

In Pursuit of God

Exploring and Expressing Faith

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Bold

Week 1

This week in summary

Bold		WEEK 1
Summary	<i>Acts 1</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
Spirit of God	<i>Acts 2</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Dependent	<i>Acts 3-4</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Acts 5-6</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Faith with Feet	<i>Acts 7</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Summary

Acts Chapters 1-7

In the book of Acts, Luke continues where he left off in the biography of Jesus. Luke records the early years of the growth of Jesus’ movement across the Roman Empire. He begins this new chapter of Jesus’ Kingdom with a farewell scene between Jesus and his followers before Jesus ascends. He left the Kingdom in their hands. He told them to continue following his commands and announce the good news everywhere they go, baptizing and making more disciples of all groups of people.

Jesus left, but he didn’t leave them on their own. He promised to send the Spirit of God to lead and guide them as they continued to follow all of their king’s commands. Luke gave us a sneak preview of this Holy Spirit of God in Jesus’ biography, but now the Holy Spirit will take center stage as this Kingdom from Heaven grows across the earth.

In the opening chapters of the book of Acts we’re introduced to the Holy Spirit in a new way. In former times, He empowered various individuals for a short time and came and went at will. The prophet Joel, however, predicted—by that same Holy Spirit—a time when He would be poured out on all who believe. When Jesus came, He spoke of that gift, and in Acts we see it—or, rather, *Him*—poured out in the new way. The gift—that is, the Holy Spirit—is said to be for *all* who

believe—leaving none who believe who are without Him. The evidence of His presence in the lives of those who first received Him is seen in various ways: some spoke in languages they'd never learned, proclaiming Christ to those who heard. Others worked miracles, and, as Paul's letters will detail, there are many other gifts of the Spirit—but each gift is given as a manifestation of the Spirit for the building up of the body of Christ—both numerically and developmentally. The *fruit* of the Holy Spirit is seen in the changed lives of those who have Him operating in their lives. That is, a change in character takes place in which it becomes evident—night and day—the person is a different person than before.

Numerically, we can witness the early congregation—the church—growing after some or other major miraculous event. Later on, we'll see some emphasis shift away from the miraculous—though still quite present—and shift more towards the spoken word.

Developmentally, we see the church growing as the Holy Spirit encourages them through daily, not-so-miraculous living. We observe that in the former volume Luke the physician wrote about all that Jesus *began* to do and teach until the day He was taken up into heaven. We can infer that means that Jesus continued to “do and teach” after He was in heaven, but the nature of *how* He does so changes drastically. He will now do so through His servants by means of the Holy Spirit. We read how the early congregation was generous and sharing. They were a unique kind of people who truly knew how to sacrifice for one another. We read about how though there were problems, they were met in decisive—sometimes even a little scary—ways.

Reading Today: Acts 1

10-15 minutes

Day 2

Spirit of God

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;” The Spirit of God has many names to help us understand how God interacts with us directly. Here are a few of them:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| The Spirit | The Sprit of Supplication |
| The Spirit of God | The Spirit of Knowledge |
| The Breath of God | The Sprit of Fear of the LORD |
| The Spirit of the Father | The Spirit of Adoption |
| The Holy Spirit | The Guarantee of our inheritance |
| The Holy Ghost | The Comforter |
| The Eternal Spirit | The Witness |
| The Spirit of the Holy one | The Helper |
| The Breath of the Almighty | The Teacher |
| The Spirit of Holiness | |
| The Spirit of Truth | |
| The Spirit of Glory | <i>The Spirit is like</i> |
| The Spirit of the LORD | <i>dove,</i> |
| The Seven Spirits of God | <i>breath,</i> |
| The Spirit of Jesus | <i>wind,</i> |
| The Spirit of Christ | <i>fire,</i> |
| The Spirit of Life | <i>water,</i> |
| The Spirit of Wisdom | <i>ceremonial oil,</i> |
| The Spirit of Understanding | <i>voice,</i> |
| The Sprit of Counsel | <i>gift,</i> |
| The Sprit of Strength | <i>power</i> |
| The Spirit of Grace | |

A simple understanding: the Spirit is the part of God that meets us most directly affecting us from the inside. The Spirit of God lives in some people. We will learn more as we read Acts.

Who has the Spirit of God living in them? _____

How did they receive? _____

Reading Today: Acts 2

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Dependent

Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

The poor in spirit, who feel accepted by God and understand their reliance on God for everything.

The Beatitudes, sometimes called the beautiful attitudes come from a sermon brought by Jesus known as the Sermon On The Mount. The portion of this sermon is directed at His disciples. In Matthew 5 beginning with verse 1 we read: Jesus went up on a mountain side and sat down, His disciples came to Him and He began to teach them. Teaching His disciples is one of the main things Jesus came to earth to do. He taught His disciples and now because His words were recorded for us, we may also learn from Jesus.

Jesus said to them, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

Blessed here means happy. Happy, someone that is poor? We normally do not link poor and happy together. But Jesus is looking past the obvious to what is real. Jesus is big on that.

Strong people don't think they have needs. People with great wealth also may feel they have no needs. But as we have all seen in this life, money and wealth may not last forever and the strength of our bodies has limits and lessens over time. So what Jesus is saying here is that the pathway to real happiness is not through us or what we can do, but something else.

Jesus said that the poor in spirit will receive the kingdom of Heaven. This is not a kingdom that can be taken by force or purchased with money. The kingdom of heaven is gained by submitting to its King, Jesus. Someone that is poor in spirit submits because they know they have no other choice and because they believe in and trust the king. Jesus is the king and Jesus is the key to the kingdom. To enter in one need only bow before Him and allow Him to change them from the inside out. Being poor in spirit is almost completely about knowing you cannot do this on your own, and so you don't even try.

Reading Today: Acts 3-4

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors**B**EGIN WITH PRAYER

Pray with your Family - Remember your neighbors by name during mealtime and bedtime prayers.

Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

LISTEN

Ask Open-ended Questions - How long have you lived here? What line of work are you in? What do you do for fun?

Ask Follow-up Questions - How did that test go? Are you feeling better? How was your vacation?

EAT

Enjoy a Meal Together - Invite a neighbor (or two) for a BBQ, order in Pizza, or have everyone bring a dessert to share.

Celebrate Special Occasions and Holidays - Bake cupcakes for birthdays. Send a casserole to new parents. Deliver Christmas cookies.

SERVE

Serve While You're Outside - Turn lawn chores into opportunities to serve: Mow lawns, water yards, etc.

Serve In Times of Need - Visit when a neighbor passes away or has a baby. Deliver flowers or a gift. Coordinate meals with other neighbors.

STORY

Share Commonalities - Hobbies such as golf, book club, bunko night, or a running/fitness group can all bring people together.

Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

Reading Today: Acts 5-6

10-15 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

There's a healthy progression when it comes to the Bible: Reading leads to understanding, believing and doing. So based on what you've read this week. What should you be doing? We will come up with an action plan each week based on what we've read. The following are some questions that will help you to develop action steps **based on the text you read this week:**

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How did people follow God's instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Based on this week's reading, What do you believe God wants you to do?

This week I choose to obey God by

Reading Today: Acts 7

10-15 minutes

Movement

Week 2

This week in summary

<u>Movement</u>		<u>WEEK 2</u>
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Spirit of God	<i>Acts 10-11</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Mourning	<i>Acts 12</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Acts 13</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>Acts 14</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Summary

Acts Chapters 8-14

Now what? People are dying, the cops are chasing them and Jesus’s followers leave town... except they forgot to lay low. Instead the spread the message everywhere they go and this movement is spreading. No big surprise that the authorities that executed Jesus would continue their bloody opposition but it seems their crack down turns against them. God uses the followers of Jesus to push the boundaries of his Kingdom on earth from Jerusalem to the surrounding regions. It’s just like Jesus predicted in Acts 1:8 *Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”*

As we read along, we note the continued imparting of the Holy Spirit to new believers. Particularly in chapter 8, the Spirit is given to the Samaritans at the laying on of the hands of the missionaries— continuing the expanding geo-cultural nature of the spread of the Good News (recall that Jesus had said they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8)).

By contrast, the “Gentiles” receive the Spirit *before* anyone is even immersed in water (ch. 10)! His coming upon the Gentiles is directly akin to what happened in the opening of chapter 2. We see in these chapters, too, the Spirit's activity again in leading and guiding the Church. Miracles are performed. Healings occur. Boldness, prophecy, and a host of other marks of the Spirit's activity are witnessed.

Reading Today: Acts 8-9

10-15 minutes

Day 2

Spirit of God

One of the many things that I love about God is that, each time I feel like I've got God figured out He does something mind-blowing.

In the pattern of God interacting with humanity, He progressively takes steps to get closer and closer and closer to us.

Then God took on human flesh and lived among us in the person of Jesus.

What!? God moved into the neighborhood and he's hanging out at my barbeque? As mind blowing as the incarnation of all powerful God is, He took it another step closer: from living **among** us to living **inside** us. The Spirit of God came to live in us guiding us and giving us power to fulfill God's plan for us.

God entered a symbiotic relationship with us. Hard to believe that some people around you have living in them the Spirit of all-powerful God, creator of gold, galactic super-clusters, the human genome, math and squirrels. He is pure awesome and he lives in some of us.

How can I receive that?

Reading Today: Acts 10-11

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Mourning and Comfort

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted

Those who mourn, who know and express their feelings, grieving the nature and effect of sin in themselves and in others.

Jesus' disciples came to Him and He began to teach them. That statement from Matthew 5 tells me that these men followed Jesus. They knew that to learn from Him they must be with Him.

Jesus teaching continued with these words, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."

Remember the word blessed here means happy. So here we go again, mourning and happy don't seem to have any connection. When we think of mourning we think of loss and separation. As people we can be sad about the loss of many things. A job, a possession, a friend or loved one, either because they moved away or because of death, but we especially connect mourning with death.

Jesus says that when we mourn we will be comforted, we will receive comfort and that comfort will come from Him or more specifically from the Holy Spirit. In The Gospel of John Jesus tells His disciples that He has to go away so He can send the Holy Spirit to us here on earth. In this case Jesus actually refers to the Holy Spirit as the comforter. Think of it this way you are very cold and you wrap up in a huge goose down comforter. That is a tiny example of the comfort that Jesus has the capacity to offer.

Jesus mourned many things but what He mourned the most was when people rejected His offer of Love and salvation. Jesus wants us to experience His comfort. Comfort that has the ability to turn gloom into joy, sorrow into happiness and emptiness into the richest life we can possibly imagine. The biggest reason why life with Jesus is so rich and good is because He is in it with us, all the way wherever we go and whatever we go through.

Reading Today: Acts 12

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Pray with your Family - Remember your neighbors by name during mealtime and bedtime prayers.

Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

LISTEN

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STORY

Share Commonalities - Hobbies such as golf, book club, bunko night, or a running/fitness group can all bring people together.

Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Acts 13

10-15 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on Acts 8-14 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How did people follow God's instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: Acts 14

10-15 minutes

Others

Week 3

This week in summary

Others		WEEK 3
Summary	<i>Acts 15</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
Spirit of God	<i>Acts 16-17</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Mourning	<i>Acts 18</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Acts 19</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>Acts 20-21</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Summary***Acts Chapters 15-21***

A big transition just happened in the middle of this otherwise culturally Jewish movement. The leaders are seeing that God has a plan for non-Jewish outsiders. Samaritans (half-Jews) and gentiles (non-Jews) are getting involved. The Spirit of God is verifying the validity of their inclusion in his Kingdom. The leaders gather together to discuss this issue. What do we do with our ancient animosity and prejudice? Do *they* need to become like *us* or like *Jesus*? What do we do with these 'others'?

In these chapters, we begin to note a marked decline in the direct mentioning of the Holy Spirit. We might not know what, exactly, if anything at all, we should make of this. Does it mean we shouldn't see the Holy Spirit at work in quite so many places? Does it mean we should only credit Him in the extraordinary events? Has Luke now established so well that the Holy Spirit is the main character that it would seem cliché to keep bringing Him up?

Yet in especially two places the Holy Spirit is made mention of in this chapter set. First, we see the Holy Spirit actually *prevent* the missionaries from preaching the Good News *twice!* How do we account for this strange activity? Later on, Paul comes across some disciples who had never heard there even was a Holy Spirit! He lays hands on them and they receive Him.

The section closes on the Holy Spirit both compelling Paul to go up to Jerusalem and at the same time warning him of what is to come. It seems in 21:4, though, that the Holy Spirit is still quite prominent in that the believers there make a strong attempt to keep Paul there longer—perhaps praying for permission from Him for Paul to stay a while longer.

Reading Today: Acts 15

10-15 minutes

Day 2

Holy Spirit of God

The following list describes some of the ways the Spirit of God interacts with us. There are many more, this is just to get you started.

Ways the Spirit of God **leads** us:

- Wisdom
- Guidance
- Specific instructions
- Giving us words as we proclaiming Jesus

Ways the Spirit of God gives us **power**:

- Boldness
- Prophecy
- Speaking in tongues
- Miraculous signs
- Healing
- Cursing

Ways the Spirit of God validates our **testimony**:

- Using miraculous signs
- While we proclaim Jesus
- Verifying to the audience
- Verifying the inclusion of outsiders (gentiles)

Reading Today: Acts 16-17

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Meekness: strength under control**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth**

The meek, who know they don't have it all together and have thus yielded control of their life to God and can be gentle with other people and themselves.

The word meek is not one we use a great deal so here is what it means from Jesus point of view.

Meek here is not weak, in fact it is best pictured as strength under control. I knew a man when I was very young; he worked with my father in construction. This man was 6 foot five and had the biggest hands I ever saw. He was Norwegian and his family had for many years built boats that were very detailed and finely built, almost to the point of being furniture. This large, huge handed man could do the finest finish work imaginable. I remember my father complimenting his abilities many times.

The same huge man that had the capacity for fine work could have also been a formidable foe if he wanted. But the man was gentle and very unassuming. It's like he knew where he came from, and so used it for good.

In another place in the Bible it says that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. A meek, gentle person knows this and gives credit and honor to God who again has everything at His disposal and Gives to those who will use His gifts well.

The whole inheriting the earth thing is just that, the things of the earth that belong to God come to us when we humbly submit and come to Him, the giver of every good and perfect gift.

Reading Today: Acts 18

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Pray with your Family - Remember your neighbors by name during mealtime and bedtime prayers.

Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

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STORY

Share Commonalities - Hobbies such as golf, book club, bunko night, or a running/fitness group can all bring people together.

Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Acts 19

10-15 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on Acts 8-14 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God’s heart & values?

How did people follow God’s instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: Acts 20-21

10-15 minutes

Obedience

Week 4

This week in summary

Obedience		WEEK 4
Summary	<i>Acts 22</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
God, the Battle Medic	<i>Acts 23</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Satisfied	<i>Acts 24</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Acts 25-26</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>Acts 27-28</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Summary***Acts Chapters 22-28***

The course is set. Paul is compelled by the Spirit of God to go to Jerusalem and to Rome. He is well aware of the fact that this will mean his arrest but He also knows this trial will give him the opportunity to make a personal invitation to the governor and the king.

In this set of chapters, there is a markedly reduced explicit mention of the Holy Spirit—like pretty much zero until Paul mentions the Spirit as the force behind prophecy. In these chapters, we can reflect more on where we see the activity of the Holy Spirit in ways already revealed and learn to fill in some of the blanks in our own lives. In other words, we now get to wrestle with questions of where the lines blur between something that just simply happens as a course of nature and those things that happen by divine providence. Might we sometimes become so used to seeing His activity that it almost becomes a given that it is He who is at work in our lives? Is that necessarily a good or bad thing? What are the pros and cons of that?

Reading Today: Acts 22

10-15 minutes

Day 2

God, the Battle Medic

The Kingdom of God is different than the nations of earth. Our values are different; our approach to life is different. For those who choose to follow the way of Heaven, there is a necessary conflict the pattern of life on earth. Not everyone wants to surrender their will to see God's will accomplish. To embrace God's kingdom I must sacrifice mine.

Just like Jesus, the citizens of heaven on earth suffer the tension of God's growing Kingdom. *All who desire to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But our struggle is not against flesh and blood humanity.* God seldom removes the source of our pain; But He is always going through it with us so we never have to face suffering alone.

Before Jesus returned to the Father he promised to send the Holy Spirit to lead and guide in His absence. Jesus referred to the Spirit of God as "The Comforter." In the Spirit of God stands with us in the middle of life shattering conflict and he gives us comfort. Not just comfort, He brings peace leading to joy. It's a mind blowing paradox that followers of Jesus find joy when their life is torn apart. This joy is not the tense excitement of masochism. It's the relaxed peace that comes from knowing that God has total control. It's hard not to smile when you know that God has the winning hand. Be sure to bet on Him.

Reading Today: Acts 23

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Satisfied

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

Those who crave uprightness, who are more excited about God's agenda for themselves and the world than any other thing.

We all know what it's like to be really hungry. In fact we have all used phrases like I'm starving to death, which in my case though I have used that phrase it's never been true. As I think about it I have never missed a meal that I did not elect to miss for one reason or another. The hunger that Jesus is talking about here is for Him. Oh He says righteousness, which simply means to live rightly or to do right things. The question is one of standards, which one do we use ours or His. When I have made choices that have only me in mind things never turn out well, and by no coincidence at all is the opposite true that when I do things the way I know that Jesus teaches it goes well.

But Jesus says that we will be filled. And He's not just saying a little, but over the top full: filled with His Spirit, we receive blessing after blessing after blessing.

Think about it if we are what we eat and we experience the results of what we eat, it makes sense to only satisfy our hunger with what will last, Jesus' righteousness.

Reading Today: Acts 24

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors**BEGIN WITH PRAYER**

Pray with your Family - Remember your neighbors by name during mealtime and bedtime prayers.

Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

LISTEN

Ask Open-ended Questions - How long have you lived here? What line of work are you in? What do you do for fun?

Ask Follow-up Questions - How did that test go? Are you feeling better? How was your vacation?

EAT

Enjoy a Meal Together - Invite a neighbor (or two) for a BBQ, order in Pizza, or have everyone bring a dessert to share.

Celebrate Special Occasions and Holidays - Bake cupcakes for birthdays. Send a casserole to new parents. Deliver Christmas cookies.

SERVE

Serve While You're Outside - Turn lawn chores into opportunities to serve: Mow lawns, water yards, etc.

Serve In Times of Need - Visit when a neighbor passes away or has a baby. Deliver flowers or a gift. Coordinate meals with other neighbors.

STORY

Share Commonalities - Hobbies such as golf, book club, bunko night, or a running/fitness group can all bring people together.

Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Acts 25-26

10-15 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on Acts 22-28 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How did people follow God's instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: Acts 27-28

10-15 minutes

Friend

Week 5

This week in summary

<u>Friend</u>		<u>WEEK 5</u>
Abraham the friend of God	<i>Genesis 12-14</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
God the friend	<i>Genesis 15-16</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Mercy	<i>Genesis 17-19</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Genesis 20-22</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Faith with feet	<i>Genesis 23-25</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Abraham***a friend of God***

Abraham clearly had a very special role in God's purpose. He was known as the friend of God, a friendship based upon an ongoing relationship and acts of obedience to the divine will. He left his home country, prepared a covenant ceremony, had himself and the male members of his camp circumcised and was even prepared to offer his long awaited son as a burnt offering in obedience to God's will. As a result the Lord established a commitment with him and his descendants. This unique relationship enabled Abraham to feel confident enough to intercede persistently.¹

Briefly looking at Abraham's life it isn't obvious why God choose him. Abraham twice dismisses his wife to win favor from national rulers by deceiving them. He takes his wife's servant to have a son, and then discards her when things get tense.

But for all his flaws, Abraham responds to God and trusts Him under some extraordinary circumstances. No matter how extreme and unreasonable God's request, Abraham trusts and obeys God.

Abraham's life was summarized by early followers of Jesus, highlighting his faith in God which explains why he was known as a friend of God:

*By **faith** Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By **faith** he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By **faith** Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in **faith**, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.*

- Hebrews 11

Reading Today: Genesis 12-14

15-20 minutes

¹Robert Bradshaw

Day 2

God the friend

The hero of Abraham's story is God. Abraham's life is a canvas that displays the wonders of God. Today we're going to highlight four observations of God based on the picture of Abraham's life.

God called Abraham away from safe and familiar surroundings. This was to be a benefit to Abraham provided he followed God without knowing the destination. God will likely ask you to follow him into unfamiliar environments.

God guarantees his promises at great expense to himself. In chapter 15 God makes a promise with Abraham and uses an ancient ritual to seal the deal. But God put a twist in this ritual. Normally a powerful King outlines his conditions for peace including land and tribute etc. Then the weaker king agrees to his conditions by walking between the row of slaughtered animal carcasses. The bloody carcasses were a threat to the weaker king reminding him of the cost he would face for breaking the peace. God reversed this. Taking the smoke and torch light to represent himself. God passed through the blood so the cost of our rebellion would be on his head. This was ultimately resolved with the sacrifice of Jesus, restoring God's peace with humanity. God made a promise to Abraham using himself as collateral.

God has a special love for humanity that has been discarded. When things turned sour between Sarah and her faithful servant Hagar, She was thrown out along with her Ishmael. They were left to die in the wilderness if they were some kind of mistake. God saw Hagar and Ishmael destitute and took care of them. He had plans for them. God promised to make them into a mighty nation.

God see us. God listens to us.

God asked Abraham to make an unreasonable sacrifice: his son. This act of faith is the most defining event in Abraham's life. Abraham's trust in God is the foundation that God used to build a mighty nation and fulfill his promise. But the question before Abraham was will you trust that Isaac will provide the mighty nation, or will you trust God?

When we want to remove God from our lives, it's easiest to do this by replacing God with one of his blessings. God's blessings have all the wonderful aromas of the divine but without the life changing requirements. God asked Abraham to sacrifice the blessing (*Isaac*) and trust simply in Him. Abraham obeyed God and that made all the difference.

There are numerous parallels between the sacrifice of Isaac and the crucifixion of Jesus, in both situations **God provides** the sacrifice and in the end both Isaac and Jesus are full of life.

Reading Today: Genesis 15-16

15-20 minutes

Day 3

Mercy

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Those who are hurting lonely or distressed and without dragging their feet, give unqualified aid.

Jesus continues His teaching and in the next three verses He sheds some light on how we are to operate as followers of His way. He makes a statement next that many would consider weak, especially if one is thinking in military terms. I say this because many, even Jesus own disciples were perhaps a little confused about how Jesus was establishing His kingdom. Many thought that Jesus was going to command an army of angels to kick start things by kicking the Romans out and setting up an earthly physical kingdom where those loyal to Him would play leading roles. On one hand all that sounds cool, but that's not what Jesus had in mind. As Jesus would reveal to His followers, then and now, His kingdom is not of this earth.

Jesus said, "Blesses are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." One who shows mercy is the strong one. We know this because Jesus demonstrated mercy when He did not do to all of us what we deserved, He did not destroy us. Mercy is not receiving what we really deserve, which in all our cases is death. Instead He poured down on us an abundance of grace. If we want to receive mercy we must be merciful.

In Matthew 18 Jesus tells us how this looks with the story of the unmerciful servant. There was a man that owed an unpayable debt, millions of dollars, to a king. The King called him to account and demanded that the man pay back all the

debt or go to jail to repay the debt. All the man's possessions including his wife and children would be forfeit.

In great anguish the man pleaded with the king to be patient with him until the debt was settled. The king knowing the impossibility of the task and feeling the man's sorrow and anguish forgave the debt and set the man free. Obviously the man was relieved and happy. He went out and met a man who owed him just a few dollars. He grabbed the man and began to choke him demanding that he repay the debt. The man pleaded with him and asked for time to repay the money. The king heard about this and had the man brought back before him and pronounced judgment on him because he did not have mercy and forgive a tiny debt when such a huge debt was forgiven him.

That is how we will be treated if we don't have mercy on everyone in our lives.

Reading Today: Genesis 17-19

15-20 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

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STORY

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Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Genesis 20-22

15-20 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on Genesis 12-25

What do you believe God wants you to do?

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How did Abraham follow God's instructions?

What changes place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: Genesis 23-25

15-20 minutes

Author

Week 6

This week in summary

Author		WEEK 6
Joseph	<i>Genesis 37-39</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
The Author	<i>Genesis 40-42</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Pure Hearted	<i>Genesis 43-44</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Genesis 45-47</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Faith with Feet	<i>Genesis 48-50</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Joseph**God uses this for good**

Joseph was promised glory and power in his dream. But to achieve that victory he had to become a slave in Egypt. And, as if that were not enough, when his conditions improved because of his integrity, he was made worse than a slave—a prisoner. But it was all planned. For there in prison he met Pharaoh's butler, who eventually brought him to Pharaoh who put him over Egypt. What an unlikely route to glory! And the story doesn't end there. God lead Joseph to this position to use his power to save the lives of many people including his own estranged family.

But that is God's way—even for his Son. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave. Worse than a slave—a prisoner—and was executed. But, like Joseph, he kept his integrity. *"Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee might bow"* (Philippians 2:9,10).

And this is God's way for us too. We are promised glory—if we will suffer with him (Romans 8:17). The way up is down. The way forward is backward. The way to success is through divinely appointed setbacks. They will always look and feel like failure. But if Joseph and Jesus teach us anything it is this: *"God meant it for good!"* (Genesis 50:20).

It's tempting to only see Joseph's heroic character and achievements. But God does not want us to miss the largely silent, desperate years Joseph endured. Imagine the pain of his brothers' betrayal, the separation from his father, the horror of slavery, the seduction and false accusation by Potiphar's wife, and the desperation he felt as his youth passed away in prison.

Sometimes faithfulness to God and his word sets us on a course where circumstances get worse, not better. It is then that knowing God's promises and his ways are crucial. Faith in God's future grace for us is what sustains us in those desperate moments.

We all love the fairytale ending of Joseph's story. And we should, because Joseph's life is a foreshadowing of a heavenly reality. God sent his Son to die and be raised in order to set his children free. There is coming a day when those who are faithful, even to death will hear, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master*" (Matthew 25:21).

Our current circumstances, however dismal or successful, are not our story's end. They are chapters in a much larger story that really does have a happily ever after.

desiringGod.org

Jon Piper

Reading Today: Genesis 37-39

15-20 minutes

Day 2

God, The Author

The world is God's self-exposing story.

Should it surprise us when the divine storyteller enters into his story? What else could he do? What else would we expect from him? For this world is the story that God is telling: it is the revelation of his very being. Our world pulses with his life; we exist because he dreamt us up. Human storytellers create with ink on paper; the divine storyteller creates with matter on space and time. Human authors tell their stories through imagined characters; the divine author tells his story through humans.

Story Within the Story

Still, this master artist is not content to tell his story merely through the created universe. He tells a story within the story too, by appointing people throughout the narrative to record his direct communication with his characters. So emerge the Scriptures, an even deeper revelation of the mind and heart of the divine author. The Scriptures reveal to us that in this particular drama, the characters are created for a loving relationship with their author.

The author of life insists on entering his story. Only his role is no cameo. When God enters the story he takes up the central role, and suddenly it becomes apparent that his role was central all along. And since this is the archetype of all stories, it is fitting that in it, the author's bone, flesh, and blood are all, quite literally, laid bare. Anything else would be anticlimactic.

In the appearance of this author within his own story, all of the other minor roles foreshadow and echo his critical one. In that grand denouement which is the incarnation, all other lives suddenly take on a whole new meaning and importance. In addition to their contribution to the story within their own plot arches, each individual life becomes a living echo of the story's main character, Jesus Christ.

God, continue to write your story. Write your story into ours so that ours can be writ into yours. Make us always the supporting characters of your protagonist, Jesus Christ

[thegospelcoalition.org/article/
God-is-the-author-who-enters-his-story](http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/God-is-the-author-who-enters-his-story)

Andrew Shanks

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2 NIV

Reading Today: Genesis 40-42

15-20 minutes

Day 3

Pure Hearted

The Pure in heart don't pretend to be what they are not but are completely open and honest with God and others.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God.

Can you imagine world with no pride or arrogance? Can you imagine how people would live if these two things were not any part of our world? We would not be greedy. We would not want what others have. We would not cheat or steal or lie or kill. All these things come from pride. Pride puts us first and we live out our lives to please only ourselves which allows us to do anything to accomplish that.

This teaching of Jesus reinforces the proverb: *Above all else guard your heart, for from it flows the wellspring of life.*

Proverbs 4:23

Blessed, or happy are the pure in heart for they will see God. Wow! They will see God. Now can you imagine how you would live your life if every decision was made because you clearly see God and His way for you? When you realize that God in His Son Jesus set aside heaven for a period of time to show us His Father, live among us, demonstrate what true love and sacrifice are and that He had no un-pure thoughts or motives, it should make it easier for us to be like Him.

This teaching of Jesus is the key to seeing things clearly. A person who has a pure heart has no agenda. A person who has a pure heart only thinks of the needs of others. A person who has a pure heart is able to look beyond the temporary and see the eternal. a person who has done that see's God and that changes everything.

Reading Today: Genesis 43-44

15-20 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

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5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Genesis 45-47

15-20 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on Genesis 37-50 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God’s heart & values?

How did Joseph follow God’s instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: Genesis 48-50

15-20 minutes

Existence

Week 7

This week in summary

<u>Existence</u>		<u>WEEK 7</u>
Moses	<i>Exodus 1-3</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
The God who is	<i>Exodus 4-6</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Peacemakers	<i>Exodus 7-9</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Exodus 10-12</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>Exodus 13-15</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Moses**אֱלֹהֵי אֶשֶׁר אֱלֹהֵי**

Moses was born under a death warrant signed by the leader of the most powerful nation on earth. But God has a sense of humor so Moses grew up in the household of the man who wanted him dead.

God had big plans for Moses. It would soon be time to rescue the descendants of Abraham and reclaim their birthright. Moses was just the man to do it. But Moses wasn't ready.

As a young man Moses was ambitious and courageous. He saw the social injustice of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and he put a stop to it. He took a stand and was expelled from Egyptian society.

Later in life Moses settled down and started a family. He engaged in decent work as a shepherd. But He still wasn't ready.

It was time for Moses to have a face to face with God. As soon as Moses realized who was speaking to him Moses cowered with respect and fear. God laid out his plan to rescue the children of Abraham. Moses openly and honestly laid out his fears beginning with "who are you?"

Moses didn't know God. He knew *about God*. He heard stories of God passed through Abraham Isaac, Jacob and all his children. Moses knew *about God*, he just didn't *know God*. He'd never met God personally. So God identified himself:

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה
 "I am who I am"

Confused? Understandably.

God is accountable to no one but himself. We all have a boss who tells us what to do. Even if you don't have a direct employer you are still accountable to the government which is accountable to the political system which is accountable to human behavior which is accountable to the laws of nature. To put it another way I can make my own decisions about who I am until death decides I should be a corpse.

**I could be or could not be, but God is and must be.
 He alone is the foundation of all that exists.
 I exist out of possibility, God exists out of necessity.
 God exists and is the source of existence.
 He decides what exists and continues to exist.
 Everything that truly exists comes from Him.
 He is not an idea, or literary device.
 He is not a phenomenon that we create from our belief.
 He is real
 ... and the source of reality.
 He is present.
 Although intangible, he is substantive.
 And He alone is of ultimate significance.**

No wonder Moses hid his face.

Reading Today: Exodus 1-3

10-15 minutes

Day 2

The God who is

*The compassionate and gracious God
Slow to anger,
Abounding in love and faithfulness,
Maintaining love to thousands,
And forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin
Yet he doesn't leave the guilty unpunished;
He punishes the children and their children
for the sin of the fathers
To the third and fourth generation*

~ Exodus 34:6-7 ~

At first blush, there are some things I like about this self-description of God. I like the idea, for example, that he's slow to anger. We all know short-tempered, hot-headed...persons...whom the Bible, in the book of Proverbs, refer to as "fools." They really know how to catch us in the act, immediately rip us up one side and down the other, get under our skin, and usually over practically nothing. And O how good it feels to know that scripture is on our side! That fool! That guy or gal is such a hot-head, they qualify for the category we know as, "fool!"

I like the idea, too, that he's abounding in love and faithfulness. In a world where it's easy to feel like our worth is based on our looks, productivity, sex appeal, bank account, socio-economic standing, etc., it's comforting to know—even though mocked ("Hey...at least Jesus still loves you")—that there is a god in your corner (Question: are you serving him who promises to be in your corner?).

I *greatly* appreciate on a daily basis the fact he forgives our "wickedness, rebellion, and sin." Not enough space to detail.

I also appreciate that he doesn't leave the guilty unpunished—even when it's me who needs a good shoe mark on my backside.

And then there are some things I don't. That last part is the one that gets me, though. At first glance, it appears he is out to make me suffer by watching my own children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren receive punishment for something I did. I have to presume that a face-value reading isn't what's in mind here. Because in the Law it says that children will not suffer for the sins of the fathers. So perhaps this is meant to be understood in the sense that if the children continue in the sin of the fathers they will bear worse consequences because they should have known better. So, for example, if my father had been a drunk and I continued in it I would receive punishment for his sin and mine. Why? Because I didn't take heed from my father's example and turn away from sin. ***Did this*** ever play out in Israel's history? The two-word answer is in the question.

Speaking of Israel's history, it's surely not *all* tainted with stories of sin and rebellion! No, we also find stories of people who loved and obeyed God. Because of their relationship with him—and he being no respecter of persons—he had compassion on some to show his love.

Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life! And more abundantly." How comforting to know that God is compassionate and gracious!

"Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love" - Lamentations 3:32.

Reading Today: Exodus 4-6

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Peacemakers

The Peacemakers, who show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight; and how to discover their place in God's family.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

When we look at the last two things that Jesus taught, in being merciful and pure in heart and we add those two God traits together we get the next element of God that Jesus is going to teach on in His ministry, the peacemaker. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

When I think of this beatitude an obvious question springs to my mind, peace between who and whom. That's the real question, but before we deal with that, let's ask another question, how much peace do we see anywhere we look? Answer not much. There is trouble everywhere we look. We read about it in the paper, if you still get one. We see it on the news. We celebrate it in most every video game we play. The world is saturated with everything, it seems but peace. The world seeks to be at peace with itself but it's looking in the wrong direction and in the wrong place. Peace between us and each other, or between countries at war is not even possible in the realest sense without peace between us and God.

God cannot possibly expect us to achieve peace or even know what peace is without knowing what He has in mind for us. Ever since the beginning of time and what happened in the garden and the breaking of the relationship God intended and still wants we have been at war with God. By that I mean we have had no peace with Him, and also no connection.

The whole reason Jesus came to be with us is so that peace between us and God could be re-established and the relationship restored. As followers of Jesus teachings we are called to be peacemakers. To be peacemakers we have to be at peace with God ourselves. Everything we have, everything we are belongs to God. That means we belong to God and we can belong to nothing or no one else. The peace treaty made by God with regards to us is signed in Jesus blood. The result of living this beatitude is its greatest benefit, we are God's sons.

Reading Today: Exodus 7-9

10-15 minutes

Day 4

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STORY

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5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Exodus 10-12

10-15 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on Exodus 1-15 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How did Moses follow God's instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: Exodus 13-15

10-15 minutes

Set Apart

Week 8

This week in summary

<u>Set Apart</u>	<u>WEEK 8</u>	
David	1 Samuel 15 -17	Day 1
Set Apart	1 Samuel 18-20	Day 2
Persecuted	1 Samuel 21-23	Day 3
Blessing	1 Samuel 24-27	Day 4
Action	1 Samuel 28-31	Day 5

Day 1

David, King of Israel Weirdo Par Extraordinaire

David was a man after God's own heart. And that's God talking. The more cynical among us might, at best, feel like their character was being impugned. But for David, that was high compliments coming from the Almighty Himself!

What does that mean, though, to have a heart after God's?

In everything David did, his holiness was connected to his distinct sense that he should do things differently than the rest of the world would if they were in his sandals.

First, recall that God's choosing of David was dependent on one thing only: God's sovereign choice. Recall that God doesn't look at the outward things that we look at, but He looks at the heart. Isn't that so true? In Samuel's day there were, as there always are, standards of beauty, leadership, etc. that were based partly on appearance. Recall that Samuel thought the David's oldest brother Eliab was the one whom Samuel thought was God's choice—perhaps because of God's choice of Saul, who stood a head taller than anyone else, earlier. But, and let this one sink in carefully, for it's key to everything else, God does things differently than we do. And it's that which sets Him apart as being what we call, "holy." The thing that God did differently from us is in choosing someone who didn't "fit the bill" in terms of being eligible for kingship. Now David was still "handsome and

ruddy,” but note that fourteen generations later there would come the King of Kings who “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him,” and, “like one from whom men hid their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3).

David was a man after God's own heart because he did things differently. This brought him into conflict with all of that which is considered “normal.”

Holiness Is Not Normal, Don't Be Normal

It would be normal, for example, to kill your enemy if you literally caught him with his pants down. That's what happened in a cave when Saul was pursuing David to kill him.

It would be normal, too, to take a drink of cool water that your troops risked life and limb to obtain for you because you're so special to them.

It would be normal to mourn, wail, and carry on at the death of your infant son—not that that's wrong—but, again, David acted differently.

It would be normal protocol, if you have no battle experience and aren't accustomed to whatever armor you've been outfitted, to simply hang back; you'd simply do more harm than good if you, an untrained upstart, go up against an expert. You're going to get your backside handed to you—especially if you expect to win by going out to the battlefield armed only with a sling, five stones, and a shepherd's staff. Again, not normal.

It would be normal to kill anyone who threatens to take your throne by force. Yet how did David prove in that?

It would be normal, too, to silence all criticism and negativity. Yet how did David initially treat Shimei?

It would be normal

Interestingly enough, there is a verse of scripture that tells us that David was faithful to God in everything except one thing: Bathsheba. In that instance, David did exactly as just about any other red blooded male in his position would have done. That deviation from the abnormal is exactly what became a mark against him when it came time for the authors of scripture to write out David's epitaph.

David did so many things opposite from what the norm should be. Yet many times the norm isn't really all that far off from what's right. So what's the secret here? How can we discern when we should go against the grain? Surely we shouldn't do so just for its own sake, for if we deviate from the norm and the norm happens to be right, then we're wrong. The secret was that David was a man who meditated on God's Law. He did so because he wasn't interested in normal vs. abnormal, but right vs. wrong. In all he did, he did so because of his intense and close relationship with God's Law—except, as mentioned, in the case of Bathsheba. (Numbering of the fighting men?)

That word “law” is one at which many Christians brisk because we're used to the message of “grace, not law,” and anything of obedience and keeping God's commandments, strangely enough, is seen as legalism. Yet Jesus said not only to “make disciples,” but to teach them to keep all He commanded. Jesus, in fact, was very much the ultimate man after God's own heart. Aside from the fact He was God incarnate (some say, “God in a bod”), He showed us how to live contrarily to the rest of the world, how to have a complete disregard for the expectations of humankind.

Reading Today: 1 Samuel 15-17

20-25 minutes

Day 2

Set Apart, Holy

A child skins his knee on the playground. He can feel the wound begin to throb as the skin turns red and swells. The slightest touch provokes pain. The child pulls away as the school nurse cleans the wound. The nurse knows this treatment will disinfect the wound and help the body to heal. She knows about the pattern of medicine, infections, microorganisms, diseases and the body's marvelous designed ability to heal its self. The child knows only the sting of rubbing alcohol so he resists the nurse's wisdom.

Much like the nurse, God knows the deeper truths that fuel the universe he designed. We are like the child who only knows that disinfecting is painful. Naturally we have opposing objectives.

God is different from us. He does things in a way that doesn't seem natural to us; and He asks us to trust Him and follow in his footsteps. God knows what He's doing and He knows that what He asks us to do it better for us, but it also puts us in conflict with the rest of the world.

God is ***purely different*** from the patterns of humanity. The term for this is Holy. It's not just about competing values and objectives. There is nothing like God in scope, scale and substance. He is completely unique. He is so foreign from human experience that the only way we can even know anything about Him is if God reveals himself to us.

God calls us to trust him and follow him in his different approach to life. We are compelled to switch sides in this cosmic conflict. As we defect to God's way of doing things, we now find ourselves in conflict with the rest of humanity.

We are to approach the world much like David who loved and respected Saul even though Saul wanted him dead. “The LORD forbid that I should raise my hand against His anointed.”

God doesn't call us to a life of clouds and ease, roses and rainbows. He calls us to be holy as He is holy.

*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!*
Isaiah 6:3

*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!
Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.*
Revelation 4:8-11

The great wisdom volumes of humanity are but a tea cup compared to the ocean of the Lord.

Reading Today: 1 Samuel 18-20

20-25 minutes

Day 3

Persecuted

Those who are persecuted because of their uprightness, who stand with God and are willing to endure any difficult consequences.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, or me, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Have you ever thought how the bad stuff in life that happens to other people could never happen to me? We hear about the very kinds of things every day. But the sad truth, or perhaps the not so sad truth, is that we cannot avoid these occurrences. Trouble in life is inevitable, and trials and troubles are in store especially for those who follow Jesus.

Everything that Jesus is, all He did and all He does is righteousness, Jesus is righteousness. Jesus next teaching like those before go against the grain of human thought, at least in our specific day and age in our comfortable western world. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, or me, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Persecution is not something we sign up for so quickly. We have gotten used to our blessings and we are very slow to even think about losing anything that we have come to cherish and rely upon. But clearly we will suffer because we choose to follow Jesus. The apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12 that everyone that wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. In Acts 5 the apostles were flogged, which was no little thing, and they went away from the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the Name.

We will be persecuted because Jesus was. In Matthew 10:22 Jesus told His followers that all men will hate us because of Him, but that anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved. These are not words we want to hear, but we must hear them. We have brothers and sister on the other side of the world that gladly say yes to Jesus offer of salvation knowing they could lose everything, family, friends, jobs, perhaps even their lives. We must ready ourselves for what is coming. I don't this to scare but to warn. A storm is coming and we are not ready.

Reading Today: 1 Samuel 21-23

20-25 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Pray with your Family - Remember your neighbors by name during mealtime and bedtime prayers.

Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

LISTEN

Ask Open-ended Questions - How long have you lived here? What line of work are you in? What do you do for fun?

Ask Follow-up Questions - How did that test go? Are you feeling better? How was your vacation?

EAT

Enjoy a Meal Together - Invite a neighbor (or two) for a BBQ, order in Pizza, or have everyone bring a dessert to share.

Celebrate Special Occasions and Holidays - Bake cupcakes for birthdays. Send a casserole to new parents. Deliver Christmas cookies.

SERVE

Serve While You're Outside - Turn lawn chores into opportunities to serve: Mow lawns, water yards, etc.

Serve In Times of Need - Visit when a neighbor passes away or has a baby. Deliver flowers or a gift. Coordinate meals with other neighbors.

STORY

Share Commonalities - Hobbies such as golf, book club, bunko night, or a running/fitness group can all bring people together.

Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: 1 Samuel 24-27

20-25 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on 1 Samuel 15-31 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God’s heart & values?

How did David follow God’s instructions?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: 1 Samuel 28-31

20-25 minutes

Word of God

Week 9

This week in summary

<u>Word of God</u>		<u>WEEK 9</u>
The Word of God	<i>John 1</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
John's Biography of Jesus	<i>John 2</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Persecuted	<i>John 3</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>John 4-5</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>John 6-7</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

The Word of God

If God can create the universe, it shouldn't be too surprising that God can interact with the universe. What's to stop God from miraculously making direct changes according to his will?

Instead of taking direct control sometimes God communicates with flesh and blood humans leaving the choice of response in our hands. God spoke to prophets and they heard his message.

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways,
God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
but in these last days he has spoken to us
by...*

What's this a new means of transmitting God's message? We're familiar with God's voice to prophets who broadcast to people. What new form might the word of God take?

*Then the word became flesh and lived
among them.*

What if God's message was transmitted **in the form** of a flesh and blood human being? Words etched in stone or written on paper are limited but a human being is interactive. A more capable medium could carry a deeper message. A human that doesn't just recite a collection of words. A human could express the message in his actions. He is the living personification of God's principles in the flesh.

He is fully human complete with hangnails and pimples but he is also the living Word of God, a complete expression of the will of our creator. Ever wonder what the will of God would look like if it took a physically tangible form? Look no further than Jesus, the Word of God standing in the flesh.

Reading Today: John 1

10-15 minutes

Day 2

John's Biography of Jesus

There are four credible biographies of the life and work of Jesus. Of these John's writing is paradoxically the simplest and deepest.

John spells out the reason why he wrote: *"these are written in order that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), the Son of God and that believing you may **have life** in His name."*

He identifies why Jesus came: *"I have come that they may **have life**, and that they may have it more abundantly."*

John even gives us the entire Bible summarized in one sentence: *"God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, so whoever **believes** in Him should not perish but **have eternal life**."*

If John's simple message of faith, life and love stand as a vivid melody, then John's harmony can be found in his careful choice of details. As John describes the events surrounding Jesus, he includes extra details that have little bearing on the event but the details themselves stand as symbols that teach the same lesson about Jesus. John is a master composer.

For example: the first miracle of Jesus is changing water to wine at a wedding celebration. Symbolically water becoming wine looks like something very ordinary becoming something special, which parallels the transformation Jesus does in us.

But there's more. John includes a detail that it took place on the third day, begging the question the third day of what? ...of the celebration? ...of the month? ...of the year? "Third day" is John's link between the wedding celebration and resurrection that takes place on the third day after the crucifixion. To John the resurrection of Jesus is a celebration. How much of a celebration? Well let's look at how much water Jesus turned into wine. 180 Gallons. That's enough to keep the party going for a long, long time.

Look for the following details as you read through John's biography of Jesus.

Life

Light and Darkness

Belief or Faith

Water

Celebrations (weddings, festivals & Passover)

Spirit and Flesh

The number 7 (speeches, miracles)

Food

Jesus' time had not yet come...

People understanding or not understanding Jesus

Jesus' identity statements "I am the bread of life"

Reading Today: John 2

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Persecution and Joy

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Last time we discussed persecution and how it comes to those who stand for Jesus. We carry on with that theme and add some more on that will as before not be good news, or perhaps it's the best news. Jesus finishes out this section of Matthew 5 with these words; "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus is clearly saying that we will be treated the same as the prophets who came before Jesus telling of His coming to fulfill the plans of His Father in Heaven, many of whom were tortured and even killed.

Jesus said that we should rejoice and be glad that these things are happening, because this life is not about the here and now but the place where our heavenly Father lives in heaven. Jesus' life and what He did and how He lived is our focus.

The apostle Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” We are the temple of God. The temple was a place where sacrifices were offered to please God. The temple in its primary context does not exist now, we have become that place where God lives and moves and breaths His will and ways to a world separated from Him. We may be called upon to give up much, even our lives, but is that not one of Jesus core teachings? At the end of all this it’s simple, die to myself and live for Jesus. Note I said was simple not easy. We can only do this through His power

Reading Today: John 3

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

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Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

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STORY

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Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: John 4-5

15-20 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on John 1-7 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How did Jesus follow God's will?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: John 6-7

15-20 minutes

Son of God

Week 10

This week in summary

Son of God		WEEK 10
7 Signs, 7 Speeches	<i>John 8</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
Son of God	<i>John 9</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Salt of the Earth	<i>John 10</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>John 11-12</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>John 13-14</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Seven Signs, Seven Speeches

The first half of John's biography of Jesus is built around seven signs (miracles) and seven speeches. The signs and the speeches seem to be related to each other; the discourses speak of various powers the Savior has that are necessary in helping each child of our Heavenly Father to gain eternal life and the signs of miracles confirm that the Savior has those powers. How does each sign complement each message?

1) Transformation

Sign Water converted to wine (John 2:1-11)

Speech The natural man converted to the spiritual man (John 3:1-21)

2) Life beyond Death

Sign Bringing life to the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54)

Speech The living water that brings everlasting life (John 4:1-41)

3) The Sabbath and Morals

Sign Healing the invalid on the Sabbath (John 5:1-18)

Speech Christ is Lord of the Sabbath (John 5:19-47)

4) The Great Provider

Sign Feeding the multitude with Bread (John 6:1-15)

Speech Christ is the Bread of Life (John 6:22-66)

5) Water and Divinity

Sign Jesus walks on water (John 6:12-21)

Speech Christ will walk into the presence of the Father, offering living water to all (John 7:14-39)

6) Sight

Sign Healing of the man born blind (John 9)

Speech Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12-59)

7) Resurrection and Sacrifice

Sign Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11)

Speech The Good Shepherd, lays down His life for His sheep that He might bring about the resurrection (John 10:1-18)

As you read each section describe below how does each sign compliments Jesus' messages?

1 Transformation (ch 2-3)

2 Life beyond Death (ch 4)

3 The Sabbath and Morals (ch 5)

4 The Great Provider (ch 6)

5 Water and Divinity (ch 6-7)

6 Sight (ch 8-9)

7 Resurrection and Sacrifice (ch 10-11)

Reading Today: John 8

10-15 minutes

Day 2

Son of God

Israel generally had two types of kings. One kind was chosen by God and the nation prospered. The other type of king was chosen by someone other than God and things didn't go so well. When God choose a king He sent a prophet to endorse the man. The prophet would show the endorsement by anointing the new king. This process of endorsement by anointing was called "Messiah" or "Christ." This is exactly what we see between the Jesus and the prophet John the Baptist and at the Jordan River. (Matthew 3)

Surprisingly when God endorsed a King, he was also given a figurative title "Son of God." (2 Samuel 7:14 & Psalms 89) "Son of God" was a title used by the King of Israel who was chosen by a prophet of God. To Jesus' audience "Christ" and "Son of God" meant the same thing that is – God's chosen King.

When Jesus asked Peter what He believed, Peter's responded "Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is unlikely that Peter meant "you are the messiah and the divine son of God." Peter was likely using a repetitious synonym to add emphasis.

Put simply when Jews in Jesus' time said "Son of God," it was a statement about royalty not divinity.

But John the disciple isn't like most Jews. He uses this title "Son of God" as one of many ways to describe Jesus's divinity. Not only does John believe that Jesus is divine, most of the stories in his biography point out this fact. A fact we will explore in detail later. John doesn't want you to get the idea that Jesus is just the latest "son of God" king of Israel. This Son of God is uniquely different. John describes Jesus as the

“only” son, and he consistently refers to God as Jesus’ personal father.

John wants to be completely clear so that there is no doubt in the mind of his fellow Jewish readers that Jesus is fully human and fully God.

“The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.”
John 1:14

Reading Today: John 9

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Salt of the Earth

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

Salt enhances the flavor of food. It is the most universally recognizable seasoning. So when Jesus says we are like salt, we should add desirable flavor to humanity. The world should be a better place to live because we are here. Jesus calls us to have a positive effect on the world.

In the days before refrigeration salt was also used to preserve food. The salt made it difficult for bacteria to grow. Salted meat was healthier. We are to stand opposed to the forces that try to destroy humanity. Jesus calls us to stand against oppression, against the things that separate us from He who gives us value.

Salt can lose its saltiness when it is mixed with other substances. The more junk mixed with it, the less effective the salt. Salt was a valuable commodity in Jesus day but its usefulness was limited by its purity. Jesus calls us to be focused and dedicated to preserving and enhancing the world. You are the Salt of the Earth.

How do you have a positive effect on the world?

How do you stand against the forces that separate us from God?

What 'unsalty' junk is mixed in your life?

Reading Today: John 10

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

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STORY

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Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: John 11-12

15-20 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on John 8-14 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God’s heart & values?

How did Jesus follow God’s will?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: John 13-14

15-20 minutes

Lamb of God

Week 11

This week in summary

<u>Lamb of God</u>		<u>WEEK 11</u>
Long Farewell	<i>John 15</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
Lamb of God	<i>John 16</i>	<i>Day 2</i>
Light of the World	<i>John 17</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>John 18-19</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>John 20-21</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Long Farewell

One of the most recognizable Christian rituals is the Lord's Supper (Eucharist). This is a ritual of remembering the last meal Jesus shared with the disciples before he was crucified. John spends 1/4th of his book at this event, but he never talks about the actual meal.

Instead John describes Jesus' invitation to love and unity.

Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John describes Jesus in great detail inviting his disciples to a very vulnerable solidarity. He describes their relationship with him like a vine and its branches. Live in me and I will live in you. Jesus prays "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

This scene pictures a deep spiritual intimacy with God through Jesus.

How can we be united to each other and united with God?

Reading Today: John 15

10-15 minutes

Day 2

Lamb of God

Humanity has a long history of bad blood when it comes to God. We consistently reject God's call to trust him. We'd rather trust ourselves, and build our own little kingdoms instead of investing in God's Kingdom.

We needed a mediator to get us on the same page. Not only does Jesus chart a vision for our future with God that we can embrace, Jesus also took responsibility for all our atrocities committed against God as we pursued our own selfish desires. He took our sins, our offenses against God and he made payment with his own blood.

It would be a nice thought that forgiveness comes freely but the truth is forgiveness always costs. One way or another someone has to pay. If my neighbor breaks my window I can forgive him, but I still have to pay for the repair or live with the damage.

Jesus' blood is the way God pays for our damage against him. It doesn't matter the scale or intentionality: I may have cursed God in anger, trivialized his significance by ignoring Him, or I may have harmed his children. Jesus covered it all.

Jesus is the sacrificial lamb.

This was the Prophet John's statement when he first saw Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Not only does he cover all our sins against God, he demands that we forgive when humanity sins against us.

Later another John followed Jesus on earth and watched the Kingdom of heaven grow on earth. John had a special vision of heaven where he saw Jesus again in the form of the sacrificial lamb.

I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!

How is Jesus involved in God's first promise to humanity - the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15?

Reading Today: John 16

10-15 minutes

Day 3

Light of the World

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

My daughter has a toy owl made of yellow rubber and plastic. It looks like any other toy until you plug it in. It has a light inside that make the owl glow. At night the owl illuminates her dark room. Light seeps through the rubber veil and pours across the walls, the books the doll house.

Last week I was listening to a homeless man tell me about his near death experience. He believes he saw heaven briefly. Light was pouring from everything: the grass, a spoon and every person, light just flowed out of us. It wasn't reflected light like we see now; it was light coming from within like my daughter's owl, but it was true of everything in heaven. There were no shadows in heaven because every nook and cranny gushed light. The light was overwhelming to his eyes.

In a letter John wrote to fellow believers he declared: "God is light."

If God is light and his spirit lives in us, then it also pours out of us like light from a light bulb. We are light bearers as we carry the Spirit of God in us. We are a source of God for the world. In our pursuit of Jesus we reveal to the world what God is like. The world can catch a glimpse of what God is like through us.

John wrote about his experience seeing heaven:

“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.”

Just imagine a place where everything and everyone is overflowing with God’s light.

Be light to the world, reveal God to the world.

Reading Today: John 17

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors**BEGIN WITH PRAYER**

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5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: John 18-19

15-20 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on John 15-21 **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God’s heart & values?

How did Jesus follow God’s will?

What changes took place to society?

What parts of this story might apply to you?

Why is this story important for someone like you?

Reading Today: John 20-21

15-20 minutes

Love of God

Week 12

This week in summary

<u>Love of God</u>		<u>WEEK 12</u>
Who is Jesus	<i>Ephesians 1</i>	<i>Day 1</i>
The Divinity of Jesus	Read Appendix	<i>Day 2</i>
Because Love	<i>Isaiah 9</i>	<i>Day 3</i>
Blessing	<i>Isaiah 40</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
Action	<i>Psalms 8</i>	<i>Day 5</i>

Day 1

Who is Jesus?

Jesus' culture fiercely defended God's honor. They would execute someone just for speaking disrespectfully about God. Some people were so sensitive to the issue of God's honor that they would not even utter the name God revealed to Moses for fear that they may pronounce his name incorrectly.

It may seem like a hyper sensitive reaction of an ancient culture but remember everything and everyone is connected God's worth. While there's nothing we can really do to debase God, the Jews wanted no part of anyone willing to try to bring Him down. Anyone who spoke ill of God was charged with the crime of blasphemy which required capital punishment. The execution was brutal. A group of men would gather around the criminal, pick up heavy rocks and hurl them at the convict until dead.

This is the event in John 10:22-42

Don't let anyone tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God. He did. His audience clearly understood His claim to Deity and they tried to execute Him for it multiple times (John 5:18, John 8:58, John 10:33)

So who is Jesus? Moral teacher? King? Savior? Miracle worker? Is he human? Is He Divine? What is this person?

The people closest to Jesus who saw his movement grow after long after his departure wrote the following about him.

*See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. **Colossians 2***

*Although Jesus was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Philippians 2***

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1***

Jesus is the answer to the question: “What if God was one of us?”

Reading Today: Ephesians 1

10-15 minutes

Day 2

The Divinity of Jesus

(see the appendix for a list of scripture references)

The last thing the disciples expected to see from their fishing boat in the middle of a sea was someone walking towards them. In the darkness of night and the middle of a storm, Jesus walked on the water and met the disciple at their boat. It was a scene that stuck in the minds of the disciples; with the question did Jesus just reveal that he is God? The biographies of Jesus they wrote later demonstrate how they beheld this scene and looking at Jesus, they saw God.

John makes the connection between Jesus and God with the comment from Jesus: “don’t be afraid, It is I.” John wrote in ancient Greek and he didn’t write “It is I” he wrote “Εγώ εἰμι” which means “I AM.” This was a special phrase in Jesus’ culture because it was the response God gave to Moses when asked for his identity. God said “I am who I AM.” Jesus identified himself the same way that God did.

John looked at Jesus and he saw God.

Matthew also saw God through Jesus but he uses details that connect to God at the moment of creation. Looking at Jesus reminded Matthew of the description of God in the second verse in the Bible. “The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.” So Matthew included the detail that when they first saw Jesus from far off they thought they saw a spirit on the water. (note the ancient language has only one word for a spirit or a ghost, so while some translations use the word ghost. It was the same word to Matthew.)

Mark describes the same scene but includes a different detail to arrive at the same conclusion. Look at Jesus and see God.

Later in Moses' life He stands before God cloaked in a luminous bush and Moses asked to see God's glory. God tells him that no one can look directly at Him and live, but he can see look as God leaves. So God *passed by* giving Moses a glimpse of his glory. Mark tells how Jesus intended to *pass by* the disciples, just like God passed by Moses.

Since no one can look at God directly, let's look at some indirect connections between Jesus and God.

Jesus does Godly stuff

God is the only creator of earth, the universe and everything. But the bible says everything was created by and through Jesus. Conclusion: Jesus must be God.

God is eternal and described as the "first and the last." Jesus is eternal and is called the "first and the last" Conclusion: Jesus must be God.

God is all powerful. Jesus says he has all power and authority. Conclusion: Jesus must be God.

God knows everything. Jesus knows everything. Jesus must be God.

God is everywhere. Jesus is everywhere. Jesus must be God.

People should only pray to God and only worship God. They disciples pray to Jesus. Jesus accepts worship from multiple people. Jesus must be God.

When the devil was testing Jesus, he responded with scripture, "do not test the LORD your GOD." This is only relevant if Jesus is God.

Prophets spoke to the people saying, "this is what God says...", teachers taught the people, "this is what God said in

scripture.” But Jesus spoke from his own authority, “This is what I say.”

Jesus was to be named “God with us” and “Mighty God”

Over and over Jesus demonstrated qualities that are unique to God. By simple reasoning this makes Jesus divine.

I AM

Jesus identifies himself using the special “Εγώ εἶμι” phrase that God used to identify himself to Moses. Each description includes a statement that is even more telling of Jesus’ divinity.

*“I’m telling you so that you will believe that **I AM**”*

*“unless you believe that **I AM**, you will die in your sins”* Jesus is claiming that belief in him will save us from our sins and that he is God.

*“before Abraham was born, **I AM**.”* Jesus claimed to be older than Abraham, and he claimed to be God. His opponents tried to kill him after hearing this.

Jesus gave seven more **I AM** statements that each describe a role associated with God and each statement follows an intentional literary structure. Even the fact that there are seven statements is another clue that God is involved in it.

I AM the bread of life

I AM the light of the world

I AM the door of the sheep

I AM the good shepherd

I AM the resurrection and the life

I AM the way, the truth and the life

I AM the true vine

Reading Today: see the appendix

Day 3

Because Love

Love is a huge deal to Jesus. He said:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

This is the greatest and first commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.***

If you want any kind of association with Jesus, he leaves no alternative. You must love.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love

If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

So love is the center of Jesus' program, the entirety of Jesus' law and the defining characteristic of his disciples. Maybe it would be a good idea to know what love looks like. Is love a powerful feeling between teenagers? Is love an emotional rush that leads us to foolish decisions? Is love a good looking person, an object of desire?

No.

What is love?

Love gives of itself. Love sacrifices. Love pours out. Love can be measured by what it gives up.

Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus gave of himself everywhere he went through his entire life. He held nothing back for himself. He had no place to lay his head. His loving sacrifice wasn't just a last minute act of charity at his death. His love poured out in everyone he encountered.

Jesus' extraordinary acts of love inspire extraordinary love from us. Love is our response to Jesus.

Then King Jesus will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

How can you show extraordinary, sacrificial love like Jesus did?

Reading Today: Isaiah 9

10-15 minutes

Day 4

Blessing your Neighbors

BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Pray with your Family - Remember your neighbors by name during mealtime and bedtime prayers.

Prayer Walk - Walk by yourself or with family, roommates, and other neighbors who are believers. Pray over each home by name as you pass and ask God for opportunities with your neighbors.

LISTEN

Ask Open-ended Questions - How long have you lived here? What line of work are you in? What do you do for fun?

Ask Follow-up Questions - How did that test go? Are you feeling better? How was your vacation?

EAT

Enjoy a Meal Together - Invite a neighbor (or two) for a BBQ, order in Pizza, or have everyone bring a dessert to share.

Celebrate Special Occasions and Holidays - Bake cupcakes for birthdays. Send a casserole to new parents. Deliver Christmas cookies.

SERVE

Serve While You're Outside - Turn lawn chores into opportunities to serve: Mow lawns, water yards, etc.

Serve In Times of Need - Visit when a neighbor passes away or has a baby. Deliver flowers or a gift. Coordinate meals with other neighbors.

STORY

Share Commonalities - Hobbies such as golf, book club, bunko night, or a running/fitness group can all bring people together.

Socialize and Make Holidays Special - Enjoy recreational areas. Participate in yard sales and BBQs. Attend holiday parties.

5 People I will bless this week

Reading Today: Isaiah 40

15-20 minutes

Day 5

Faith with Feet

Based on the scripture you read this week **What do you believe God wants you to do?**

What have you learned about God's heart & values?

How can you follow God's will?

Reading Today: Psalm 8

15-20 minutes

Appendix

Divinity of Jesus scripture list

John 10:30-33 "I and the Father are one." The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

John 5:18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Colossians 2:8-9 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.

Philippians 2:5-11 Although Jesus was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 1:1,14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus Walks on water

John 6:20 But he said to them, “do not be afraid. It is I”

Matthew 14:26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear.

Genesis 1:1-2 The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters

Mark 6:48 And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them,

Exodus 33:18-22 Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by

Exodus 34:6 The LORD passed before him

Jesus is Creator

John 1:3 All things were made through him, and nothing was made without him.

Colossians 1:16-17 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

God is “First and Last”

Isaiah 41:4 Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.

Isaiah 44:6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

Isaiah 48:12 Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last.

Jesus is "First and Last"

Revelation 1:17-18 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Revelation 2:8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.'

Revelation 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Jesus is Eternal

Psalms 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Heb. 1:12 But you are the same, and your years will have no end.

Heb. 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Micah 5:2 One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity

Jesus is all powerful

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

John 16:15 All that the Father has is mine;

John 17:9-10 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

Revelation 3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Matthew 11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus is all Knowing

John 16:30 Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.

John 18:4 Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

John 21:17 Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.

Colossians 2:2-3 to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Jesus is everywhere

Matthew 28:20 And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Jesus is in Everything

Colossians 3:11 but Christ is all, and in all.

Ephesians 1:20-23 He worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Testing Jesus is testing God

Matthew 4:7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Jesus teaches by his authority

Matthew 5:18,20,22,26,28,32,34... (too many to list)

Jesus is named "God with us" and "Mighty God"

Matthew 1:23 Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel which interpreted is, God with us.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Worshiping Jesus

Matthew 2:2, Matthew 2:11, Matthew 4:10, Matthew 8:2, Matthew 9:18, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 20:20, Matthew 28:9, Matthew 28:17, Mark 5:6, Luke 24:52, John 9:38, Hebrews 1:6

Praying to Jesus

Acts 7:59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

1Corinthians 1:2 those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 10:13-14 Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

I AM statements "Εγώ εἰμι"

Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

John 8:24 "unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins"

John 13:19 "I'm telling you so that you will believe that I AM"

John 8:58 "before Abraham was born, I AM."

John 6:20 "don't be afraid, I AM."

Seven I AM identities in John

John 6:35 I AM the bread of life

John 8:12; 9:5 I AM the light of the world

John 10:7 I AM the door of the Sheep

John 10:14 I AM the good shepherd

John 11:25 I AM the resurrection and the life

John 14:6 I AM the way the truth and the life

John 15:1,5 I AM the true vine

