man's healing because it doesn't line up with their inaccurate view of a God who's closed for business on the Sabbath. In addition, their response to this man's testimony of Jesus is that he is a dirty sinner, and they are righteous teachers. Any teacher who attempts to force your submission by telling you how much better they are than you is a teacher you should immediately separate yourself from.

Are you a sinner? As a Christian the answer is both yes and no. Scripture is clear that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Scripture also indicates after our salvation, we continue to struggle with sin. We're all born in utter sin. We all struggle with frustrating, repetitive sin. But we're not all defined by our sin. Believers still struggle with earthly moments of sinful failure in our thoughts, words, and actions. But on the day I stand before God, I stand not as a sinner, but as saved. I will be held eternally guiltless because I received the price Jesus paid on my behalf through the cross. **Do you see yourself as better than other sinners? Don't answer that one too quickly. Perhaps you elevate yourself over the addict or the adulterer. However, we are all born in utter sin and stained by the sinful actions of our flesh. Only through Jesus are we guiltless and confident to stand before our Creator in the day of judgment. Remember that next time you find yourself judging another person's sin more harshly than your own.**

Read John 10

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28

How can we stay saved? The question is usually posed, “How can we be saved?”, but that question is generally pretty clear for Christians. Once we have given our lives to Jesus how do we ensure that our sinful pitfalls of lying, lust, greed, and the rest do not remove us from the kingdom of Heaven? If you’re like me, there have probably been times in your life your sinful choices caused you to doubt whether you had truly been saved at all. Which means, you’ve come to a deep understanding of salvation through Jesus.

Jesus offered us eternal life because all we can offer ourselves is eternal death. Jesus didn’t offer to pay our ticket to Heaven while making us responsible for not missing the train, nor getting kicked off of it! Once a person places their faith in Christ, three things become instantly true of them. 1) They have eternal life. 2) They will never face judgment for their sin. 3) They have eternal fellowship with God. **How can we stay saved? Remaining saved has nothing to do with us, and everything to do with Jesus. If you could lose your salvation (being snatched from the hand of Jesus), then the salvation of Jesus is worthless. Our eternity would depend on our effort, thereby rendering the death of Jesus on the cross as a pointless exercise. I know someday you don’t feel saved or almost feel Jesus would let you do something to prove your worth in light of your worthless choices. Just stop. Salvation isn’t about your feelings, but the fact that Jesus has rescued everyone who’s asked for it. Live your life in confidence today through Jesus and make your choices for holiness from a place of love and not a fear of becoming lost.**

Read John 11

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

The spider hated the lion. Lion would walk through the jungle like he owned the place, hardly giving Spider a second glance. One day, Spider was in a cave when Lion walked in, strolled past, and laid down to nap in the back of the cave. Spider’s anger quickly turned to excitement. “I’ve got him!”, Spider exclaimed as he raced to the entrance. For hours, Spider spun his web across the mouth of the cave, weaving back and forth until even the sunlight was blocked by the thick, dark web. Soon after, Lion awoke with a yawn and strolled towards the mouth of the cave. “I’ve got him, I’ve got him!”, Spider whispered excitedly. Lion stopped for only a moment to consider the web and then...stepped right on through. Because he was a lion, and it was only a spiderweb.

That’s the picture of death for the Christian. It’s undeniably mysterious, but death is a mere blip for the Christian. Often scripture calls death “falling asleep”, which Jesus does here as well. He doesn’t mean our souls fall asleep at death, but that death is as easy as falling asleep; though you die, yet you live! To say we never die is an indication of our eternal life. Technically, I already have eternal life as a believer and my soul is guaranteed a place in Heaven. So while my physical body may die, my soul remains vibrant, alive, and awaiting the day it’s reunited with my eternal resurrection body. **Do you believe this? Those are the words of Jesus, and while you may say yes, you may also deal with fears over death. You don’t have to be embarrassed or**

ashamed of this fear. Bring it to God. Confess your fear of the unknown, or of leaving family behind, or even your fear that maybe your faith is in vain. God is honored in our honest questions, and Jesus himself experienced a physical death. He can relate and he cares, so bring your cares and fears of death before Him.

Read John 12

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. John 12:32

Preaching feels like a competition at times. Watching other pastors create a brilliant sermon series with graphics and intriguing titles can sometimes make me feel inadequate. However, I've learned over time that my goal is not to draw a crowd. As a preacher of God's Word, my job is to ensure that Christ is lifted up in my preaching each and every week. Preaching a sermon on money? Christ should be lifted up. A sermon on marriage or parenting? Christ should be lifted up. The true and lasting draw must always be Jesus.

Jesus said when was lifted up, he would draw "all people to himself." This harkens back to the foreshadowing of Numbers 21:9 when the Israelites were plagued by venomous snakes. Moses created a bronze snake and placed it on a pole, raising it up high. Anyone who was bitten and looked upon the figure would live. In the same way, we've all been bitten by that ancient serpent, the Devil, and are dying under the curse of sin. But Jesus was lifted up on the cross, becoming the ultimate figure on the horizon to draw every dying sinner to himself. If we will trust in his sacrifice upon the cross, we no longer worry about an eternal death of separation in Hell. **How are you lifting up Jesus? Intentional gospel witnessing is important, but so is holiness and living out the character of Jesus among the lost. When you live out the character of Jesus, you once again draw people to the cross. They have the opportunity to examine a sacrifice made on their behalf, a sacrifice that must mean something for them. No matter what spiritual conversation you're having, be sure to lift up Jesus who is the only one that can save the soul and change the heart.**

Read John 13

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also out to wash one another's feet. John 13:14

You're often acting like someone else. Not that you're being fake, but we all adopt characteristics from people we love, respect, or admire. I've become more forgiving towards fellow workers in the ministry because of a pastor who taught me how to do it. My profanity consists of "doggone" and "goodnight" because my father used those words as substitutes. As you read my examples, you're probably thinking of your own lessons learned from co-workers and family members. Some of those were deliberate choices, but others you simply picked up from being around them.

If there was anyone in the upper room who SHOULDN'T have been washing people's feet, it was Jesus. At least that's our initial thought; He's Lord and Teacher and probably someone else should take on this role. I'd imagine though as the disciples thought back to their time when Jesus was on this earth, that's a moment they thought of often. They remembered him feeding thousands with almost nothing, walking on water, and even rising from the dead. But they also remembered this quiet moment when God himself took time to act as the lowliest of servants to his people. What was the result? A team of disciples that did not seek to be served, but faithfully

served until their end. What drives people to such selfless devotion even to the point of their own lives? The example of their Lord. **Which jobs are beneath you? You might not say it, but there are certain tasks in your home, church, or office that you simply would never help with. Do you realize how much your example of service would impact others around you? They would see your actions, consider why you take them, and potentially adopt those actions themselves. Being like Jesus is more than being kind and avoiding sin. Being like Jesus is about acting as a servant to all.**

Read John 14

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

Over the first 20 years of the 21st century, polling has consistently shown a disturbing belief hiding within the church. Over half of those who claim to be Christians, believe that non-Christians go to Heaven when they die. The simple reason for believing this is because they want to. I wish all people went to Heaven when they died as well, but that’s not what God has said on the matter. He has offered Heaven to anyone who would choose to believe, not sending His Son to condemn the world, but to offer them a rescue.

As Jesus and his disciples close their final supper together, these men are growing anxious. They can tell that Jesus is taking a final lap, but they still seem to be struggling with what the next 12 hours to the cross will look like. They keep asking Jesus how they’re going to find or follow him. Finally he responds with our verse today: Jesus is going to the Father in Heaven, and if anyone wants that same access, Jesus is the only way. There is no back door into heaven. Jesus is the only truth. Many religions claim to be the way to God and Heaven. In doing so they attempt to cluster Christianity in as just one of many truths, when in fact the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible has been exceeded by no other religious volume. Jesus is the only life. We live the example of His life, not attempting to live a pleasing life on our own. The actions of our lives do not grant us Heaven, but instead we’ve been given Heaven and instructed to follow the example of Jesus’ life. **Do you want lost people to go to Heaven? Then don’t simply hope for it or change your truth to sleep better at night. We must tell people the gospel of Jesus. It was his final command to us in Matthew 28:19-20, not so we would grow the church, but so that people would not have to be eternally condemned and separated from God!**

Read John 15

You are my friends if you do what I command. John 15:14

After I became a Christian, I found myself afraid of Jesus. His love and forgiveness had been a moment of great hope and change in my life, but the places I remained unchanged caused me real distress. Was Jesus regretting his decision to rescue me? Then I read this passage, and like all of John 15, we must consider it carefully. We’re told that we are his friends if we do what he commands, so every character failure seems elevated in the face of such friendship. Yet, we’ve missed a major command of Jesus in this thinking: the command to repent. Jesus brought the perfection that overcomes and overwhelms our imperfections.

Earlier in verse 7 Jesus says if we abide in him, allowing his words to abide in us, then he will grant us whatever we wish. This statement feels untrue on its face as we think of all we have

prayed for that has never come about. But Jesus is not just calling us to call on him for wants. He tells us to pray in a place of abiding, friendship, Jesus “firstness” that allows our requests to be an avenue in which God’s desires are honored above our own. Jesus prayed the cup of the cross would pass, but he did not pray that alone. He prayed also for the will of the Father above all. So in my requests, I seek not that Jesus would do as I command, but that I am doing as he commands. **Have you been viewing the commands of Jesus as merely the “Thou Shalt Nots”? I sure can struggle with that mindset, but I remember my call is to do all that Jesus commands. To first live holy and to additionally live repentant when I fail. Remember, Jesus the friend of the believer in both circumstances of obedience. Lift any disobedience to him in repentance today and thereby place yourself in obedience!**

Read John 16

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

John 16:7-8

Let me see if I can remember them all: Share Jesus Without Fear, Four Spiritual Laws, Contagious Christianity, FAITH, 3 Circles...that’s all I can remember. These are the various different evangelism programs and strategies I’ve had some involvement in to help me share my faith in Christ. I’m certain they all mentioned our need to rely on the Holy Spirit, but if that didn’t feel like the emphasis. It felt like I was just there to memorize strategies so I could win the arguments I was certain to get into with lost people. But if we really felt the Holy Spirit was so involved, why weren’t we challenged to pray more for His movement? We speak of the power and work of God, but we easily fall into the trap of primarily focusing on our own power and work.

I’m so glad that Jesus left. The disciples certainly didn’t feel that way initially, but Jesus had confined himself to a physical body. They would always have to journey to wherever Jesus was in order to have a face-to-face. Jesus left in order that we all would have access to the Helper, namely the Holy Spirit, who resides within every believer. It is the Holy Spirit who does the real conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment. I believe there is value to those training programs as long as we remember that we are not the primary voice of salvation. I could speak on the gospel for five minutes, but the Holy Spirit is continuing conversations with that person long after my time with them ends. **What feelings do you experience when sharing the gospel? Like many of us you experience fear; not of the person, but of failing to do a good job of presenting the truth. As my evangelism professor in seminary once said, “You only fail in your witness when you fail to witness.” While the Holy Spirit is the ultimate mover in the process of salvation, our willingness to put a human face on the conversation of sin and forgiveness is a powerful conversation starter for a lost person. Pray for unexpected opportunities, those you’ve been witnessing to already, and those you want to witness to. Seek to be a partner with God’s Holy Spirit for the sake of souls all around you.**

Read John 17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17

Recently I had a conversation with someone who claimed to be a Christian. While I do not determine who is truly saved, I did have a sense she truly believed and trusted in Christ. The

struggle in our conversation was that she had never been taken much beyond that initial point. Churches so emphasize salvation that we fail to emphasize sanctification which comes as we build genuine disciples of Jesus. Her hope as a Christian was to become a better person, which I gently encouraged her to rethink. Instead of becoming a better person (which could mean anything), the call of Christianity is that she would become more like Jesus, which is something we can actually evaluate. When I read the gospels, I see the person that God has called me to emulate...Jesus Christ.

To be sanctified is to become more like Jesus. It's neither an overnight or finite process, but is an ongoing exercise of our faith. You cannot be sanctified by asking, "What would Jesus do?" You become sanctified by reading in God's Word, "What did Jesus do?" His actions and attitudes are no secret. If you want to become more patient, forgiving, or prayerful, look into God's Word. God has given us the Bible so that we would never have to wonder at His will. Instead, I read the Bible and I celebrate the areas that have already been sanctified within me, while honestly evaluating with God the areas that are a mess. **How were you sanctified over this last week? What area of God's word provided encouragement and correction for your life? Be diligent to continue in those areas, believing that every act of refinement by God is for some future purpose in your life.**

Read John 18

Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" John 18:38

This whole chapter is about establishing truth and examining motives. Caiaphas restates his earlier "prophecy" in verse 14 that it's better for one man to die for the Jews, not as a Savior, but as a martyr. This allowed Caiaphas to make the prophecy self-fulfilling, knowing he'd be sure the prediction came true by having Jesus killed. During Jesus's trial, an officer strikes Jesus in verse 22 for an answer he gave. Jesus responds by asking if the officer struck him because of his concern for truth. The officer does not respond.

Now standing before Pilate, Jesus has given an account of the truth and that those who pursue truth will pursue Jesus. Pilate is only concerned with the challenging situation before him and ultimately denies that anyone can really establish truth. I sense some cynicism in Pilate here after a life of politics and jockeying for position in a Roman world where murder for the purpose of promotion was not uncommon. **We all have times that we struggle with truth. We know God loves us, but our problems at work, with your kids, and that strange sound your car is making cause you to wonder. Truth doesn't change with the circumstances and when life gets you down, stop and ask yourself, "What is true right now?" Pray this question and seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and the scriptures. When you realize all that is true about God in the midst of your frustrating situation, it allows you to function as a Christian and as a witness to others.**

Read John 19

And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." John 19:37

Early in my ministry, I realized that email is a terrible form of communication. People tend to ramble and it's nearly impossible to determine someone's tone. Then things got worse...we began texting. Now arguments, breakups, and even job firings happen in 120 characters or less! I

find that people can be very bold behind a smartphone, but less so in person. Just like with emails, people are responding without the actual pressure of feeling the tension or disappointment in the room during the conversation, and as a result they communicate in very uncaring ways when not actually confronted by the other person.

That isn't an option with Jesus. God ordained not merely that Jesus would be a sacrifice, but a public sacrifice. He was crucified during the holiest time of the year, guaranteeing an enormous crowd of people that would be witness to the event as well as confronted by its purpose. Scripture says "they will look on him whom they have pierced." That's not just for the Pharisees of Jesus' day, but us as well. As we read the eyewitness accounts, we see the Jesus you and I have pierced. He was crushed for our iniquities and bruised for our sins. You and I are guilty of murder. Some may have physically placed Jesus on the cross, but we all did it spiritually by our sins. **Consider today that your sins are the reason that Jesus died. If you've accepted His forgiveness, thank Him for it. If you're wrestling with that decision, I ask you why? Is it because of shame over your past or even your today? Is it because of doubts in who He is? Jesus was publicly crucified as proof from that day forward that there is a Savior for all mankind. Be sure to serve as a public witness of His sacrificial act so that no one can claim they have not seen the Jesus whom they too have pierced.**

Read John 20

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." John 20:27

Thomas the disciple wasn't as terrible as he's painted out to be. In fact, there are more demonstrations of Thomas as a man of faith than not. He was with Jesus very early on. He asked really good questions. When Jesus was headed into dangerous territory, Thomas did not draw back, but urged all the disciples, "let us go and die with Him." But watching his friend and rabbi die and be buried was more than his faith could endure. We often have that moment. We felt like things were going really well until that life moment that felt beyond anything we'd ever been asked to go through before. As a result, our faith was weakened and we were ashamed.

Thomas was missing during Jesus' first appearance to the main group, but Jesus returned a second time to have a very specific conversation. He spoke directly to Thomas calling his friend and disciple to examine the evidence. Do not disbelieve, but believe. Thomas makes a wonderful declaration of the true nature of Jesus and is brought back from unbelief. What happened next? Church history tells us that Thomas took the gospel further than any other disciple, going as far as India. He refused to allow unbelief to stop his personal efforts as a disciple and a disciple-maker. **You've had a moment of disbelief. We all have and they are incredibly painful, both as we doubt God and then as our doubts are answered and we try to reconnect. Jesus died for all our failures, including unbelief. He knows it will happen. Not only Thomas, but the entire group of disciples had moments of unbelief and confusion as Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Bring your unbelief to Jesus. He's not waiting to chastise your struggles, but to build you up in the faith. Our pursuit of Jesus is met by a God who wants us to know Him. Take time today to admit what seems impossible while also admitting your belief in His power over everything.**

Read John 21

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

John 21:17

When counseling couples are married or soon to be, I try to help them understand the fuller nature of the relationship. Greek uses three words for love and each one has a place. Eros is the romantic love that any married couple immediately recognizes. Next is Phileo which is love like a close friend. That’s also a necessary component that can grow cold over the years of marriage as each spouse moves into their personal routines. The final is the most important: Agape. This is sacrificial love that places that wants and needs of the other before ourselves. This can be difficult, but a good relationship is between two agape lovers, each caring for the other as they would for themselves.

As you read this exchange between Jesus and Peter, the English translation doesn’t expose the changing words. Jesus originally asks Peter in verses 15 and 16, “Peter, do you love me?” Peter responds each time, “You know I Phileo you.” Jesus is asking for sacrifice, but Peter is only acknowledging friendship. In response, Jesus literally says in verse 17 “Peter, do you love me like a friend and brother?” Peter is grieved because he has likely made the connection with his triple denial and sees that Jesus has challenged Peter if the lower level of love he claims is really true. I don’t see this as Jesus beating Peter up, but challenging Peter to rise up and be the true and powerful disciple he’ll soon prove himself to be. **What kind of love is Jesus asking you for? We may easily say we love Jesus, but are we treating him as a friend only? Jesus is the greatest friend of sinners, but accepting his salvation also makes Jesus our Lord. We are challenged to live a sacrificial agape love in response to Jesus doing no less for us. John 3:16 says that God so “Agape” the world, he sent Jesus. Where are you sacrificing for Jesus? Where has he been calling you to sacrifice? Examine the places of your life that Jesus is calling for a greater love today.**